

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Chapter I introduces the research background, describing the importance of reading comprehension in English language learning for young learners. It includes the research problem, objectives, and research questions, as well as the significance and scope of the study. Through this introduction, the foundation is established for examining the use of digital storytelling as a strategy to support students' reading comprehension.

### 1.1 Research Background

Reading comprehension is one of the essential skills in literacy, which plays a central role in supporting students' academic achievement and lifelong learning (Frans et al., 2023; Sulfasyah et al., 2023). It enables students to process and understand written information, forming the basis for learning across various school subjects such as mathematics, science, and social studies. In the Indonesian context, the Merdeka Curriculum explicitly integrates four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing into the learning outcomes for English at the elementary level, as stated in Permendikbudristek No. 12 of 2024 and BSKAP Decree No. 032 of 2024. With this framework, reading comprehension becomes a vital foundation for developing higher-order-thinking skills (HOTS), such as analysis, evaluation, and problem solving, which are essential for 21st-century education (Anderson et al., 1977; Anggraeni, 2020). Therefore, strengthening students' reading comprehension is central to achieving the curriculum's expected learning outcomes.

Despite its importance, previous studies and assessment reported that Indonesian students continue to face serious challenges in reading comprehension. Sulfasyah et al. (2023) emphasize that elementary students often fail to grasp main ideas and supporting details, which block their ability to process texts in effective way. Frans et al. (2023) further pointed up that the lack of engaging reading materials and ineffective teaching strategies has a significant contribution to these difficulties. Similarly, Fadhilla et al. (2024) found that students in rural areas in Indonesia struggle with complex vocabulary and comprehension tasks. These findings are consistent with international evidence. In the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, Indonesia ranked 59th out of 81 countries in reading literacy with score of 359, underscoring that reading comprehension among Indonesian students considered low (Solihin et al., 2024).

Furthermore, data from the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) shows that the literacy of most young students in Bali still needs improvement. According to official 2022 data from *Satu Data Provinsi Bali*, the average reading literacy competency for elementary school students across all regencies was around 56.3%. More specifically, Buleleng Regency reported a score of 52,93% which is below the provincial average (Pemerintah Provinsi Bali, 2022), indicating that nearly half of the elementary school student population in Buleleng still struggles to achieve optimal standards.

In responses to the concerning condition of literacy achievement, there is a need to implement appropriate instructional strategies that can support students' reading comprehension while also considering their learning experiences. Efforts to enhance students' reading comprehension should not rely solely on curriculum

adjustments, but must emphasize the selection of pedagogical approaches that make students success in constructing meaning from texts (Li et al., 2024). Effective instruction in reading comprehension requires strategies that promote cognitive engagement, provide contextual support, and facilitate meaningful interaction with reading materials (Dwiningtiyas et al., 2020; Li et al., 2024; Wibowo et al., 2020).

In the digital era, integrating technology into classroom practices has been suggested as a way to support reading comprehension and align instruction with students' learning characteristics (Samat & Aziz, 2020; Sanchez et al., 2020). Current education highlights the importance of combining technological media with teaching strategies (Koopman, 2022). Most students today are accustomed to processing information through multimedia formats like videos (Alzubi, 2023; Brenner, 2013). Relying solely on conventional printed materials often struggles to capture their attention during reading sessions (Alzubi, 2023). Digital media provides multimodal features such as dynamic visual and audio input to traditional reading activities. These act as contextual clues for unfamiliar vocabulary especially for young learners (Alzubi, 2023; Avezova, 2022; La Torre & Désiron, 2024). Integrating teaching strategies with technological media offers a more supportive environment for language acquisition. It provides a relevant approach to bridging the gap between students' background knowledge and the target reading text (Koopman, 2022). Therefore, it is recommended to use strategies that integrate technology into reading instruction.

Other than teaching strategy, students' perceptions are equally essential in evaluating the effectiveness of instructional approaches. Perception refers to the way individuals interpret and make sense of their environment, which directly

influences their actions, motivation, and engagement (Cahyani et al., 2025; Mahayani et al., 2025; Qiong, 2017). In the educational context, students' perceptions reflect how they experience classroom practices, teacher interactions, and instructional methods, ultimately shaping their learning behaviors and outcomes (Suganya & Sheshasaayee, 2023). When students perceive a learning strategy as enjoyable, relevant, and supportive, they are more likely to be active and involved in activities that will influence their reading comprehension (Gumartifa, 2021; Suwanarora, 2021). That is why, positive perceptions of teaching strategies are linked to higher motivation, active participation, and improved academic achievement (Edgerton & McKechnie, 2023; Lestari et al., 2017; Sason et al., 2023). For example, EFL students value respect and supportive relationships with teachers that give them effective teaching (Lodo, 2021). Therefore, examining both the effectiveness of an instructional strategy in improving reading comprehension and students' perception toward its implementation becomes essential in identifying practices that are effective and meaningful for students.

Storytelling has long been recognized as an instructional strategy that can support the improvement of reading comprehension. Storytelling integrates narrative techniques to engage students in emotional and cognitive aspect. Research by Elleman and Oslund (2019) showed that storytelling supports key aspects of comprehension such as background knowledge, inference-making, and vocabulary development. Grounded in Schema Theory (Anderson et al., 1977), storytelling enables students to connect new information with their prior knowledge that can strengthening comprehension and retention. Marzuki et al. (2018) reported that combining cognitive reading strategies with storytelling has a significant effect on

students' comprehension among students in coastal areas of Indonesia. Storytelling has also been found to provide contextualized and meaningful learning experiences that make lessons more engaging (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021; Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018). In addition, storytelling fosters empathy and socio-emotional development as described in research by Salsabila et al. (2021), stated that children exposed to storytelling showed improved empathetic behaviors such as respecting friends, being patient, helping others, and reconciling conflicts.

With the advancement of technology, storytelling has evolved into digital storytelling henceforth, DST, a pedagogical strategy that integrates narrative with digital technologies that supports literacy learning. In this strategy, digital stories use as instructional media that bring narratives to life through visuals, audio, text, and animation (Kim & Li, 2021; Oskoz & Elola, 2016). Rather than treating digital stories as the final product, DST employs them as tools to deliver narrative-based instruction in more interactive and meaningful ways. This strategy are expected to increase motivation, participation, and deeper comprehension, as it contextualizes texts through multimodal input and real-life connections (Brenner, 2013; Kim & Li, 2021; Samy et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies indicate that DST can be effective in supporting vocabulary acquisition, inference-making, and reading comprehension, outperforming traditional strategies in EFL contexts (Adigüzel & Kumkale, 2018; Radaideh et al., 2020). Its strength lies not only in the multimedia features of digital stories but in the pedagogical integration of these media into a narrative-driven teaching strategy that aligns with the needs of 21st-century students (Alkhilili, 2018; Maureen et al., 2020; Rahmasari, 2023).

DST has great potential for improving reading comprehension. The implementation of this strategy directly targets reading comprehension through the integration of on-screen text or subtitles (Fatmawati et al., 2024; Kim & Li, 2021). Students read narrative text displayed in a video while listening to the narration. Accompanying audio and visual animations serve as learning aids. These multimodal elements provide contextual clues for unfamiliar words (Kim & Li, 2021; Yazıcı-Demirci & Yangın-Ersanlı, 2026). Young learners often struggle to understand unfamiliar vocabulary in traditional print formats (Alzubi, 2023; Nikmah & Anwar, 2021), with visuals such as images and animations in digital stories help students visualize events and construct meaning from written sentences. This combination of text, sound, and moving images effectively reduces the cognitive load required to process reading material (Oskoz & Elola, 2016; Sanchez et al., 2020; Shaojie et al., 2022).

Several studies have investigated the use of DST on various educational levels. In Indonesia, some research has been conducted at the secondary and tertiary levels. For instance, Yuniarti and Yulian (2022) conducted a quasi-experimental study involving pre-service early childhood teacher students and found that DST has a positive influence on speaking performance while also exploring students' perceptions of its multimodal features. Similarly, Setiawan et al. (2023) investigated pre-service elementary teachers in Cirebon through a quasi-experimental design and reported positive effects of DST on oral communication skills, digital literacy, and learning motivation. At the senior high school, Sudarmaji et al. (2020) examined tenth-grade students in Tangerang and focused on visual memory and writing skills, while Fatmawati et al. (2024) compared DST and spoken storytelling

in improving reading comprehension among high school students and also considered students' perceptions. At the junior high school, Sembiring and Simajuntak (2023) reported vocabulary improvement among students at seventh grade, and Adara and Haqiyyah (2020) explored the effect of DST on university students' motivation in an Indonesian EFL context. At the local level, research conducted at SD Negeri 3 Banjar Jawa, Buleleng, Bali has already assessed teachers' readiness and parents' perceptions toward DST as an innovative approach to support English language learning (Cahyani et al., 2025; Mahayani et al., 2025).

Outside Indonesia, several studies have examined DST at the primary and secondary schools. Radaideh et al. (2020) investigated fifth-grade students in Jordan and found that DST can be effective on reading comprehension. Sarigoz and Yildirim (2024) studied second-grade primary students in Turkey and reported moderate improvement in reading comprehension through a quasi-experimental design. Akdoğan (2023), working with students at an English preparatory school in Turkey, found significant development in vocabulary and reading skills, while Tamimi (2024) examined secondary school students and highlighted improvements in academic achievement and motivation. However, Yazıcı-Demirci and Yangın-Ersanlı (2026), in a study of fifth-grade students in Turkey, found that although DST enhanced vocabulary and attitudes, it did not have a significant effect on reading comprehension with the duration of the study.

Despite a lot of research on DST, there are still gaps. In Indonesia, most studies have been conducted at the secondary and tertiary levels, such as those involving pre-service teachers (Setiawan et al., 2023; Yuniarti & Yulian, 2022), senior high school students (Fatmawati et al., 2024; Sudarmaji et al., 2020), junior

high school students (Sembiring & Simajuntak, 2023), and university students (Adara & Haqiyyah, 2020; Hamdy, 2017). Research specifically focusing on elementary school students remains limited, particularly in Bali, Indonesia. Although international studies have examined the effect of DST on primary students' reading comprehension (Radaideh et al., 2020; Sarigoz & Yildirim, 2024; Yazıcı-Demirci & Yangın-Ersanlı, 2026), similar study with elementary EFL classrooms in Bali is still scarce. Furthermore, previous studies in Indonesia have emphasized the effect of DST on speaking skills, vocabulary development, writing ability, or motivation but did not specific on reading comprehension at the primary level (Adara & Haqiyyah, 2020; Sembiring & Simajuntak, 2023; Sudarmaji et al., 2020; Yuniarti & Yulian, 2022). Although some studies have explored students' perception toward DST (Fatmawati et al., 2024; Yazıcı-Demirci & Yangın-Ersanlı, 2026; Yuniarti & Yulian, 2022), limited research that examined both reading comprehension improvement and students' perception with the same elementary EFL setting, especially in Bali. Therefore, further investigation is needed to address these contextual.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of DST in sixth-grade students' reading comprehension in an elementary EFL classroom in Bali. While previous studies have been conducted at secondary or tertiary levels and in different geographical context, this research focuses on primary-level students, particularly sixth-grade students. In addition to examining the effect of DST on reading comprehension, this study also explores students' perception toward its implementation in the classroom, thereby integrating both cognitive and affective dimensions with a single investigation.

Another aspect of this research lies in the selection and adaptation of digital storytelling materials that are aligned with the themes of the Merdeka Curriculum. The digital stories were selected to correspond with the instructional objectives taught in class, ensuring that the intervention is relevant and pedagogically appropriate. By employing a mixed-method, this study is expected to provide empirical evidence about the effect of DST on reading comprehension and how the students perception toward its use with a primary school setting in Bali.

## 1.2 Problem Identification

Based on the research background, the problems can be identified as follows:

First, reading comprehension remains an important aspect of literacy development among elementary students in Indonesia, however, some students still experience difficulties in understanding main ideas and supporting details in texts. This condition indicates the need to examine instructional strategies that may support students' reading comprehension in classroom contexts.

Second, teaching strategies implemented in the classroom need to be aligned with curriculum themes while also supporting students' engagement and comprehension. When instructional activities are not varied, students may show limited involvement during reading lessons. Therefore it is necessary to explore approaches that are pedagogically relevant and suitable for elementary students.

Third, the implementation of digital storytelling in elementary classrooms, particularly for sixth-grade students in Bali, has not been widely examined in relation to reading comprehension. Although storytelling has long been used as an instructional strategy, the integration of digital elements such as text, visual, and

audio in storytelling requires further empirical investigation. Specifically, its effect on students' reading comprehension and students' perception toward its use in the classroom context remain areas that need to be explored.

From the problem identification, it can be conclude that further investigation is needed to examine the effect of digital storytelling in sixth-grade students' reading comprehension and to explore their perception toward its implementation in an elementary EFL classroom in Bali.

### **1.3 Research Limitation**

The limitation of this research is focus on finding the effect of digital storytelling on sixth-grade students' reading comprehension and their perception of digital storytelling at SD Negeri 3 Banjar Jawa.

### **1.4 Research Question**

Drawing from the research background and problem identification, the research questions of this study are:

1. Is there a significant difference in reading comprehension between groups that taught using digital storytelling and those taught using conventional strategies at SDN 3 Banjar Jawa?
2. What are the sixth-grade students' perceptions of using digital storytelling at SDN 3 Banjar Jawa?

### **1.5 Research Objective**

The objective of this study is to determine the effect of digital storytelling on sixth-grade students' reading comprehension and to explore sixth-grade students' perceptions of the use of digital storytelling in their classroom.

## 1.6 Research Significance

The significance of this study lies in its potential contributions to both theory and practice. Theoretical contribution of this study are expected to enrich the existing literature on the integration of DST in English language teaching for young learners. It fills the gap in previous research by focusing on sixth-grade students in Bali, a population that has been underrepresented in previous studies. Moreover, it provides insight into how DST can be implemented to support reading comprehension, giving evidence on how narrative-based instruction can influence literal and inferential understanding, particularly in EFL contexts.

The practical contribution of this study are expected to benefit various stakeholders. For students, it offers a more engaging and meaningful learning experience that give positive influence on their motivation, reading comprehension, and participation to the lesson.

For teachers, the study provides an innovative strategy that aligns with the 21st-century skills by incorporating technology and storytelling to upgrade literacy instruction, especially for young EFL learners. The practical implementation of DST in class can serve as an alternative to conventional strategies to make the lesson more engaging.

For future researchers, this study opens new pathways to investigate the effect of DST across different grade levels, language skills, or technological formats. It also encourages further exploration of students' perceptions as an essential aspect of instructional success, and support the development of more learner-centered pedagogical model.