CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Research

Language is widely recognized as one of the most fundamental tools of communication in human life. Through language, humans are able to convey thoughts, feelings, and ideas to others (Ilyosovna, 2024). In a global context, language proficiency, particularly in international languages like English, has become an essential skill supporting cross-cultural interactions, international trade, and the exchange of information. The advancement of technology and media has further augmented the importance of effective communication in English (Merta et al., 2023), making it vital not just for personal and social growth but also for professional success.

English proficiency unlocks access to global resources, including scientific journals, international training, and diverse employment opportunities in the global market (Alfarisy, 2021; Ilyosovna, 2024). mentain the educational sector, English proficiency, particularly in speaking, empowers students to actively engage in learning, enhance their confidence, and prepare them to confront the challenges of globalization (Anita et al., 2023). Therefore, the teaching of English in schools is more than meeting the curriculum standards. It is also about equipping students with practical skills that are applicable to the real world.

Among the four primary English skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking, speaking is considered the most important yet also the most difficult skill to master, especially for junior high school students. This is because speaking

requires students to use language in real-time interactions, which demands not only proper pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar but also confidence and fluency (Leonita et al., 2023; Pirdayanti et al., 2022). Unlike reading or writing, where students have time to process language input or output, speaking involves immediate responses, often under social pressure. Several factors make speaking particularly challenging for junior high school students: first, the lack of confidence and anxiety due to fear of making mistakes, which often leads to silence during speaking activities (Souisa, 2020; Utami, 2023); second, limited vocabulary and grammatical mastery, which hinder students' ability to construct sentences and express ideas; third, minimal exposure and practice in oral communication, as most classroom time is devoted to written activities; fourth, shyness and cultural norms that discourage active participation; and finally, the imbalance in assessment systems that prioritize reading and writing over speaking, resulting in students paying less attention to improving their speaking skills.

Based on preliminary observations and interviews at SMP Bali Dharma School revealed that seventh-grade students face significant challenges in speaking English. Although they perform relatively well on written assessments, their speaking skills remain underdeveloped, revealing a pedagogical gap between curriculum expectations and actual classroom outcomes. Based on the most recent speaking test, the average student score was 64.8, which is below the school's Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) of 75. This underachievement reflects a broader national trend where speaking remains the weakest English skill among Indonesian students (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The English teacher stated that students often lack confidence, feel shy, and are afraid of making mistakes when

speaking (Utami, 2023). The predominant teacher-centered approach further limits students' opportunities to engage in meaningful speaking practice. Although some role-playing activities are conducted, they are not implemented frequently enough to significantly improve students' speaking skills (Kristianti & Artini, 2023). Furthermore, learning materials often fail to connect with students' interests, making the lessons less engaging and motivating (Dewi et al., 2020).

Another major issue is the imbalance in assessments, where speaking is given far less emphasis compared to written exams. This causes students to focus on written skills while neglecting verbal communication. As a result, they lack both the practice and confidence needed to communicate effectively in English. When the researcher asked students about their feelings toward learning English, most admitted they did not enjoy it, particularly speaking activities. The reasons they gave included fear of making mistakes and being laughed at by their peers, nervousness about speaking in front of others, difficulty forming sentences due to limited vocabulary, and the response that speaking English was difficult and not relevant to their everyday lives.

After conducting classroom observations and interviews with the English teacher, the researcher identified several specific issues affecting students' speaking skills: students were not confident in speaking English, there were limited interactive speaking activities, students were rarely encouraged to express their ideas verbally, the teaching process felt monotonous, and speaking was not a major focus of assessment. In fact, students were primarily evaluated based on their written test results, with little to no emphasis on speaking or other oral performance components. These problems significantly hindered students' ability to express

ideas clearly and participate actively in discussions. From these findings, the researcher concluded that students need a new and more engaging learning method that offers greater opportunities for speaking practice.

To address this issue, the researcher collaborated with the English teacher and proposed the implementation of Digital Storytelling (DST). DST is a learning method that integrates storytelling with multimedia tools, creating a more interactive and meaningful learning experience (Robin, 2008). DST has been shown to improve students' speaking abilities by enhancing fluency through regular practice and active participation, improving pronunciation by allowing students to listen to and assess their own recordings, and promoting better vocabulary and grammar usage by encouraging students to carefully plan and construct their stories in context (Rahmawati et al., 2023; Sulistianingsih & Mujiyanto, 2023). Furthermore, DST supports the development of creativity, critical thinking, and technological skills, which are essential in the 21st century (Ohler, 2008). Previous studies have found that DST helps increase student engagement, provides a platform for self-expression, and reduces anxiety related to public speaking (Amaliah et al., 2022; Jannah & Trilestari, 2020; Yusuf & Anwar, 2018).

This research focuses on improving the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Bali Dharma School and their responses toward the use of Digital Storytelling (DST). Previous studies from Amaliah et al., (2022), Elyani et al., (2022), Hidayat et al., (2024), James et al., (2019), Syafryadin et al., (2019), Yusuf & Anwar (2018), Jannah & Trilestari (2020), Noviya (2019) have shown that DST can improve students' speaking abilities. However in terms of methodology, while DST has been explored in various forms such as full-motion videos, student vlogs,

and animated clips very few have specifically focused on the narrated photo story format, despite its clear pedagogical advantages. For instance, Noviya (2019) implemented DST through full video production, while Yusuf & Anwar (2018) assigned students to create personal experience videos using mobile phone recordings. Similarly, Jannah & Trilestari (2020) used animated storytelling clips, and Elyani et al., (2022) applied picture-cued storytelling combined with video voice-over. These formats, while effective, often require higher levels of digital literacy, technical equipment, and time investment, which may not be suitable for younger learners or schools with limited technological infrastructure.

The narrated photo story is a simpler yet powerful DST model that combines still images, recorded narration, and minimal editing has been rarely applied in previous research. This underutilization represents a methodological gap, particularly in the context of junior high school classrooms. The present study fills this gap by employing narrated photo stories using Canva, a user-friendly and accessible platform. This format aligns with the cognitive and technical readiness of seventh-grade students, providing an age-appropriate, low-barrier entry point into multimedia storytelling. Moreover, it allows learners to focus more on language production, pronunciation, and expression without being overwhelmed by complex video-editing demands.

1.2   Identification of Problem

English is an essential subject in the Indonesian school curriculum, as it plays a key role in helping students succeed academically and prepare for global communication and career opportunities. Among the four language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking, speaking is one of the most important, yet also the most difficult to master. This is especially true for junior high school students, who often struggle to express their thoughts fluently and confidently in real-time communication.

At SMP Bali Dharma School, the average speaking score of seventh-grade students was 64.8, below the minimum passing standard (KKM) of 75. Interviews with the English teacher revealed that students often showed low confidence, anxiety, and hesitation to speak. Observations confirmed that teaching was primarily teacher-centered, with minimal use of interactive activities such as role-playing. Furthermore, speaking receives limited attention in both instruction and assessment, leading students to focus more on reading and writing.

Ideally, English learning should help students become active and confident speakers. The curriculum encourages student-centered methods and communicative activities that are relevant to students' lives. However, there is a clear gap between these expectations and the reality in the classroom. Students often feel nervous, afraid of making mistakes, and find speaking English irrelevant to their daily experiences. These factors limit their willingness to participate in speaking activities and hinder their language development. As a result, students continue to struggle with pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and confidence, which negatively impacts their communication skills.

Thus, there is a pressing need for a learning method that not only improves speaking performance but also motivates students to participate actively in oral communication. Digital Storytelling is proposed as a solution due to its potential to address these barriers through creative, student-centered, and multimedia learning experiences.

1.3   Limitation of The Research

To address the problem more effectively and ensure the research remains focused and manageable, the researcher limits this study to only two main areas: improving students' speaking skills and analyzing their responses to the Digital Storytelling (DST) method and exploring their responses to the use of DST as a learning method. Although several issues were identified such as lack of student confidence, teacher-centered instruction, limited speaking practice, and the imbalance in assessment, this research does not attempt to address all these dimensions comprehensively. Instead, the focus is directed specifically at how DST method can improve students' speaking skill in a small classroom context.

The choice to limit the study in this way is based on both practical and theoretical considerations. From a practical standpoint, the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method is most effective when addressing specific, observable problems in a targeted classroom setting. From a theoretical perspective, focusing on speaking aligns with previous studies that have shown DST to be especially can improve students' speaking skills. Other related variables, such as its impact on listening, reading, or teacher training are recognized as important but are beyond

the scope of this study. Future research is encouraged to explore those areas in more detail.

1.4   Research Questions

Based on the background above, the researcher formulated the research questions as follows:

1. Can Digital Storytelling methods improve students' speaking skill at the seventh grade students of SMP Bali Dharma School?

2. What are students' responses on the use of Digital Storytelling as a method of learning?

1.5   Research Objectives

This research aims to:

1. To investigate whether the Digital Storytelling method improves the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Bali Dharma School.

2. To examine the students' responses toward the use of Digital Storytelling as a learning method in improving their speaking skills.

1.6   Significance of The Research

1.6.1   Theoretical Significance

This research aims to contribute to the understanding of can Digital Storytelling (DST) supports the improvement of speaking skills among junior high school students in Indonesia. By exploring the impact of DST within a small-scale classroom setting, particularly in the context of SMP Bali Dharma School, this research aims to fill existing gaps in the literature regarding the integration of the learning method. The findings are expected to advance theoretical frameworks concerning media-enhanced language learning, specifically focusing on verbal communication, active participation, and motivation by providing evidence on how DST can improve students' speaking skill.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

1.6.2.1 Teacher

This research provides English teachers with valuable insights into how implementing the Digital Storytelling (DST) method can improve students' speaking skills. It guides teachers on how to design and facilitate DST based classroom activities that encourage active speaking practice, build confidence, and foster student engagement also offer practical solutions for integrating DST seamlessly into their teaching practices.

1.6.2.2 Students

The study demonstrates that the use of DST as a teaching method can significantly improve students' speaking abilities by providing more opportunities for active verbal expression in a supportive environment. Students benefit from

increased motivation and confidence when creating and presenting digital stories, which makes speaking practice more meaningful and less intimidating. As a result, students develop greater fluency, pronunciation, and overall speaking competence, contributing to better communication skills.

1.6.2.3 Other Researcher

This study offers a valuable reference for researchers interested in exploring the use of Digital Storytelling in language learning. By focusing on small-scale classroom settings and capturing students' responses, the research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on technology-enhanced teaching methods. It provides a model for investigating how innovative methods like Digital Storytelling can address specific challenges in language acquisition, particularly in developing speaking skills. The findings can inspire further studies in various educational contexts, supporting advancements in interactive and technology-based language teaching methodologies.