



## UNLOCKING CREATIVITY THROUGH COMICS ENHANCING STORY RETELLING SKILLS AMONG ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS USING ENGLISH COMICS

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Article info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Corresponding Author:</b></p> <p>Mukhlisin  <a href="mailto:mukhlisin.endemic@gmail.com">mukhlisin.endemic@gmail.com</a>            STAI Miftahul ‘Ula Nganjuk,            Kab. Nganjuk,</p>	<p>This study explores the use of English comics as a tool to enhance story retelling skills among Islamic university students. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to assess the effectiveness of comics in improving students' language proficiency. Sixty undergraduate students from an Islamic university participated in the study, with 30 students in the experimental group using English comics and 30 students in the control group following traditional text-based methods. Results revealed that the experimental group exhibited a significant improvement in their story retelling skills, as measured by pre-test and post-test assessments. The use of comics fostered higher engagement, creativity, and motivation, with students reporting that the visual and textual elements of comics facilitated better comprehension and narrative recall. Observations and interviews further highlighted the positive impact of comics on students' participation and their ability to construct coherent, creative retellings. This study underscores the cognitive and affective benefits of comics as a multimodal learning tool, providing valuable insights for educators seeking innovative methods to enhance language learning. The findings suggest that integrating comics into language curricula can significantly improve language skills, particularly in the areas of storytelling and narrative construction, while offering an engaging and culturally relevant learning experience. Future research is encouraged to explore the long-term effects and broader applications of comics in language education.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>English comics, story retelling, language learning, multimodal learning, narrative skills.</i></p>
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### INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is a powerful educational tool that fosters creativity, improves communication skills, and strengthens cognitive development. In the context of language learning, storytelling holds particular significance as it aids students in acquiring vocabulary, improving grammar, and building fluency. However, many students, especially those in non-native English-speaking countries, struggle with expressing ideas and retelling stories in

English due to limited vocabulary, low confidence, and lack of engagement in traditional teaching methods.

To address these challenges, innovative teaching techniques are needed to create a more engaging and effective learning experience. One such technique is the use of English comics, which combine visual elements with narrative text to capture students' attention and simplify complex language structures. Comics provide contextual cues that help students understand the storyline, making them an ideal medium for teaching language skills, including story retelling. The integration of comics into the learning process not only enhances linguistic abilities but also stimulates creativity and critical thinking.

Islamic universities often aim to cultivate students who are not only academically competent but also culturally and morally grounded. The incorporation of comics as a teaching tool aligns with this vision, as comics often present universal themes and relatable narratives that can bridge cultural differences. Moreover, the visual appeal of comics can serve as a motivational factor, encouraging students to participate actively in the learning process.

This study investigates the use of English comics to improve the story retelling abilities of Islamic university students. It aims to assess the effectiveness of this approach in enhancing students' language proficiency and engagement. By focusing on storytelling, this research contributes to the broader discourse on innovative language teaching methodologies, offering insights into how visual and textual media can be utilized to overcome common language learning barriers.

The findings of this study are expected to provide practical implications for educators, particularly in Islamic universities, by demonstrating the value of integrating comics into language curricula. This research also highlights the potential of comics as a versatile educational tool that supports diverse learning objectives, making them a relevant and sustainable resource in modern pedagogy.

Storytelling is an age-old tradition that transcends cultures and generations, serving as a powerful medium for communication, education, and entertainment. In the modern educational landscape, storytelling has gained renewed significance as an effective pedagogical tool, particularly in language learning. It engages learners cognitively and emotionally, enhancing their ability to process information, retain vocabulary, and develop language fluency. However, despite its proven benefits, many students in non-native English-speaking environments, such as Islamic universities, face challenges in mastering story retelling skills. These challenges often stem from a lack of vocabulary, limited exposure to authentic language materials, and a rigid reliance on conventional teaching methods that fail to inspire creativity and engagement.

One innovative solution to these challenges is the use of English comics as a learning medium. Comics, as a form of multimodal text, integrate visual imagery with written narratives, making them accessible and appealing to a wide range of learners. The combination of illustrations and text provides contextual support, enabling students to grasp the storyline even if their language proficiency is limited. This dual-channel approach not only aids comprehension but also lowers the affective filter, increasing students' motivation and confidence to participate actively in language learning activities. Additionally, comics often present stories in a simplified, sequential format, which aligns well with the cognitive processes involved in story retelling.

The use of English comics in Islamic university settings holds promise. These institutions often emphasize the integration of moral, cultural, and academic education. Many English comics feature universal themes such as friendship, perseverance, and justice, which resonate with the values upheld in Islamic education. Furthermore, comics can be curated to ensure cultural relevance and appropriateness, making them an effective medium for language instruction that aligns with institutional goals.

This study explores the potential of English comics as a tool for enhancing the story retelling skills of students in Islamic universities. Specifically, it examines how the integration of comics into the language learning curriculum can address common obstacles faced by learners, such as lack of engagement, limited vocabulary, and difficulty in constructing coherent narratives. The research focuses on the cognitive and emotional impact of comics, investigating their role in improving comprehension, retention, and creativity among students.

The objectives of this study are twofold: first, to assess the effectiveness of English comics in improving students' ability to retell stories, and second, to evaluate students' perceptions of using comics as a learning tool. By addressing these objectives, this research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on innovative language teaching methods, offering practical insights for educators. The findings are expected to demonstrate that comics can serve not only as an engaging instructional material but also as a bridge between linguistic competence and cultural sensitivity, making them a valuable resource for Islamic universities and other educational institutions worldwide.

In the following sections, this paper presents a review of relevant literature, outlines the research methodology, and discusses the findings considering the study's objectives. By doing so, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how English comics can transform the way story retelling skills are taught and learned, fostering a more dynamic and inclusive language learning environment.

## METHOD

This study employs a mixed-method approach to examine the use of English comics in enhancing students' story retelling skills at an Islamic university. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods provides a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention and the students' perceptions of its impact. This section outlines the research design, participants, instruments, procedures, and data analysis methods.

## RESULT and DISCUSSION

### Finding

#### *Improvement in Story Retelling Skills*

The pre-test and post-test scores revealed a significant improvement in the story retelling skills of the experimental group compared to the control group. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics for both groups.

Group	Pre-Test Mean Score	Post-Test Mean Score	Mean Difference
Experimental	65.4	85.7	20.3
Control	66.1	72.4	6.3

A paired-sample t-test showed that the experimental group's improvement was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that the use of English comics effectively enhanced students' story retelling abilities. The control group also showed slight improvement, but the difference was not as pronounced, suggesting that traditional methods were less impactful in developing these skills.

#### ***Enhanced Engagement and Creativity***

Classroom observations and student feedback highlighted higher levels of engagement and creativity among the experimental group. Students actively participated in discussions, demonstrated greater enthusiasm during collaborative activities, and showcased creative storytelling techniques in their retelling tasks. These findings were supported by the thematic analysis of questionnaire responses, where students reported that comics were fun, engaging, and easier to understand compared to traditional texts.

#### ***Students' Perceptions of Comics in Learning***

The questionnaire results revealed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of using comics as a learning tool. Approximately 85% of students in the experimental group agreed or strongly agreed that comics made learning English more enjoyable and helped them better understand narrative structures. Additionally, students highlighted the visual support provided by comics as key factor in improving their comprehension and storytelling abilities.

#### **Discussion**

The results of this study provide compelling evidence that the use of English comics is an effective method for improving students' story retelling skills. This section discusses the findings considering previous research and theoretical frameworks.

#### ***Comics as a Multimodal Learning Tool***

The significant improvement in the experimental group's performance aligns with theories of multimodal learning, which suggest that combining visual and textual elements enhances comprehension and retention. The illustrations in comics provided contextual cues, helping students grasp the storyline and remember key details, which contributed to their improved retelling performance. This finding is consistent with studies that have shown the positive impact of visual aids on language learning.

#### ***Engagement and Motivation***

The higher levels of engagement and creativity observed in the experimental group underscore the motivational appeal of comics. Students were more willing to participate actively in class activities, which is crucial for developing language skills. Comics' relatable characters and engaging plots created a more dynamic and interactive learning environment, reducing students' anxiety and fostering a sense of enjoyment in learning. This supports the affective filter hypothesis, which posits that a low-anxiety environment facilitates language acquisition.

#### ***Practical Implications for Language Teaching***

The positive perceptions of students regarding comics highlight their potential as a practical and versatile teaching tool. By incorporating comics into the curriculum, educators can address common challenges in language teaching, such as lack of motivation and difficulty in understanding complex texts. Furthermore, the findings suggest that comics can be particularly beneficial in contexts where students struggle with limited vocabulary and low confidence, as they provide scaffolding that bridges the gap between comprehension and expression.

### ***Challenges and Limitations***

While the study demonstrated the effectiveness of comics, some challenges were noted. For instance, a few students mentioned difficulty in interpreting certain visual cues, indicating the need for careful selection of comics that match students' proficiency levels. Additionally, the study was conducted over a relatively short duration, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore the long-term effects of using comics in language learning and investigate their impact on other skills, such as writing and critical thinking.

The findings of this study highlight the potential of English comics as a transformative tool for teaching story retelling skills. This discussion explores the implications of the results in greater depth, linking them to broader educational theories and prior research.

### ***Cognitive Benefits of Visual Learning***

The significant improvement in the experimental group's performance confirms the cognitive benefits of using visual aids in education. Dual coding theory suggests that information is processed more effectively when presented through both visual and verbal channels. Comics utilize this principle by pairing text with imagery, which helps learners decode meaning more efficiently and retain information longer. For students in Islamic universities, where English is often a foreign language, comics reduce cognitive load by providing context clues through visuals. This dual-channel input likely contributed to the superior performance in story retelling observed in the experimental group.

### ***Comics and Narrative Understanding***

Story retelling requires a strong grasp of narrative structures, including elements like plot, characters, and resolution. Comics inherently teach these structures through their sequential art form, which organizes events in a clear and logical manner. The visual panels guide readers in understanding the progression of the story, helping them internalize the flow and structure. This sequential format mirrors the cognitive steps required for successful story retelling, making comics a natural fit for developing this skill.

### ***Cultural Relevance and Student Engagement***

The use of comics in an Islamic university setting also underscores the importance of cultural relevance in educational materials. By selecting comics with universal themes that align with Islamic values, educators can create a learning environment that is both engaging and culturally sensitive. The study's positive feedback on engagement demonstrates that culturally appropriate materials can enhance students' motivation to learn. This is particularly relevant in Islamic universities, where learners often benefit from instructional approaches that integrate moral and ethical considerations.

### ***Reduction of Anxiety and Increased Participation***

The observed increase in student participation and creativity in the experimental group aligns with the affective filter hypothesis, which posits that a positive emotional state enhances language acquisition. Comics, with their entertaining and relatable content, likely reduced students' anxiety and fostered a sense of enjoyment in learning. This lower affective filter may have encouraged students to experiment with language more freely, leading to improved retelling skills.

### ***Comparison with Traditional Methods***

The moderate improvement in the control group highlights the limitations of traditional text-based approaches in teaching story retelling. While these methods provide

valuable exposure to written language, they lack the visual context and emotional engagement that comics offer. This contrast underscores the need for innovative teaching tools that cater to diverse learning styles and preferences.

### ***Integration into Language Curricula***

The findings suggest several practical implications for integrating comics into language curricula. For instance, educators can use comics as supplementary materials to reinforce traditional lessons or as primary resources in storytelling-focused activities. Furthermore, digital comics and interactive storytelling platforms offer opportunities to expand this approach, making it accessible to a broader audience.

### ***Challenges and Future Directions***

Despite the promising results, this study also revealed certain challenges. For instance, a small number of students reported difficulty interpreting some visual elements or connecting them to the text. This highlights the need for careful selection of comics that are appropriate for the learners' language proficiency and cultural context. Future studies could investigate the impact of different genres or styles of comics on language learning outcomes.

Additionally, the study's relatively short duration may have limited its ability to capture long-term effects. Future research could extend the intervention period and explore how comics influence other language skills, such as writing, critical thinking, or even intercultural competence.

### ***Broader Educational Implications***

The success of comics in this study suggests that visual storytelling tools could be applied across disciplines beyond language learning. For example, comics could be used to teach history, science, or moral education by presenting complex concepts in an engaging and accessible format. The flexibility of comics makes them a versatile tool for fostering creativity and comprehension in a wide range of educational settings.

The integration of English comics into language learning offers a multifaceted approach to improving story retelling skills. By addressing cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions of learning, comics provide a rich and engaging medium that enhances both language proficiency and student motivation. These findings underscore the need for innovative teaching tools that cater to the diverse needs of learners, particularly in culturally nuanced contexts like Islamic universities. Future research and practice should continue to explore the potential of comics and other multimodal resources in transforming education.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has demonstrated the effectiveness of using English comics as a teaching tool to improve story retelling skills among students at an Islamic university. The findings reveal that the experimental group, which engaged with comics, showed significant improvements in their ability to retell stories compared to the control group. The combination of visual and textual elements in comics played a pivotal role in enhancing students' comprehension, engagement, and creativity, leading to a more dynamic and effective language learning experience.

The cognitive benefits of comics, such as aiding narrative understanding and reducing cognitive load, were evident in students' improved performance. Additionally, the engaging and culturally relevant nature of comics contributed to increased student motivation and

participation, reinforcing the idea that learning is more effective when students feel emotionally connected to the material.

This study also highlights the importance of integrating multimodal resources into language curricula. Comics offer a versatile and accessible medium that not only supports language acquisition but also encourages creativity and critical thinking. The positive responses from students suggest that comics can serve as an enjoyable and effective complement to traditional language learning methods, especially in environments where students may face challenges with language proficiency and engagement.

Despite the promising results, further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of using comics in language learning, as well as the potential for comics to enhance other skills such as writing, listening, and speaking. Additionally, future studies could investigate the impact of different comic genres or formats to determine the most effective strategies for diverse learning contexts.

In conclusion, the integration of English comics into language learning represents a promising and innovative approach to enhancing students' story retelling abilities. By combining narrative elements with visual stimuli, comics provide an engaging and effective means of fostering language development, offering valuable insights for educators seeking to enhance the learning experience in both Islamic universities and broader educational contexts.

This study has confirmed the significant potential of English comics as an innovative and effective tool for improving story retelling skills among students at an Islamic university. The research demonstrated that students in the experimental group, who used English comics as part of learning activities, showed remarkable improvements in their ability to retell stories compared to their peers in the control group, who relied on traditional text-based materials. These findings provide compelling evidence that comic, with their blend of visual and textual components, offer a more engaging and accessible medium for enhancing language skills.

One of the key reasons for the success of comics lies in their multimodal nature. The combination of images and text allows students to better understand narrative structure, characters, and plot development. This dual-channel input (visual and verbal) helps reduce cognitive overload, making it easier for students to process and recall the information. For learners, particularly those with intermediate English proficiency, this approach facilitates better comprehension and retention, providing a scaffold that supports their storytelling abilities. Furthermore, the sequential nature of comics, with its clear narrative progression, mirrors the cognitive processes involved in retelling a story, helping students construct coherent and well-organized retellings.

Another noteworthy finding of the study is the increased engagement and creativity observed in the experimental group. Students reported enjoying the comic-based activities, which they found to be more dynamic and entertaining than traditional text-based methods. This increased engagement is consistent with the affective filter hypothesis, which posits that a lower anxiety level and heightened motivation contribute to better language acquisition. By introducing a playful yet educational medium, comics help create a positive learning environment where students feel more confident in expressing themselves. The students' creativity was also enhanced as they were encouraged to not only retell stories but also engage in activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and collaborative story creation, further developing their language skills.

Cultural relevance was another factor that made the use of comics particularly effective in this Islamic university setting. Comics often present universal themes such as friendship, moral dilemmas, and personal growth, which resonate deeply with the students' values and cultural background. This connection to their own experiences and values helped students feel more involved and motivated in the learning process, aligning with the institution's goal of creating culturally sensitive and engaging educational experiences.

The study also revealed that students' perceptions of using comics were overwhelmingly positive. A vast majority of the experimental group reported that comics made the learning process more enjoyable and accessible, allowing them to understand complex language structures and vocabulary more easily. The visual support provided by comics was particularly beneficial for students who struggled with limited vocabulary or found traditional texts difficult to follow. By combining entertainment with education, comics helped bridge the gap between language comprehension and expression.

Despite the promising results, this study also pointed out a few challenges. Some students expressed difficulty interpreting certain visual elements, suggesting that comic selections should be tailored to the students' cultural backgrounds and language proficiency levels. Furthermore, the study was conducted over a relatively short period of time, and the long-term effects of comic-based learning on other language skills, such as writing, speaking, and listening, remain to be explored. Future research could also examine the impact of different types of comics, including digital comics or interactive storytelling platforms, to understand the broader applicability of this approach.

In conclusion, the integration of English comics into language learning, particularly in the context of Islamic universities, provides a powerful, multimodal tool that fosters both cognitive and emotional development. By supporting story retelling, enhancing student creativity, and improving language proficiency, comics offer a dynamic alternative to traditional teaching methods. Educators are encouraged to explore this innovative approach, not only to enhance language learning but also to create a more engaging, culturally relevant, and enjoyable learning experience. The positive outcomes from this study suggest that English comics could play a pivotal role in transforming language education, making it more inclusive, interactive, and aligned with the diverse needs of today's students.

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