



ENGLISH COMICS AS READING MATERIALS AND INTERVENTION IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

With the engaging blend of visuals and texts, comics have emerged as promising tools for enhancing reading comprehension in primary classrooms. This study examined how incorporating English comics as reading materials and interventions impact students' reading comprehension. It also determined students' perceptions on the use of English comics to improve their reading comprehension. Explanatory sequential design was employed. Specifically, classroom action research was utilized in the quantitative phase. Pre-and post-test assessments were used to determine differences in students' reading comprehension performances. For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview was used to determine students' perceptions of the comics. The study involved 20 Grade 5 students at Palabayan Elementary School (PES), Tinoc, Ifugao, Philippines. Quantitative results showed significant improvement in the students' reading comprehension after using the comics. Qualitative findings divulged four main themes: comics design, the impact of comics on reading comprehension, challenges encountered, and suggestions for improvement of the comics. Students indicated the positive influence of visually appealing design elements and well-designed picture and text alignment. Accordingly, it helped improve their reading comprehension and increased their pleasure in reading. Challenges encountered include visual and textual overload, as well as students' limited vocabulary. Students' recommendations include improving the clarity of the comics, adding more pictures for visual appeal, and enhancing the designs of the comics. Nonetheless, this study implies the impact of English comics and supports their utilization as reading materials and an intervention tool for enhancing young students' reading comprehension.

Keywords: English comics, reading comprehension, reading intervention, reading material, Philippines

Introduction

Students can enhance their English language skills by immersing themselves in the joy of reading comics. Comics, a versatile medium blending text and visuals (Carrier & Oliker, 2001), offer a unique approach to education. Their ability to simplify complex ideas makes learning engaging for young students. The interactive nature of comics, with their panel-by-panel viewing, maximizes user engagement (Kunzle, 2025), making them a valuable tool for educators across various disciplines (Bolton-Gary, 2012; Fabillar et al., 2024). This multimodal approach promotes diverse learning styles and makes reading a thrilling adventure. Using comics as educational materials is particularly beneficial for enhancing comprehension (Källvant, 2015; Lopez, 2022; Sharma, 2020), fostering a deeper understanding of concepts, and encouraging active engagement in the learning process.

Comics are gaining recognition as valuable tools for teaching English at the primary level. They can enhance students' multiliteracy skills, spark their interest in reading, and

facilitate language acquisition (Källvant, 2015). It can help develop multimodal literacy skills, preparing students for the demands of the 21st century (Issa, 2017). These engaging resources are particularly beneficial for young English language learners (Losi et al., 2023), boosting language proficiency, enthusiasm, and knowledge retention in the classroom (Brown, 2023). Comics make learning English enjoyable and exciting, aiding students in remembering and understanding the language better. Using comics in teaching can improve academics and motivation, especially when learning English grammar (Jadán-Guerrero et al., 2022). These benefits have made English comics a popular educational material in primary schools, fostering positive character traits and enhancing students' understanding of the material and learning goals.

Reading comprehension plays a crucial role in students' academic performance across various educational levels, and it is a complex process that involves extracting and constructing meaning from written text (Duke et al., 2021). It requires constructing a coherent mental representation of text information, integrating the reader, the text, and the activity within a broader sociocultural context (Butterfuss et al., 2020). Students without reading comprehension problems do better on reading assignments at various grade levels. Reading comprehension is essential for understanding directions and building independent readers (Chang & Avila, 2014). Students with better reading comprehension skills tend to have higher self-perceived academic performance (Beluce et al., 2018) and improved problem-solving abilities (Jala, 2020).

In comics, visual literacy interventions can enhance comprehension and inferential understanding of educational comics (Golding & Verrier, 2020). Comics significantly enhance reading comprehension by combining text and images to engage various cognitive processes simultaneously (Tiemensma, 2009). This unique storytelling format effectively conveys narratives and captivates readers with visually appealing content showcasing familiar characters and events, potentially boosting students' interest in reading. Particularly beneficial for struggling readers, the visual components of comics aid in improving text comprehension and overall learning, especially for individuals encountering difficulties in grasping written material. Comics excel at teaching conversational skills by visually modeling nonverbal communication (Sedliarova & Soloveva, 2021). They provide a contextualized learning environment for grammar structures (Jadán-Guerrero et al., 2022), and their adaptability allows for repurposing linguistic content (Graham, 2011).

Comics have been found to boost grammar learning and motivation among students (Jadán-Guerrero et al., 2022) and can aid in recycling language content and introducing activities in the early years (Graham, 2011). English comics in classrooms are supported by their ability to blend visual and textual elements, making them engaging and effective for language learning (Graham, 2011). However, there is a need for further research on students' production of comics, not just consumption, to fully harness their potential in English language education (Issa, 2017).

In the Philippines, reports and studies highlight ongoing challenges in reading literacy among Filipino students. The country ranked last in English reading comprehension in the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). The Philippines' performance in PISA 2018 revealed persistently low proficiency in reading compared to other countries (OECD, 2019), while in 2022, PISA results showed no significant improvement from 2018 (OECD, 2023). A local study indicated that most primary students had English reading skills significantly below their grade level (Canuto et al., 2024). Significant difficulties with reading literacy are evident among Filipino pupils, especially in primary school.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The use of English comics to support students' reading comprehension is closely aligned with the Dual Coding Theory (DCT). DCT posits that learning is more effective when information is processed through both verbal and non-verbal systems (Clark & Paivio, 1991). Comics combine both systems by integrating written language with sequential illustrations, allowing students to simultaneously process and reinforce information through both pathways. When students read comics, they decode the words and interpret visual elements like facial expressions, gestures, background scenes, and panel sequences. These visuals provide additional context that can clarify meaning, illustrate emotions, or depict actions that may not be fully explained through text alone. This dual representation of information reinforces understanding, aids in memory retention, and helps students make sense of the narrative more efficiently. For young or struggling readers, English comics provide contextual clues that support decoding, inference-making, and overall comprehension, making them a powerful tool for literacy development. This synergy between image and word enhances comprehension and motivates learners to read more, ultimately contributing to their literacy development.

English comics can effectively support the Simple View of Reading (SVR). SVR defines reading comprehension as the product of decoding and language comprehension (Catts, 2018). Comics help improve decoding skills by presenting text in short, manageable chunks, usually within speech bubbles or captions. This format allows learners to focus on recognizing words and improving fluency without being overwhelmed by dense blocks of text. At the same time, the rich, expressive illustrations in comics provide crucial visual context and cues that aid in understanding the narrative, characters' emotions, and plot developments, thereby, supporting language comprehension. The illustrations provide immediate context for the text, helping readers infer meaning, grasp emotions, and follow plot developments, even when vocabulary or sentence structures are unfamiliar. The interplay of concise text and complementary images helps readers make sense of meaning even when vocabulary or sentence structure might be challenging. This dual benefit makes English comics a practical resource for developing foundational and higher-level literacy skills.

Another theory supporting English comics and reading comprehension is the Cognitive Load Theory (CLT). CLT explains that learners have a limited working memory capacity, and effective learning occurs when instructional materials minimize unnecessary cognitive demands (Paas et al., 2003). Comics support reading comprehension by reducing extraneous cognitive load through clear and concise text, paired with supportive visuals that provide immediate context and meaning. They use pictures alongside short and simple text, which reduces the mental effort needed to understand a story. Instead of many hard-to-read paragraphs, comics break the story into small parts with images that give clues and support the meaning, helping to manage intrinsic cognitive load by simplifying complex narratives. Combining images and words allows learners to process information more efficiently, as visuals scaffold understanding and help students integrate new knowledge. This germane cognitive load supports deeper processing and schema building, enabling learners to comprehend and retain text more effectively.

Comics in English Education

Using comics in the classroom has been linked to better knowledge retention, higher motivation, and improved language learning results (Brown, 2023). It may also lower anxiety and improve recall of information (Karap, 2017). The visual nature of comics enhances student

motivation and engagement, making the learning process more enjoyable. Visual elements of comics, such as illustrations and graphic design, can capture students' attention and hold their interest, leading to a more positive learning experience and making the learning process more pleasurable (Bolton-Gary, 2012).

These benefits extend to English education, where comics are practical tools for teaching various aspects of the English language, including composition, teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), and creative writing (Issa, 2017). English comics have been found to aid in developing writing and reading skills among foreign language learners (Losi et al., 2023). Comics often feature diverse characters and settings, which can help students relate to different cultures and perspectives. This can foster a sense of inclusivity and understanding in the classroom. Students who regularly read comics improved their ability to infer and draw conclusions from text. This is significant as it underscores the value of comics in developing critical thinking skills, a crucial element of reading comprehension (Smith, 2006).

Using comics as reading materials and intervention is an effective way to promote reading. Comics can serve as a bridge that leads reluctant readers toward enjoying reading. By providing a visual and engaging medium, comics can make reading more accessible and enjoyable for students who might find traditional text intimidating (Smith, 2006). Teaching reading through comics is a more effective way to teach reading than general materials full of printed texts (Robbani & Khoirotunnisa, 2021). Comics provide various contexts for learners to practice and develop their language skills in a more engaging and accessible way (Issa, 2017).

Tanala (2023) observed that comic-based reading materials enhanced comprehension at the primary level. This suggests that comics provide an engaging and practical approach to enhance reading comprehension among young learners. Further, Csabay (2006) indicated that the use of comics is not limited in teaching reading, but also in teaching various subjects, as well as it supports visual learners and encourages critical thinking. Robbani and Khoirotunnisa (2021) disclosed that students taught using comics showed significantly higher reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and overall reading engagement levels than those taught using traditional textbooks.

Karap (2017) revealed that students taught using comics showed lower anxiety and stress levels during the learning process. This was attributed to the comics' engaging and visual nature, which made the learning process more enjoyable, and thus, less intimidating. Losi et al. (2023) found that comics can aid in developing writing and reading skills among foreign language learners.

Smith (2006) divulged that students who read comics improved their ability to make inferences and draw conclusions from text. Ridhwan et al. (2018) observed that comics can benefit primary students, particularly those learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Significant improvements in students' reading comprehension and writing ability were observed. Liu (2004) found an improvement in the reading comprehension of low-level English as a Second Language (ESL) learners when presented with high-level texts.

English Education in the Philippines

English language education in the Philippines, with its complex history rooted in American colonialism, has successfully shaped current policies and practices. Despite English's official status, most Filipinos learn it as an additional language, creating challenges for teachers and learners. The country's multilingual context is often overlooked in English language education, with monolingual perspectives dominating curriculum design, assessment, and classroom teaching (Kilag et al., 2024; Madrunio et al., 2016). This approach perpetuates myths about English and marginalizes Filipino students. While there are areas for improvement, the overall success of English language education in the Philippines is a testament to educators' and policymakers' dedication and hard work.

Reforms by the Department of Education (DepEd) aim to address these issues and balance international demands with local culture (Lumidao, 2024; Madrunio et al., 2016). This includes the mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in the kindergarten to Grade 12 (K12) Curriculum (DepEd, 2019) and the implementation of the recent MATATAG Curriculum (DepEd, 2023). However, the urgent need to recognize the diverse linguistic landscape and move beyond traditional ESL labels remain crucial for effective English language teaching in the Philippines.

The English K12 curriculum in primary schools plays a pivotal role in shaping students' understanding and interpretation of cultural experiences. It focuses on developing foundational language skills and fostering a love for reading, aiming to give students a strong foundation in language arts and multiliteracies. The curriculum covers various topics, including reading comprehension, vocabulary development, literature, writing, grammar, and communication skills (DepEd, 2016, 2023). The K12 system strengthens students' foundation in crucial subjects and improves their English language skills, especially in reading and interacting with people, broadening their perspectives.

Evaluating Students' English Reading Comprehension in the Philippines

Filipino students' reading comprehension is evaluated through the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). It is a national reading assessment tool developed by the DepEd. Its primary purpose is to assess students' reading proficiency in English and Filipino languages. It serves as diagnostic information to support education and as a basis for reading intervention and enrichment programs. At the primary level, it is administered to students from Grades 3 to 6, typically aged 8 – 12. The Phil-IRI evaluates students' reading proficiency using oral and silent reading tests. The oral reading test measures students' decoding, word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. Students read a passage aloud while the teacher records miscues, followed by answering questions about the passage read. The silent reading test measures students' reading speed and ability to understand texts without oral decoding. Students read a passage silently and answer comprehension questions (DepEd, 2018a, 2018b).

The Phil-IRI tests are conducted at the beginning and near the end of every academic year as pre-and post-tests. It can be delivered through group screening tests (GST) or individualized tests. The GST is administered to assess an entire class's reading level, and pinpoint specific students who might require additional support through reading activities. Meanwhile, the individual test is given to identify a student's independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels (DepEd, 2018b).

Research Gap

Comics can be an effective tool for enhancing English language learning and reading comprehension. They are perceived as influential in improving reading skills due to their attractive visuals and ease of understanding. The visual permanence of comics, combined with dialogue, creates engaging English language teaching materials suitable for primary school students. However, despite these advantages, there is a pressing need for further studies on its utilization in English education. There is a lack of local studies explicitly examining the use of English comics to improve students' reading comprehension. This knowledge gap urgently highlights the need for a localized investigation to assess the potential of comics as a pedagogical tool for enhancing reading comprehension among students in this specific context.

Research Focus

In this study, students' reading comprehension in English was the focus. English is the medium of instruction for many subjects in the Philippine curriculum. Strong reading comprehension in English enables students to grasp key concepts in English and other subjects. Poor reading comprehension may affect performance in content-heavy subjects. Understanding the students' reading comprehension is essential because it reflects their readiness for advanced learning at higher grade levels and supports early reading intervention. English comics were used as reading materials and interventions due to their shorter sentences, dialogues, and visuals and graphics that provide clues to word meaning. This study utilized individual and silent reading tests to assess students' reading comprehension after using English comics as reading materials and intervention.

Research Significance

This study holds local and international significance in advancing literacy education through innovative, learner-centered approaches. This is particularly in exploring innovative strategies to enhance reading comprehension among young learners. This study offers empirical evidence supporting the integration of multimodal texts in primary education by demonstrating the positive impact of English comics as reading materials and intervention tools. The study demonstrates measurable improvements in students' reading comprehension skills, and highlights positive perceptions of the material, reinforcing its potential to foster engagement and motivation, influencing reading success. Given students' challenges in reading traditional texts, this study underscores the relevance of comics as an accessible and effective pedagogical tool. These insights can inform curriculum development, educational design, and content creation across language education. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge advocating for diversified and learner-centered approaches in early literacy instruction.

Research Aim and Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the effects of utilizing English comics as reading material and intervention in primary students' reading comprehension. It aimed to establish whether the use of comics leads to a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension skills. It also aimed to explore the students' experiences using comics, potentially revealing new insights into effective teaching methods. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are students' reading comprehension performances before and after implementing English comics as reading materials and intervention?
2. Is there a significant difference in student's reading comprehension performances before and after implementing English comics as reading materials and intervention?
3. What are students' views on using English comics to improve their reading comprehension?

Research Methodology

Design

This study used classroom action research and a mixed methods approach. Classroom action research is a systematic and iterative approach and is designed to improve teaching and learning practices in a real-world classroom setting (Khasinah, 2013). This study employed the stages of action research by Strickland (1988). The stages were carried out in cycles, consisting

of seven steps: identifying a problem, seeking information, planning an action, implementing the action, observing the action, reflecting on the observations, and revising the plan. Mixed-method design is a research approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This approach allows researchers to collect, analyze, and interpret data in numerical and descriptive forms, providing a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem by integrating the strengths of both data types.

For the mixed-method design, the study used an explanatory sequential design to investigate and analyze the use of English comics as reading materials and intervention to improve students' reading comprehension. First, the quantitative phase involved collecting and analyzing numerical data to uncover patterns, make predictions, and understand relationships (Creswell, 2003). It was a structured approach that used statistical analysis to draw conclusions and answer research questions (Barella et al., 2024). Moreover, a quasi-experimental approach using individual and silent reading pre-and post-test assessments was used. It provided a quick and convenient way to evaluate a specific group undergoing an intervention (Stratton, 2019). The pre-and post-test results were used to determine students' reading comprehension performances.

For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview was used to understand the views (Adams, 2015) and the impacts of English comics among the students. This method involves a guided conversation where knowledge is co-constructed between the researchers and the participants (Longhurst, 2009). To enhance student engagement, the interviews were conducted in the students' native language. Volunteer students participated in the individual interviews. The researchers used recorded videos during the interview and translated them into English. Thematic analysis was applied, afterwards, to analyze the responses, including interview transcripts, familiarization, coding, and theme identification (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Incorporating comics as reading materials and intervention, and insights into the underlying meanings and relationships surrounding the students' reading comprehension performance was captured by organizing complex data into understandable themes. The study was conducted from February to April 2025, the fourth quarter of the Academic Year 2024 - 2025.

Participants

Using total enumeration, 20 Grade 5 students at Palabayan Elementary School (PES), Tinoc, Ifugao, Philippines, were involved in the study. The students were selected through purposive sampling based on the grade section suggested by the School Head, which one of the researchers handled. Specifically, there were 55% ($N = 11$) males and 45% ($N = 9$) females. Based on total enumeration, the students were all involved in data gathering of their reading comprehension performance scores during the quantitative phase. The students were assigned pseudonyms from S1 to S20. Meanwhile, ten students volunteered for the interviews in the qualitative phase. Their assigned pseudonyms identifying their scores were maintained in the interview responses.

Materials and Instruments

The stories for the comics were selected based on the English learning competencies and lessons covered during the study. The stories were adapted from the teacher's modules and reading materials for English Grade 5. This process reflected congruence between the English comics reading materials, and the expected reading outcomes for the grade level. Four comics were made: A Glass of Milk, Greedy Dog, Ant and the Grasshopper, and The Tortoise and the Hare. One comics material was used per lesson. The comics were printed in full color and distributed individually to the students. The graphics and designs underwent rigorous selection and critique to ensure alignment with the stories.

The 10-test items used to measure students' reading comprehension are standardized tests that were adopted from the English Phil-IRI assessment tools for the Grade 5 level. This ensured that test items were valid and reliable and followed the DepEd evaluation protocols. The pre-and post-test assessment tools were the same. The guide questions were developed based on the research objectives and theoretical framework to ensure that these directly address the study's aims. They were reviewed by an English subject specialist, and two primary teachers in the Grade 5 level to ensure that the questions accurately captured relevant information. Based on suggestions, the interview questions were modified and worded clearly and precisely to avoid confusion and to ensure the same interpretation by the students.

Procedures

Before conducting the study, permissions from the School Head and the Class Adviser were requested. Once approved, informed consent from students' parents or guardians was sought. It explained the study's purpose, scope, potential student benefits, and risks involved in the study. It included the right of the parents or guardians to withdraw the participation of their child or ward in the study without repercussions. Since the study was conducted during class hours, the participation withdrawal would only involve non-collection of student data, but their inclusion in the lesson was guaranteed. The students were also oriented about the study and the significance of their participation in attaining the study's objectives.

Following an explanatory sequential design, the qualitative phase involved the seven stages of action research. First, in identifying the problem, the students were observed to have issues related to their reading comprehension. This was based on the Phil-IRI evaluations conducted by the school. This also involved identifying the probable use of comics as reading materials and intervention. Second, existing literature on using comics in language learning, reading, and reading comprehension was explored. This stage included exploring how visuals paired with text aid in understanding. The individual and silent reading pre-test was also conducted to identify students' strengths and weaknesses in their reading comprehension. Third, in planning an action, a plan to incorporate English comics into the reading lessons was developed, ensuring that the comics align with the student's reading levels and learning objectives. This stage included selecting specific reading materials, designing and developing, producing the comics, and setting measurable goals for comprehension improvement. This stage also involved lesson planning to incorporate the comics.

Fourth, comics were introduced and used in the lessons to implement the action. During every lesson within a week, each student was given a copy of the comics. The comics were used for students' regular reading practice, motivation, lesson integration, guided discussions, vocabulary exercises, and comprehension assessments. The comics were used for around 15–20 minutes in every lesson delivery. Initially, the students silently read the comics and were instructed to highlight unfamiliar words they encountered. Then, the comics were read aloud panel by panel with the class. This provided reading support and clarified students' struggle with their highlighted words. The comics were read at least twice to clarify meanings and to understand and discuss the moral or message of the comics' story. Afterward, questions were asked to assess students' comprehension of the comics' story. The questions focused on sequencing and story plot, inference questions, character analysis, themes, and other relevant ideas. The students were required to write their answers on their papers, which were then collected. As closing activities, the comprehension questions were answered as a class through recitation.

Fifth, the action was observed, and the students' engagement with the comics was monitored. Any changes in their reading behaviors, participation, and reading comprehension during comic lessons were noted. The post-test assessment was conducted to determine possible

improvement in students' reading comprehension. Students' issues and concerns regarding the English comics were also noted for later improvement. Monitoring, feedback, and support were provided. Sixth, reflections on the gathered data were done through reflecting on the observations. This also involved statistical treatment and analysis of the data gathered. This involved comparing students' comprehension levels before and after the reading intervention. Reflection on whether there was a need to adjust the use of comics to support students' reading comprehension better was covered. Lastly, in revising the plan, revisions were made to the plan of using comics in future lessons. This involved modifying the comics' contents, adjusting the difficulty level, adding more interactive elements, or incorporating additional strategies to support comprehension further.

Afterward, individual interviews were conducted; volunteer students from the class agreed to participate. The interviews were conducted during breaks and after classes in the students' classroom to ensure familiarity with the environment among the students. The researchers' smartphones were used to record the interviews. Due to the considerable students' shorter attention spans, the interview sessions were briefly conducted for about 10 to 20 minutes. Transcriptions and translations of the students' responses were completed. In many instances, the researchers carefully paraphrased the translations to maintain the original meaning and cultural relevance of the responses. To ensure accuracy and avoid bias, the translated texts were reviewed by an English teacher, who is also a native speaker of the local language. This step helped preserve the tone and content of the students' responses, while respecting their voices. A thematic analysis was conducted by systematically examining the translated data and coding key features. The study concluded by presenting and discussing the quantitative results and qualitative findings.

Data Analysis and Management

The researchers were solely responsible for data collection and analysis. To ensure accuracy, researchers personally scored each participant's test paper during pre-and post-test assessments. The scores were recorded in a secure spreadsheet and were used solely for the study. After recording, students' papers were returned for transparency and immediate feedback. The pre-test was given at the beginning of delivering the learning competency, while the post-test was given at the end. The students' names were presented in codes, and no personal information was publicized. Mean (*M*), standard deviation (*SD*), and percentage were used to determine students' reading comprehension performances. A *t*-test was employed to evaluate the significant variance between the students' pre-test and post-test scores. Following the *t*-test, Cohen's *d*, a measure of effect size was utilized to quantify the magnitude of the difference between the mean scores of the two assessments. This statistical approach provides a deeper understanding of the impact of comics on the students' learning outcomes, offering valuable insights into the effectiveness of incorporating English comics into their educational experience. The English Phil-IRI computation for reading comprehension was used:

$$\text{Reading comprehension} = \frac{\text{Number of correct answers}}{\text{Total number of questions}} \times 100$$

In interpreting reading comprehension performances, the English Phil-IRI provides the descriptions in Table 1.

Table 1
English Phil-IRI Reading Levels and Comprehension Scores

Reading Levels	Reading Comprehension Scores
Independent	80 – 100%
Instructional	59 – 79%
Frustration	58% and below

These reading levels were used as guidelines to determine the reading performance of every student. Students at the independent level could independently understand a text without significant help or difficulty. The reader could comprehend the material independently. The instructional level represented a difficulty level where the text was slightly challenging for the reader but could be understood with some support. Readers might struggle with certain words, phrases, or concepts, but with guidance from a teacher, peer, or additional resources, they could comprehend and make sense of the text. At the frustration level, the text was too difficult for the reader, leading to frequent errors, misunderstandings, and a lack of comprehension. The reader may struggle to decode words, understand the meaning of sentences, or keep track of the plot. Reading at this level could cause frustration and hinder learning, as the text exceeded the reader's current capabilities, making it hard for them to engage meaningfully with the material (DepEd, 2018a, 2018b).

Ethical Considerations

The researchers obtained informed consent from students' parents or guardians, as the students were minors, and thus, could not legally provide consent on their own. This ensured that the parents or guardians were fully aware of and agreed to their child or ward's involvement in the study. The researchers took several measures to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents. After collecting the test papers, the researchers ensured that any personally-identifiable pieces of information were not included. Other identifying data was replaced with pseudonyms. Only the researchers could access the students' records for data restrictions. The results of the study were analyzed objectively. The study conformed to the highest ethical standards in conducting a scientific study.

Research Results

Students' Reading Comprehension Performances

Table 2 shows the reading comprehension performances of the students collected before and after the integration of English comics. Results indicate increased reading comprehension from the pre-test to the post-test, after the comics' utilization. More than half of the students were at frustration levels during the pre-test, with 50% or less. Four students were at the instructional levels, while only one was at the independent level. On the other hand, the post-test shows an overall increase in students' reading comprehension. Five students achieved perfect scores, and thus, attained independent levels. The majority of the students progressed to instructional levels, however, four retained at the frustration levels.

Table 2
Students' Pre-and Post-test Reading Comprehension Performances

Students	Pre-test Scores		Post-test Scores	
	Score	%	Score	%
S1	6	60	8	80
S2	5	50	10	100
S3	6	60	9	90
S4	4	40	5	50
S5	5	50	4	40
S6	5	50	9	90
S7	6	60	8	80
S8	8	80	9	90
S9	3	30	5	50
S10	7	70	10	100
S11	5	50	7	70
S12	6	60	10	100
S13	8	80	8	80
S14	3	30	4	40
S15	3	30	6	60
S16	2	20	8	80
S17	1	10	8	80
S18	7	70	10	100
S19	4	40	9	90
S20	9	90	10	100
Mean	5.15	51.5	7.85	78.5

As gleaned in Table 3, there is a significant difference in the reading comprehension performances of the students during and after the use of English comics. Particularly, the post-test result is significantly higher than the pre-test. This indicates a significant improvement in the students' reading comprehension after using the comics. Further analysis shows that Cohen's effect size value suggested a moderate effect between the test scores.

Table 3
Difference Between the Students' Reading Comprehension Performances

Tests	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Pre-test	5.15	20	4.45	19	-5.9519*	.0001	0.60
Post-test	7.85	20	4.13				

Note: * = significant ($p < .05$); ns = not significant ($p > .05$); Cohen's $d = .20$ is small effect; $d = .50$ is moderate effect; $d = .80$ is large effect

Table 4 summarizes the four main themes and sub-themes drawn from the students' interview responses. The themes present the students' perceptions of using comics as reading materials and intervention to improve their reading comprehension.

Table 4
Emerging Themes from Students' Interview Responses

Main Themes	Sub-themes
Comics Design	
Impact of Comics on Reading Comprehension	Improved Reading Comprehension
	Elevated Reading Enjoyment
Challenges in Using the Comics	Visually Overwhelming
	Visual and Textual Overload
	Limited Vocabulary
Suggestions for Comics Improvement	

Comics Design

Student feedback emphasizes strong perceptions of the visual elements used in the comics. A student indicated that it has attractive colors. One student shared that the pictures were well-aligned with the words, while another indicated that the pictures and words were well-designed. Another expressed that the graphics used were visually appealing. As they shared,

- S15: "I like the color of the comics because it is attractive."
S2: "The pictures are attractive because they are good. The pictures are aligned to the words."
S18: "I am happy to use the comics because the pictures and words are well-designed."
S1: "The colors and pictures of the comics make it easier to understand the story because they are attractive and visually appealing."

Impact of Comics on Reading Comprehension: Improved Reading Comprehension

Students found that the comics significantly improved their reading comprehension. The visuals helped them follow the story's plot and visualize the events described in the comics. This active engagement with the visual elements enhanced their comprehension compared to reading traditional text-only books. They expressed,

- S15: "The pictures in the comics help me understand the flow of the story."
S1: "I understand the story better when it has pictures because I can see what happens in the story."
S10: "I understand more the story in comics because it has pictures compared to the regular books with no pictures."
S12: "I easily understand the comics because they have pictures where I can see what happens in the story, and who said the words or texts."

Elevated Reading Enjoyment

The use of comics increased students' enjoyment of reading. Combining engaging visuals and straightforward storytelling made the reading process more pleasurable. The students mentioned that they enjoyed reading the comics due to the short stories and the pictures used. They divulged,

- S4: "It is enjoyable to read the comics because I understand the story."
S10: "I enjoy reading the comics because there are pictures."

S17: *"Aside from the short sentences, I enjoy reading due to the pictures."*

S2: *"I enjoy reading the comics because the stories are short and good."*

Challenges in Using the Comics: Visually Overwhelming

While generally helpful, the visual elements sometimes proved overwhelming and distracting. A student indicated that they were distracted due to the pictures, but pursued to finish reading the stories. Others mentioned losing their focus due to the placement of the dialogues, aside from the pictures. They revealed,

S10: *"I am distracted sometimes, especially when the pictures in the comics are funny. Nevertheless, I continue to read the story."*

S3: *"There are times when I was distracted by the pictures and lost focus on reading the dialogues."*

S4: *"There are times that I was distracted by the pictures, and sometimes by how the dialogues are placed in the comics."*

Visual and Textual Overload

An overabundance of visual and textual information presented some challenges. Too many pictures or densely packed text affects students' reading of the comics. Sometimes, they find it hard to understand words and pictures that were placed very close together. They commented,

S17: *"There is too much information, and too many pictures in the comics. These make them difficult to understand."*

S19: *"It is difficult to understand some words and pictures, especially when they are placed very close to one another."*

Limited Vocabulary

Difficulties with vocabulary were also reported as a challenge. The students mentioned that they had trouble understanding the story due to unfamiliarity with some of the words. Given this, they depended on the pictures used. They pointed out,

S12: *"Sometimes, it is hard for me to understand the story. I do not know the meaning of some words. So, I depend on the pictures."*

S4: *"I do not know the meaning of some words used, even if there are related pictures."*

Suggestions for Comics Improvement

Students suggested improvements focusing on increasing the visual appeal and clarity of the comics. More pictures and improved design were frequently recommended. They mentioned using larger font sizes for ease of reading. They also recommended using basic and fewer pictures and words for the readers to avoid being overwhelmed. They recommended,

S1: *"There needs to be more pictures in the comics."*

S18: *"I suggest adding more designs to make it more engaging."*

S15: *"It is difficult to understand the story when the font is small. So, I suggest that it must be in bigger font sizes."*

S17: *"Make the words bigger. Some of the dialogues seem small, making them harder to read."*

S19: *"Use simpler words and fewer pictures to avoid distractions."*

Discussion

The students' pre-test reading comprehension performances before using the English comics indicate that most were at the frustration reading levels. This reflects that most students had difficulty grasping or retaining the story's meaning. They struggled with understanding the central idea, interpreting key concepts, and making connections between information in the text, as described in the DepEd (2018b) Phil-IRI. This mirrors the country's low reading comprehension ranking, as assessed by the OECD in 2019 and 2023. Even if students can decode the words, they may have failed to comprehend the story, leading to confusion and frustration. However, after using the comics and post-test assessment, their reading comprehension performances improved to instructional and independent levels. Although some remained at the frustration level, their post-test scores were higher than their pre-test scores. The shift from frustration levels to instructional and independent levels demonstrates students' attainment of better reading comprehension skills, as noted by Chang and Avila (2014), Källvant (2015), Lopez (2022), and Sharma (2020).

The measured significant improvement in students' reading comprehension indicates that the visual and narrative elements of comics have effectively supported their understanding and engagement with the stories, as underscored in the students' medium effect size pre-and post-test results. This implies that the use of comics moderately impacted students' reading comprehension performances, with a noticeable, but not overwhelming difference in the performance. It echoes that of observed enhanced reading comprehension by Liu (2004), Losi et al. (2023), Ridhwan et al. (2018), Robbani and Khoirotunnisa (2021), Smith (2006), and Tanala (2023).

The comics helped students connect words and visual context, enhancing their comprehension, particularly for frustration level readers. The visual cues in the comics provided context clues that aided in decoding unfamiliar words. Additionally, the structured format of panels, speech bubbles, and dialogues helped organize information in a way that was easier for the students to process. As a result, students have developed stronger skills in making inferences, identifying key details, and understanding narrative structure. This infers the potential of using comics for English language education among young learners, supporting Bolton-Gary (2012), Brown (2023), Graham (2011), Jadán-Guerrero et al. (2022), Issa (2017), and Losi et al. (2023). These results accentuate the prospect of comics as an effective pedagogical tool in the local context, and other developing regions facing comparable literacy challenges. In settings where traditional texts may overwhelm or disengage learners, comics can facilitate understanding, and support struggling readers, particularly in low-resource environments. As such, these insights could inform reading interventions globally, especially in countries that aim to improve foundational reading literacy through the use of engaging and accessible materials.

In analyzing students' experiences in reading comics, the study highlighted that they strongly perceive the visual elements used, specifically its aesthetic appeal, alignment with the text, and harmony between the graphics and words. This supports the enhancement of comprehension through visual literacy by Golding and Verrier (2020). The students commended the attractive colors and noted that the pictures and words were well-designed. This exhibits students' engaged cognition of the pictures and words, as Tiemensma (2009) indicated. This suggests that the visual presentation of the comics played a key role in engaging students, and in enhancing their reading experience. The students' positive feedback on the graphics' aesthetic appeal, and their effective integration with the text, reflects the importance of visual design in improving students' understanding of the story. This shows the ability of comic visuals to capture student attention, as remarked by Bolton-Gary (2012). This aligns with numerous studies emphasizing that visual support can facilitate meaning-making, particularly for learners with limited language proficiency, or those in early literacy stages. In multilingual classrooms

worldwide, visually-rich materials like comics can serve as universal connectors, transcending linguistic barriers, and increasing motivation to read.

The students indicated that the comics helped improve their reading comprehension. They consistently noted that the pictures in the comics were crucial in helping them follow the story's flow, providing clear visual representation of the events, and enhancing their understanding of the narrative. The visual cues clarified the sequence of events and helped establish a coherent structure for the story. Seeing the events depicted in pictures improved students' comprehension process. This indicates that the visual components of comics allowed the students to make better connections between the text and the action, reinforcing their understanding of key plot points. This exemplifies the comics' ability to present texts and visuals at the same time, in relation to DCT as described by Clark and Paivio (1991). The students also compared the experience of reading comics to traditional text-only books, indicating that including pictures made it easier for them to grasp the content, especially in contrast to more abstract or challenging narrative forms. This illustrates the comics' capacity to minimize cognitive overload, reflecting CLT, as discussed by Paas et al. (2003).

Beyond comprehension, students also expressed a boost in enjoyment when reading comics. Combining engaging visuals with concise storytelling made the reading experience more enjoyable. The visual elements helped break up the text, providing a dynamic and interactive format that students found more appealing than traditional books. This suggests that combining concise narratives and visually rich formats creates a more accessible and enjoyable reading experience, particularly for students who may find longer or text-heavy passages daunting. This highlights the potential of comics to make reading a more pleasurable experience, as Robbani and Khoirotunnisa (2021) and Smith (2006) pointed out.

Despite the benefits of the comics, students revealed some challenges that they experienced while engaging with the visual elements of comics, which were sometimes overwhelming or distracting. The placement of dialogue and the pictures occasionally took their attention away from the narrative, causing them to lose focus. Concerning the motivating characteristics of comics indicated by Graham (2011) and Jadán-Guerrero et al. (2022), the graphics used in the comics may have gone overboard with the visual designs. This suggests that, while visuals can support comprehension, their prominence or design may sometimes divert students' attention away from the narrative. This could also indicate that, while the integration of pictures and words is generally a strength of comics, the layout or formatting of the comics could impact how easily students can follow both the visual and textual elements, simultaneously.

The comics' visual and textual overload also presented challenges for the students. They reported difficulty when there was an excessive amount of visual and textual information in close proximity, which made it harder for them to process and understand the content. It overwhelmed the students, notably when the content of comics exceeded their capacity to absorb and make connections. This reflects a common issue where an excessive number of pictures and texts within a page can disrupt the reading flow, causing students to feel overloaded. Instead of giving a positive learning experience among the students, as noted by Bolton-Gary (2012), the comics' visual and textual overload may have hindered their reading experiences. The cramped arrangement could lead to confusion, as students may struggle to differentiate between the image and the text, or become distracted by trying to process both elements, simultaneously. This suggests that, for comics to be truly effective, there needs to be a balance in the quantity of information, and careful attention to the layout to avoid overwhelming students. Well-designed comics should allow enough space between the visuals and text, enabling students to easily differentiate between, and engage with both elements without feeling distracted or confused.

Another problem posted by the students was their limited vocabulary, which posed a challenge when they engaged with the comics. Although the visual elements of the comics helped support comprehension, students reported that their lack of familiarity with certain words

hindered their overall understanding of the story. The students with limited vocabulary often rely heavily on visuals to make sense of the narrative. This dependence on pictures suggests that while the visual elements helped fill in the gaps, they may not have always fully compensated for gaps in textual comprehension, especially when the unfamiliar vocabulary was central to the plot or understanding of key concepts. This also underscores the limitations of relying solely on images to convey meaning, such as when the pictures may not provide enough context or clarity for students to infer the meaning of certain words. Even when the visuals are related to the text, the relationship between the words and images may not always be sufficient for students to decipher the meaning of unfamiliar terms, especially if those terms are abstract or technical. Along with reading comprehension, vocabulary development is one of the literacy skills that DepEd (2016, 2023) aims to enhance as a foundational language skill through reading. These challenges illuminate the delicate balance required in educational comics design: while visuals can empower learners, they must be curated with pedagogical intentionality. These determined issues offer educators critical guidance, affirming that comics' effective use demands clarity, simplicity, and alignment between visual and textual elements.

When asked about their suggestions for improving the English comics, the students conveyed key suggestions while offering valuable insights to make the comics visually appealing and comprehensible. The suggestions include increasing the visual appeal and clarity of the comics to enhance the students' reading experience. They recommended adding more pictures to make them more engaging and easier to follow, which could provide more context and support for comprehension. They emphasized that the visuals should aid comprehension and capture their attention, enhancing the overall experience. Another suggestion involved improving the font size of the text. They found that the texts were sometimes difficult to read due to small font sizes, indicating that readability was challenging for some. This feedback highlights the importance of ensuring that the text is legible, especially for students who may have difficulty reading small print, and hence, larger font sizes should be used to improve their overall reading experience. Finally, students recommended simplifying the visual and textual content, indicating the need to balance visuals and text. Students appreciated the balance of visuals and text, where the simplicity of both elements helped keep the story clear and engaging without creating cognitive overload. The students' suggestions highlight critical considerations for the design of practical, inclusive, and adaptable educational comics. For educators, these insights would likely improve not only the accessibility of the comics, but also, their overall engagement, in order to provide students with a more enjoyable and practical reading experience. Incorporating these suggestions could increase the effectiveness of comics, not only as literacy tools but also as catalysts for inclusive education, particularly in contexts where traditional text-based instruction falls short.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Incorporating comics into reading instruction offers a fresh and effective way to address young students' comprehension challenges. They offer a dynamic and interactive reading experience among the students, making them confident and capable readers. This study aimed to explore the impact of comics on primary students' English reading comprehension. It also aimed to uncover students' experiences in using English comics. As revealed, there was a significant improvement, although with a medium effect size, in the students' reading comprehension after comics were used as reading materials and interventions. Most of the students progressed from frustration levels to instructional or independent levels. This shift emphasizes the effective use of English comics in improving the reading comprehension of students in the primary level, especially those who struggle with reading. Student feedback revealed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the comics' visual elements. The comics helped students understand the stories

better and made reading enjoyable. On the other hand, students highlighted that overly complex visuals and densely packed text occasionally hindered their understanding. Some found the layout confusing, while others were distracted by excessive visual elements, indicating the need for careful design and formatting. Students also revealed that their limited vocabulary affected their understanding, even when supported by images.

Conclusively, this study affirms the promising educational potential of English comics as a viable and engaging reading material and intervention to improve students' reading comprehension. While there are design and instructional limitations to consider, improved comprehension, increased motivation, and greater enjoyment make comics a valuable addition to literacy education. It is a promising alternative medium that fosters comprehension and positive attitudes toward reading. Educators and curriculum developers can use comics as a bridge toward deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and a lifelong love for reading, by providing engaging and accessible ways for students to learn best.

The focus on reading comprehension and not considering other literacy development constructs is a limiting factor in this study. Other skills, such as vocabulary and fluency, were overlooked. Another limiting factor is the involvement of a class section with a small number of student participants in a local school. The study's findings are limited, and do not necessarily reflect a larger population. Due to time constraints, the integration of comics was short-term. This may not provide a complete picture of long-term improvements in reading comprehension. Further research and thoughtful implementation of comics can refine their use, ensuring that they contribute meaningfully to students' academic growth and language proficiency.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed to the review, editing, literature review writing, planning, and implementing the research. All authors contributed to the data collection and analysis. All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm no conflict of interest concerning this article's authorship and publication.

Ethics Declaration

This study received ethical clearance following a review and approval by the Research Ethics Committee of Ifugao State University (IFSU)-Tinoc Campus, Philippines.

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