

THE ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE READING EDUCATIONAL COMICS BASED ON LOCAL WISDOM "THE STORY OF CANDI PARI"

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Current Issues in Indonesian EFL Reading:

- Indonesian students struggle with reading comprehension, especially narrative texts
- Limited vocabulary knowledge affects comprehension
- Lack of engaging, culturally relevant reading materials
- Need for innovative teaching approaches

The Gap:

- Traditional textbook-based instruction → Students show:
- Low engagement with reading materials
- Limited understanding of narrative structure
- Lack of enthusiasm for reading tasks

RESEARCH GAP

Previous Research	This Research
Theoretical Gap	
Focus on quantitative outcomes of comic effectiveness	Focus on students' qualitative perspectives across three dimensions
Limited exploration of student experiences	In-depth exploration of pedagogical, motivational, and cultural perspectives
Population Gap	
Research on digital comics in elementary schools (Rande & Amaliyah, 2024; Kadek Sintya Pratiwi et al., 2025)	Focus on secondary school (Grade 7) students
General comic studies without cultural integration	Comics integrated with local wisdom (Candi Pari folklore)
Empirical Gap	
Studies in various international contexts (Tekin & İlhan, 2025 - Turkey)	Indonesian EFL context at SMP Dharma Wanita 7 Tanggulangin, East Java
Focus on language skill outcomes	Focus on learner perspectives and experiences

LITERATURE REVIEW - Part 1

Reading Challenges in Indonesian EFL Context:

Current Problems:

- Students struggle with reading comprehension, especially narratives (Ramadhianti & Somba, 2023)
- Limited vocabulary directly affects comprehension (Lydia Kusumahwati et al., 2022)
- Lack of engaging, culturally relevant materials (Dahlina & Fadilah, 2022)
- Need for visual literacy integration in reading instruction (Riance et al., 2024)

Gaps in Current Approaches:

- Limited use of comics despite visual literacy importance
- Lack of local culture integration with visual media
- Focus on outcomes rather than student experiences

LITERATURE REVIEW - Part 2

Cultural Integration in EFL:

Local Wisdom in Language Learning:

- Local culture integration makes learning more meaningful (Ni Nyoman Tantri & Made Hery Santosa, 2024)
- Culturally relevant materials boost intrinsic motivation (Erman Syarif et al., 2024)
- Cultural content strengthens identity while developing language skills (Wulandari et al., 2024)

About Candi Pari:

- 14th-century historical site (1371 CE) in Sidoarjo, East Java
- Story of Jaka Pandelegan & Nyai Roro Walang Angin
- Contains values: integrity, cooperation, wisdom
- Represents local cultural heritage

Research Gap: Despite evidence of comics' effectiveness and cultural integration benefits, **no study has explored secondary students' perspectives** on reading comics based on local wisdom in Indonesian EFL context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Three Main Theories:

1. Multimodal Literacy Theory (Unsworth et al., 2022; Lim & Tan-Chia, 2022)

- Meaning-making through multiple semiotic systems (linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural)
- Comics as distinct multimodal texts combining written language, sequential images, layout design
- Students must develop abilities to comprehend and integrate various communication modes
- Parallel processing of text and images stimulates neural pathways

2. Dual Coding Theory (Evi Khoirun Nisa et al., 2022; Cohn, 2020)

- Simultaneous processing of verbal and visual information
- Visual and textual components processed together → deeper comprehension
- Reduces cognitive load while improving meaning construction
- Enhanced retention through dual memory channels

3. Constructivist Learning Theory (Tohari & Rahman, 2024; Szabó & Csépes, 2022)

- Learners actively construct knowledge through experience and social interactions
- Culturally relevant teaching: learning more meaningful when materials reflect students' backgrounds
- Prior cultural knowledge serves as cognitive scaffolding for new language material
- Comic creation = active knowledge construction (passive reading → creative expression)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **RQ 1:** How does the use of "The Story of Candi Pari" comic contribute to enhancing seventh-grade students' reading skills from their perspectives?
- **RQ 2:** What are seventh-grade students' perspectives on using "The Story of Candi Pari" comic in English language learning?

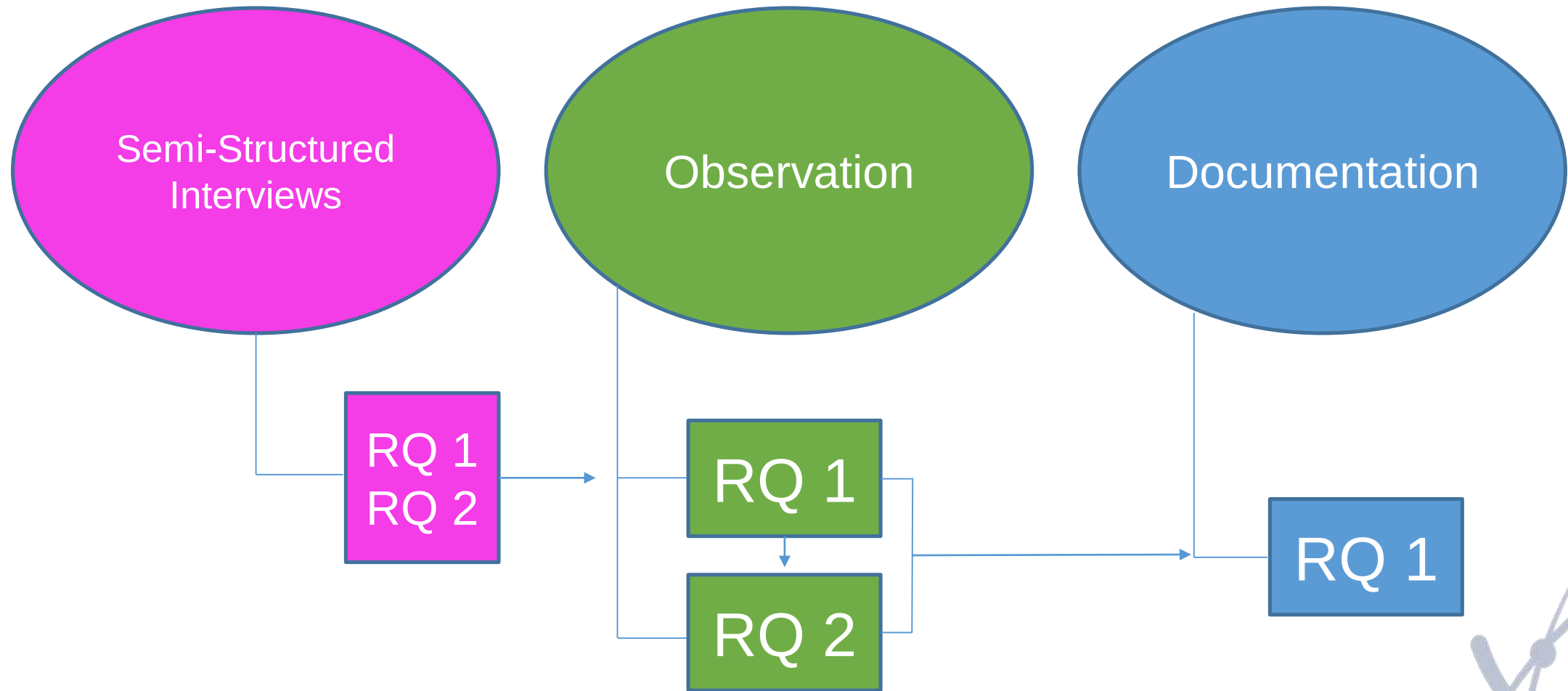
EXPECTED OUTCOMES (NOVELTY)

This study offers a unique contribution by exploring **student perspectives** rather than merely quantitative outcomes, employing a **three-dimensional framework** (pedagogical, motivational, and cultural) to understand how comics support reading development in Indonesian EFL secondary context. Unlike previous research focusing on test scores, this phenomenological approach reveals **how students experience** comic-based learning, particularly when integrated with **local wisdom** (Candi Pari folklore), demonstrating that English can serve as a tool for **cultural expression** rather than solely accessing Western content. The findings provide **authentic student's perspectives** to guide material development, offer **evidence-based recommendations** for culturally responsive pedagogy, and create a **replicable model** for integrating local heritage in language education, while extending multimodal literacy, dual coding, and constructivist theories to the Indonesian context—ultimately bridging the gap between abstract educational theories and lived learner experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

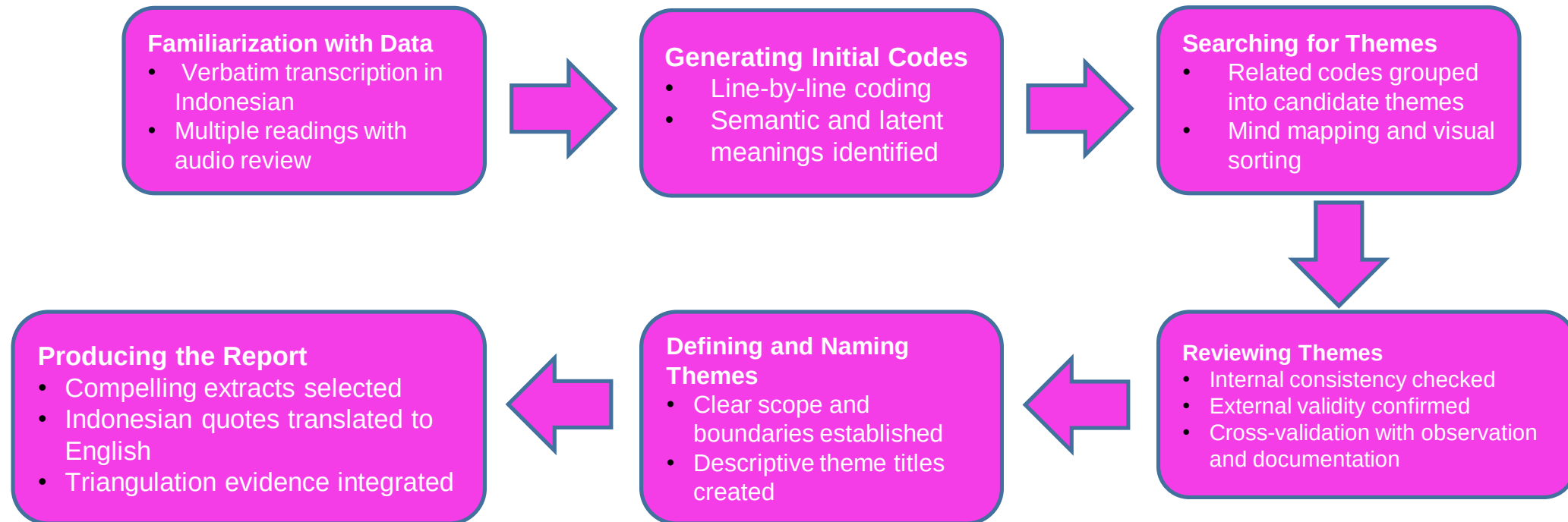
Qualitative Research	Aspect	My Plan
	Research Design	Descriptive Qualitative Study
	Research Setting	• Location: SMP Dharma Wanita 7 Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo, East Java • Duration: March 4-9, 2024 (7 days)
	Participants	• 10 seventh-grade students (ages 12-13) • 6 female, 4 male students • Selected through purposive sampling • Diverse socioeconomic backgrounds

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES



DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023), 6-Step Process:



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1 — Overview of All 8 Themes (RQ1 & RQ2)

#	Theme	Sub-themes (Key Points)	Frequency	Percentage
RQ1	Reading Skills Enhancement			
T1	Visual-Textual Integration Facilitates Comprehension	Images clarify narrative meaning; Illustrations support plot understanding; Visual context reduces translation dependency	10/10	100%
T2	Contextualized Vocabulary Learning	Pictures aid word meaning inference; Memorable vocabulary through visual association; Reduced reliance on dictionaries	9/10	90%
T3	Comic Creation Promotes Deeper Engagement	Re-reading for creation accuracy; Active meaning-making through production; Critical analysis of narrative elements	10/10	100%
T4	Enhanced Understanding of Narrative Structure	Clear visualization of story stages; Explicit identification of plot elements; Understanding of orientation–complication–resolution	8/10	80%
RQ2	Student Perspectives on Comic Use			
T5	Increased Reading Motivation and Enjoyment	Comics more enjoyable than textbooks; Sustained reading interest; Willingness to read more	10/10	100%
T6	Preference for Visual Learning Format	Visual format suits learning styles; Reduces reading anxiety; Makes English less intimidating	9/10	90%
T7	Cultural Relevance Enhances Meaningfulness	Connection to familiar local context; Easier to relate to story content; Makes English learning more relevant	10/10	100%
T8	Pride in Local Identity and Heritage	Increased cultural awareness; Appreciation for regional history; Pride in learning about local heritage	8/10	80%

RESULTS

RQ1 — How the Comic Contributes to Reading Skills

- **Theme 1: Visual-Textual Integration Facilitates Comprehension (100%)** All 10 students reported that the combination of images and text significantly helped them understand the story without needing constant translation. The pictures provided immediate visual context that clarified meaning, reducing dependency on dictionaries and teacher explanation.
- **Theme 2: Contextualized Vocabulary Learning (90%)** Nine students found that visual cues helped them infer and remember new English vocabulary more effectively than traditional text-only approaches. For example, seeing a panel showing people building a temple made the word "construction" immediately understandable. However, abstract words like "wisdom" and "cooperation" still required additional explanation from the teacher.
- **Theme 3: Comic Creation Promotes Deeper Engagement (100%)** All students agreed that creating their own comic versions required them to re-read the text carefully and engage critically with the narrative. This process transformed reading from a passive activity into active knowledge construction, pushing students to analyze character details, dialogue, and story sequences at a deeper level.
- **Theme 4: Enhanced Understanding of Narrative Structure (80%)** Eight students reported that the panel-based format made narrative structure — orientation, complication, and resolution — far more visible and understandable than learning from theory or traditional prose. The visual division of panels helped students identify story stages that they could later apply to other texts.

RESULTS

RQ2 — Student Perspectives on Using the Comic

- **Theme 5: Increased Reading Motivation and Enjoyment (100%)** Every student found reading the comic significantly more enjoyable than textbooks. This enjoyment was not superficial — it translated into sustained attention, voluntary re-reading, and a genuine desire to continue engaging with English reading materials.
- **Theme 6: Preference for Visual Learning Format (90%)** Nine students preferred visual formats because they reduced the anxiety typically associated with English reading. Students described pictures as "handholds" — a psychological safety net that gave them confidence to attempt reading even when they encountered unfamiliar words.
- **Theme 7: Cultural Relevance Enhances Meaningfulness (100%)** All students felt that learning English through a local story from their own region made the experience far more meaningful. Notably, several students experienced an important ideological shift — they began to see English not as a foreign language for accessing foreign cultures, but as a tool they could use to express and share their own local identity.
- **Theme 8: Pride in Local Identity and Heritage (80%)** Eight students reported increased appreciation for the history and cultural heritage of their region after engaging with the Candi Pari story. The activity also reinforced moral values such as respect, cooperation, and wisdom — giving the comic a dual function as both a language learning resource and a character education tool.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 2 — Detailed Theme Analysis: RQ1 (Reading Skills)

Theme	Description	Student Quote	Theoretical Framework
T1: Visual-Textual Integration (100%)	All 10 students reported that images + text significantly aided comprehension. Students spent less time on dictionaries and showed higher engagement during comic reading vs. textbook lessons.	"When I read the comic, I didn't need to translate every word because the pictures already explained what was happening." — S1	Dual coding theory (Nisa et al.); Multimodal literacy (Unsworth et al.); Social semiotics (Lim & Tan-Chia)
T2: Contextualized Vocabulary Learning (90%)	9/10 students learned new vocabulary more effectively through visual cues. Abstract words (e.g., "wisdom," "cooperation") still required explicit teacher explanation.	"The word 'construction' — the panel showed people building the temple, so I immediately knew its meaning without a dictionary." — S2	Contextualized vocabulary retention (Nofrian & Sujarwati); Zone of proximal development (Vygotsky via Tohari & Rahman)
T3: Comic Creation Promotes Deeper Engagement (100%)	All 10 students found that creating their own comic required careful re-reading and critical analysis. Student-created comics showed accurate plot, character development, and coherent narrative flow.	"When I had to create my own comic, I had to re-read more carefully — character details, dialogues, event sequences, and moral messages. This made me understand the story much more deeply." — S3	Reader response theory (Ginting); Project-based learning (Anjani et al.)
T4: Enhanced Understanding of Narrative Structure (80%)	8/10 students reported the comic format helped them understand orientation–complication–resolution structure more clearly than from traditional texts.	"The first panels show the orientation, middle panels show the complication, and the final panels show the resolution. This made me understand narrative text structure better than learning from theory alone." — S4	Visual narrative comprehension (Cohn); Mental schema internalization (Vygotsky)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 3 — Detailed Theme Analysis: RQ2 (Student Perspectives)

Theme	Description	Student Quote	Theoretical Framework
T5: Increased Reading Motivation and Enjoyment (100%)	All 10 students said comics were significantly more enjoyable than textbooks. Observation confirmed higher engagement, fewer off-task behaviors, and sustained attention throughout activities.	"Reading this comic was really fun! I was even curious to know the story continuation. I even read it twice because it was exciting." — S5	Flow theory (Thissen et al.); Reading anxiety reduction (Al Faruq)
T6: Preference for Visual Learning Format (90%)	9/10 students preferred visual formats as they suited their learning styles and reduced anxiety. One student noted no problems with regular text but admitted comics were more appealing.	"Reading English text often causes anxiety because I'm afraid of not understanding. But with comics, the anxiety is reduced because there are pictures that I can hold onto if I'm stuck." — S7	Differentiated instruction; Graphic novels for multilingual learners (Gritter et al.)
T7: Cultural Relevance Enhances Meaningfulness (100%)	All 10 students felt that using a local story made English learning more meaningful. A key finding: students reframed English from a "foreign language" to a tool for expressing their own local identity.	"When we can use English to tell our own culture, it feels like English also belongs to us. So, it becomes more relevant to our lives." — S8	Culturally relevant teaching (Santosa); Constructivism — cultural cognitive scaffolding
T8: Pride in Local Identity and Heritage (80%)	8/10 students expressed pride in local cultural heritage. Students already familiar with Candi Pari from history class reported that creating comics in English gave a "new perspective" and deepened appreciation. Values identified: respect, cooperation, wisdom.	"Before, I didn't really care about local history. But after reading and creating comics about Candi Pari, I became more appreciative of cultural heritage in our region." — S1	Social identity theory (Khadka); Character education (Ni'mah & Utsman)

DISCUSSION

TABLE 4 — Discussion: Theoretical Framework Cross-Reference

Theme	Theoretical Framework	Supporting Literature	Key Implication
T1 — Visual-Textual Integration	Dual coding theory; Multimodal literacy; Social semiotics	Unsworth et al.; Lim & Tan-Chia; Rande et al.	Students use both linguistic and visual systems simultaneously — multiple entry points lower comprehension barriers
T2 — Vocabulary Learning	Contextualized vocabulary retention; Zone of proximal development	Nofrian & Sujarwati; Tohari & Rahman; Insam & Evenddy	Images act as semiotic mediators; abstract vocabulary still needs explicit scaffolding
T3 — Comic Creation	Reader response theory; Project-based learning	Ginting; Anjani et al.; Puriasih & Trisna	Creation demands aesthetic (deep) reading — forces true comprehension and metacognitive awareness
T4 — Narrative Structure	Visual narrative comprehension; Schema theory	Cohn; Tohari & Rahman (Vygotsky)	Panel sequences externalize implicit story stages — students internalize as portable mental schemas
T5 — Motivation & Enjoyment	Flow theory; Affective filter hypothesis	Thissen et al.; Al Faruq	Optimal challenge balance (not too easy, not too hard) enables sustained flow states and intrinsic motivation
T6 — Visual Format Preference	Differentiated instruction; Multimodal scaffolding	Gritter et al.; Smyth	Comics benefit ALL learners — not just struggling readers — through reduced cognitive overwhelm and emotional safety
T7 — Cultural Relevance	Culturally relevant teaching; Constructivism	Santosa; Sedik; Kusmajid et al.	Familiar cultural narratives as cognitive scaffolding; triggers ideological shift — English as tool for local expression
T8 — Local Identity Pride	Social identity theory; Character education	Khadka; Ni'mah & Utsman; Aryani et al.	Dual function: language learning + moral/character development — highly valued in Indonesian education (Profil Pelajar Pancasila)

DISCUSSION

Discussion Highlights

The findings align strongly with three foundational theories. Dual coding theory explains why visual-textual integration aided comprehension — students simultaneously processed both linguistic and visual information, creating stronger mental representations. Constructivist learning theory supports the vocabulary and narrative structure findings — students built new knowledge by connecting English language content to their existing cultural and experiential background. Culturally relevant teaching underpins the cultural themes — when learning materials reflect students' own identity and history, engagement and meaningfulness increase substantially.

A particularly significant finding is the language ideology shift observed in Theme 7. Students began to see English as a medium for expressing their own stories, not just a skill for accessing foreign content. This reframing has important long-term implications for learner motivation and identity in EFL contexts.

Conclusion

Overall, the results demonstrate that educational comics rooted in local narratives are effective as both instructional and reading resources. They address multiple dimensions of reading development simultaneously — cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and sociocultural — making them a comprehensive and culturally meaningful approach to EFL reading instruction in Indonesian secondary schools.

