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FROM DIGITAL STORIES TO BETTER READING: ENHANCING EFL STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH LET'S READ ASIA

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abstract

Abstract

Reading comprehension remains a challenge for many EFL students, particularly when classroom reading activities rely on limited and less varied learning materials. Digital reading resources such as Let's Read Asia may provide more engaging opportunities for students to interact with narrative texts through stories and visual features. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Let's Read Asia as a digital reading medium in improving EFL students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design was employed, involving an experimental class and a control class. The samples of this study were 31 students of class IX A as the experimental class and 31 students of class IX C as the control class. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests using a reading comprehension test as the research instrument. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent-samples t-test to determine the difference in students' reading comprehension between the two groups. The findings showed that the mean score of the experimental class increased from 66.45 in the pre-test to 76.45 in the post-test. The statistical analysis also revealed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups, with a significance value of 0.037 (< 0.05). These findings indicate that the use of Let's Read Asia was effective in supporting students' comprehension of narrative texts. The findings imply that digital reading media can be integrated into EFL reading instruction to provide more varied, engaging, and enjoyable learning experiences and to support the development of students' reading comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

The increase in the availability of digital technology gradually changed how students access and interact with information, including how they read. The increased consumption of audio-visual media may affect the reading habits of students because these media would seem more immediate and engaging compared to the conventional practice of reading (Sari et al., 2024). It would be difficult for the sustained reading interest and comprehension development among students because of this trend. Most students today could be considered digital natives because they grow up with technology and always use digital technology to obtain information and communicate in daily life (Kuntari, 2023). Instead of looking at this digital competency as a hindrance to reading development, it could be seen as a chance for teachers to design learning experiences that connect the daily digital activities of students to reading activities. Thus, teachers are advised to integrate digital technology in the teaching and learning of reading in such a way that students could benefit from it meaningfully and immediately.

Reading plays an important role in helping students improve their skills in dealing with different problems, including the ability to answer questions while undergoing evaluation in the

process of learning (Oktaviani et al., 2023). The main criterion of effective learning is the ability of the students to understand and comprehend the information that is contained in the text. It becomes especially important in the context of language learning, where reading is one of the basic skills. The activity allows the students to expand their knowledge of English and develop an important language skill in English language learning. The students have to be able to comprehend the texts through reading, identify and understand English vocabulary, and extract the necessary information offered by the author. "Reading is more than the mechanical process of recognizing words or printed symbols; it is an active process wherein readers create meaning through connecting the text content to their prior knowledge" (Amanda, 2022, p. 18).

Reading comprehension can be considered as an interactional activity where readers make use of their previous knowledge and life experiences to make sense of explicit or implicit information in the text (Elleman & Oslund, 2019, p. 4). This is beyond just reading texts; readers must be able to comprehend, interpret and relate to the information in the text to gain meaningful comprehension (Amanda, 2022). In light of the fast evolution of technological advancements, more options have been provided to improve the abilities of students in reading comprehension. Digital learning media can be utilized to assist the learning experience in class through interesting reading activities. The appropriate implementation of technological advancements allows teachers to tailor learning methods based on the unique learning styles of students.

The selection of appropriate media of learning is an important component of the delivery of learning materials and the attainment of optimum learning outcomes by students. Learning media are not only a tool to deliver information, but they are also a way to catch and hold the students' attention, to arouse their interest, and to involve their minds and feelings while they are learning. The use of learning media the right way can help teachers to create learning experiences so that they can help achieve the purpose of teaching (Hikmah, 2019). The teaching and learning process will be more effective if the teachers are able to choose and combine media that are relevant to the learning content and appropriate to the students' levels of understanding (Akrim, 2018). The development of digital technology continues to grow so that the use of learning media is no longer limited to conventional tools. The use of digital media is increasingly being promoted by teachers within the framework of contemporary educational practices. Digital learning media is an important application of multimedia and technology in education (Hikmah, 2019; Khusniyah, 2022). In addition, the use of digital media in learning can be a positive factor in students' engagement, allowing them to be more active during the learning process (Suganda, 2022).

The fast development of technology has provided different chances and benefits in the area of education. The use of technology in digital learning is perceived as a new method to improve the quality of education in Indonesia and assist learners in acquiring abilities to compete in a globalized world (Ruddamayanti, 2019). One of the practical ways to integrate technology in education is the use of digital applications and platforms as a learning medium in the classroom. Let's Read Asia is one platform that can be used to encourage reading. Let's Read Asia is a digital library that gives kids access to a variety of reading materials and narrative genres. When used in the classroom, it can make reading more interesting, motivate students to take an active role in their education, and help them improve their reading comprehension abilities (Amanda, 2022).

This study was carried out at a junior high school where many pupils were deemed to struggle with reading comprehension, based on the researcher's pre-observation. There was little access to interesting and varied reading resources because the majority of the reading activities in the classroom were based on textbooks. Students' motivation and interest in

engaging in reading activities seemed to decline as a result of this lack of variety. To solve this problem, the researcher proposed Let's Read Asia as a digital learning medium to help students in reading comprehension activities, especially in learning narrative texts. The digital platform is expected to provide more engaging and diverse reading experiences for students. The researcher was therefore interested in investigating the effectiveness of using Let's Read Asia to improve students' reading comprehension. In this case, the researcher conducted research entitled "Supporting EFL Students' Reading Comprehension Through Digital Storybooks: A Quasi-Experimental Study Using Let's Read Asia." The study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of how the use of Let's Read Asia can help to improve students' reading comprehension and support a more engaging and effective process of teaching and learning.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design using a pre-test–post-test control group design. The study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Let's Read Asia as a digital reading medium in improving students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. Two intact classes were involved: an experimental group that received instruction using Let's Read Asia and a control group that received conventional instruction without the digital medium. Both groups were administered a pre-test before the treatment and a post-test after the treatment.

The population consisted of 282 ninth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Talun Cirebon in the 2025/2026 academic year, distributed across nine classes (IX A–IX I). A simple random sampling technique was used to select the research participants. Class IX A, consisting of 31 students, was selected as the experimental group, while class IX C, also consisting of 31 students, was selected as the control group. Thus, the total sample comprised 62 students. The selection of the two classes was intended to provide comparable groups for examining the effect of the treatment.

Data were collected through a reading comprehension test administered as a pre-test and post-test. The test focused on students' comprehension of narrative texts and was used to measure their reading comprehension before and after the learning activities. The pre-test was administered to both groups before the treatment to identify their initial reading comprehension ability. During the treatment, the experimental group learned narrative texts using Let's Read Asia through a series of reading activities, including pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. Students read selected digital storybooks, identified unfamiliar vocabulary and important information, discussed the content and elements of the stories, compared narrative texts, and summarized the stories. In contrast, the control group received conventional instruction without using Let's Read Asia. After the treatment, both groups completed the post-test to measure their reading comprehension achievement.

The quantitative data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics, including the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation, were first calculated to describe students' reading comprehension scores. Before hypothesis testing, the Shapiro–Wilk test was employed to examine the normality of the data, while Levene's test was used to determine the homogeneity of variance between the groups. A paired-samples t-test was then conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores within each group. Finally, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. The significance

level was set at 0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected when the significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) was less than 0.05..

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher administered the pre-test to both experimental and control groups prior to the learning treatment. After the pre-test, the experimental class had several learning sessions using the Let's Read Asia application or website as the digital learning medium, while the control class had learning sessions without using Let's Read Asia. At the end of the treatment period, a post-test was given to measure the students' reading comprehension after the learning activities. Then, the pre-test and post-test results were analyzed and compared to find out the effectiveness of using Let's Read Asia in improving students' reading comprehension in narrative texts. In this chapter the results obtained from the data analysis are presented and the research questions posed in the study are addressed. The research subjects were 62 students from class IX A and IX C, SMP Negeri 1 Talun Cirebon, in the 2026 academic year.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Experiment	31	50	80	66.45	7.873
Post-Test Experiment	31	60	90	76.45	7.659
Pre-Test Control	31	55	80	66.61	7.680
Post-Test Control	31	60	85	72.58	6.566
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Table 1 above depicts the descriptive statistics of the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. The next stage after obtaining the scores of the students was to conduct the independent-samples t-test in order to determine whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Prior to conducting the t-test, however, there were certain assumptions that needed to be satisfied with regard to the data. Thus, in order to determine whether the data satisfies the requirements of the test, the researcher had to carry out the normality test to determine whether the data is normally distributed and the homogeneity test to determine whether the variances of the two groups are homogeneous.

The data were analyzed to know whether the data were normally distributed by looking at the pre-test and post-test scores of the IX A class as the experimental group and the IX C class as the control group. For this purpose, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used by IBM SPSS Statistics. The result of the normality test of the experimental class's pre-test value is shown in table 1.2 below.

Table 2
Tests of Normality

Hasil Belajar Siswa	Class	Kolmogorov-Smirnov2			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df.	SSig.	Statistic	df.	SSig.
	Pre-Test Experiment	.137	31	.148	.950	31	.159
	Post-Test Experiment	.167	31	.028	.949	31	.149
	Pre-Test Control	.135	31	.159	.933	31	.063
	Post-Test Control	**.172**	**31**	**.020**	**.936**	**31**	**.065**

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

This study was carried out at a junior high school where the researcher's pre-observation revealed that many students struggled with reading comprehension. Because textbooks were the main source of reading activities in the school, there was little access to interesting and varied reading resources. Students' motivation and interest in engaging in reading activities seemed to decline as a result of this lack of variation.

From the Shapiro-Wilk test result, the significance value for the experimental class was found to be 0.159 in the pre-test and 0.149 in the post-test, from the data provided in Table 1.2. Meanwhile, the significance value of the pre-test and post-test for the control class was 0.063 and 0.065, respectively. This data set can be described as being normally distributed, in view of the fact that all the significance values are above the alpha level of 0.05.

A homogeneity test was conducted by the researcher to establish whether the variances in the groups were homogeneous after confirming the normality of the data. The homogeneity of the data was tested using the Levene test, where the homogeneity assumption was tested depending on the significant value. The homogeneity test is as follows

Table 3
Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Hasil Belajar Siswa	Based on Mean	.665	1	60	.41
	Based on Median	.434	1	60	.513
	Based on Median and with Adjusted df.	.434	1	59.933	.513
	Based on trimmed mean	**.675**	**1**	**60**	**.415**

The scores of the experimental group and control group after the test have a significant value of 0.418, as shown in Table 1.3. These results could be considered homogenous because their value is above 0.05, meaning the condition of homogeneity is fulfilled.

In order to determine whether there is any statistically significant difference in reading comprehension among the students with regard to the narrative texts before and after the Let's

Read Asia intervention, the researcher used a paired-samples t-test after determining the homogeneity and normality of the data. In order to test the significance of change in the pre-test and post-test scores, the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) program was used.

Table 4
Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-Test Experimental	66.45	31	7.873	1.414
	Post-Test Experimental	76.45	31	7.659	1.376
Pair 2	Pre-Test Control	66.61	31	7.680	1.379
	Post-Test Control	**72.58**	**31**	**6.566**	**1.179**

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Err	95% Confidence Interval of Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-Test Experimental-Post-Test Experimental	-10.000	1.826	.328	-10.670	-9.330	-30.496	30	.000
Pair 2	**Pre-Test control - Post-Test control**	**-5.968**	**4.167**	**.748**	**-7.496**	**-4.439**	**-7.973**	**30**	**.000**

The two-tailed significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) was 0.000, which was lower than the significance level of 0.05. As a result, the paired-samples t-test findings showed a statistically significant difference between students' reading comprehension before and after using the Let's Read Asia app for instruction. This result implies that students' comprehension of narrative texts improved when Let's Read Asia was used as a teaching tool. Stated differently, the application proved successful in helping students understand and analyze the content of narrative texts.

The researcher used an independent-samples t-test to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension between the experimental and control groups after comparing the pre-test and post-test scores of the students in the experimental class. The mean scores of the two separate groups were compared using this test. The following table displays the results of the independent-samples t-test.

Table 5
Group Statistics

Hasil Belajar Siswa	Class	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Post test Experimen Class	31	76.45	7.659	1.376
	Post test Control Class	**31**	**72.58**	**6.566**	**1.179**

Independent Samples Test

Hasil Belajar Siswa	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig	t	df.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Differen	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
	Equal variances	.665	.41	2.136	60	.037	3.871	1.812	.247	7.495
	Equal variances not			**2.136**	**58.633**	**.037**	**3.871**	**1.812**	**.245**	**7.497**

From the statistical analysis conducted, the p-value, or Sig. (2-tailed), was found to be 0.037, which was smaller than the significance level (0.05). As a consequence, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, whereas the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. The above-mentioned means that a statistically significant difference was observed in the post-test scores for experimental and control groups. The results received from the classes IX A and IX C at SMPN 1 Talun Cirebon, comprising 31 students each, provide farther evidence for the difference in reading comprehension skills of the students who learned through the use of the Let's Read Asia app and those who did not. It should be stated that in the experimental group (class IX A) the mean pre-test score was 66.45, whereas in the control one (class IX C) the mean pre-test score was 66.61. This suggests that prior to the treatment administration, the reading comprehension skills of the two groups were similar, though the mean score of the control group was a little higher than that of the experimental group.

The findings from the study suggest that Let's Read Asia could be used effectively as a digital learning tool to aid in enhancing students' ability to comprehend narrative texts. Improvement could be seen through the results of the students' pre-tests and post-tests, since there was a considerable difference in the reading comprehension ability of the students after the integration of Let's Read Asia in the process of learning. Throughout the treatment, the researcher structured the process of reading activity into three phases: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. In addition to this, students were asked to identify new vocabulary from the narrative texts that they had read to increase their understanding of the text. In the first treatment, students compared two narrative texts and highlighted the similarities and differences between them. For the second treatment, students formed groups to choose narrative texts from Let's Read Asia and discussed key components of the story. In addition, in the fourth session, the students were required to summarize the text in narrative form using the Let's Read Asia website. The activities mentioned above provided ample opportunity for the students to become actively involved in the process of reading, vocabulary building, and making sense of the narrative text..

From the results of this research, it can be seen that Let's Read Asia may help students acquire different skills related to reading comprehension. The result obtained is similar to Amanda (2022), which shows that the use of Let's Read Asia may assist students in improving their comprehension and knowledge of various aspects of reading comprehension. Considering that students nowadays are exposed to technological development, Let's Read Asia is a modern approach to the teaching of reading that is suitable for the contemporary generation of students. From the findings of the study, it can be observed that Let's Read Asia might aid in the acquisition of different skills associated with reading comprehension by students. The finding from the study is consistent with the finding from Amanda (2022), in which the use of Let's Read Asia might aid students in improving comprehension and understanding of reading comprehension skills. It is in recognition of the fact that today's students are exposed to advancements in technology that Let's Read Asia is a contemporary way of teaching reading skills.

Based on the findings of the study, the use of Let's Read Asia was effective in enhancing the reading comprehension ability of ninth-grade students of SMPN 1 Talun Cirebon regarding narrative texts. The use of Let's Read Asia as the medium for digital learning has enhanced the achievement of the students in reading comprehension. This is because of the many appealing features offered by the application that motivated the students to become more interested and enthusiastic towards reading narrative texts. With the use of illustrations that accompany the story, it attracted the attention of the students in order to easily comprehend the content of the texts. Moreover, the availability of many narrative texts in Let's Read Asia enables the students to choose reading material according to their preferences as well as compare one text with another. Through the sharing and exchanging of stories among the classmates, there is an interactive and fun-filled reading process for the students.

CONCLUSION

The researcher also conducted a pre-test at the start of the experiment to determine the level of reading comprehension of the students prior to the application of the treatment. Based on the findings, the researcher noted that the mean score of both the experimental and control groups had similarities prior to the administration of the treatment. But after the use of Let's Read Asia as a digital medium for teaching in the experimental group, their post-test score had higher improvements than that of the control group. The mean score of the pre-test in the experimental group was 66.45 while the post-test score was 76.45 after the use of Let's Read Asia. These findings show that there is improvement in the reading comprehension of the students after the treatment.

Based on the research findings, it is clear that using the digital learning medium of Let's Read Asia can help students enhance their reading comprehension skills, especially with regard to comprehending narrative texts among students in SMPN 1 Talun Cirebon. The results of the paired-samples t-test indicated a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores of the students. The significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) was 0.000 and was less than the significance level of 0.05. In this case, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, but the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. It is clear that using Let's Read Asia had a statistically significant positive impact on the reading comprehension of the students. Hence, Let's Read Asia can be considered an effective digital learning medium in enhancing students' reading comprehension skills.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

During the preparation of this research manuscript, the author used artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies, including ChatGPT, to support the writing and editing process. The

AI tool was used primarily to assist with paraphrasing, improving English grammar, refining sentence structure, and enhancing the clarity and readability of the manuscript. AI was not used to generate, fabricate, or manipulate the research data, statistical results, findings, or conclusions. All research data, analysis, interpretations, and academic decisions were independently conducted and verified by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the content, accuracy, originality, and integrity of the final manuscript.

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