

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Reading skills are basic skills that children should have mastered to support the learning and in everyday life. As expressed by Mendoza-Pinargote and Reyes-Meza, (2022) Reading is a complex process that involves concentration, analysis, and interpretation of the information conveyed in a text. In Indonesian public elementary schools, English language learning has been integrated into the Independent Curriculum, which clearly emphasizes the four language skills required to be mastered: writing, reading, speaking, and listening, as stated in Permendikbudristek No. 12 of 2024 and BSKAP Decree No. 032 of 2024. Reading comprehension is the main achievement of students in terms of literacy success (Manoharan & Ramachandran, 2023). Recognizing words, understanding the explicit meaning, and being able to analyze the implied meaning in reading are things that are involved in reading comprehension. Capin et al. (2021) stated that reading skills require integrating word reading and listening skills. If one of these skills cannot be mastered, students' reading comprehension will be greatly disrupted, affecting their learning outcomes.

However, the fact shows that Indonesian students' reading skills are still a major challenge in education. PISA results survey on students' reading skills in Indonesia are still ranked lower than those of other countries, which means that students' reading skills in Indonesia are far from optimal (Yani et al., 2021). Problems that arise, such as students who very often have difficulty understanding

complex reading structures, especially those needed in reading a text that requires high-level thinking skills (Navarrete, 2019). The results of the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM), administered in elementary schools across Indonesia, also reveal this issue. Recent research shows that the majority of fifth-grade students who took the AKM test still required special assistance and were still at a basic proficiency level in reading literacy (Indriana & Gunansyah, 2025). Students can read the entire text of the questions, but many of them find it difficult to fully comprehend the content conveyed in the text. Difficulties are particularly evident when answering Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) questions that require in-depth understanding, evaluation, and reflection on the given text. These findings indicate that reading literacy remains a significant challenge for elementary school students and highlight the need to focus on developing learning strategies that support deeper and more critical reading comprehension (Zahra & Mukhlis, 2024). Based on interviews that have been conducted with 4th-grade elementary school teachers at the location where the research was conducted, also revealed that more than 50% of students in the school had difficulty understanding and comprehending reading in depth. Another study conducted by Mendoza-Pinargote and Reyes-Meza, (2022) also supports that students are often faced with obstacles such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation errors, and difficulty connecting new information obtained with the knowledge they already have.

In addition, reading skills also require the application of strategies such as bottom-up (focusing on details in each word) and top-down (utilization of previous knowledge) as shown in research conducted by Ghafar, (2024). However, in its integration, it turns out that many students fail to combine the two strategies,

especially when given more abstract texts or when conclusions are needed from the reading. In this case, it not only worsens their reading skills but can also affect students' learning achievement competencies in other subjects, which also require good reading comprehension (Cahya et al., 2020). Bartan, (2020) emphasized, the use of elements such as audio-visuals are able to be used for increase students' attraction to the reading and learning provided. English language learning is now directed at developing communicative skills and functional literacy through the four integrated language skills, which become the focus of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, in practice, reading comprehension often remains the weakest aspect compared to the other three skills, as students are more often directed to memorize vocabulary rather than deeply understand the meaning behind the text. Its highlights the need for more innovative and interactive learning strategies so that reading skills can develop in line with speaking, writing, and listening abilities.

Therefore, the right solution is not only to correct this weakness but also to develop a curriculum that supports students' emotional and cognitive activeness in the reading learning process. However, the current implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces many challenges, one of which is that teachers are not sufficiently prepared to integrate creative, innovative, and interactive strategies. Zamista & Deswita, (2023) suggest in their research that reading learning is often hampered by teachers who are not trained in the use of teaching strategies or methods, which can help students explore reading in depth. In Indonesia, some schools have provided an opportunity to improve the low potential in reading teaching by implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum was created

so that teachers can be more flexible in the context of choosing a learning approach that suits students' talents, interests and needs, including the use of creative and innovative methods. According to a study conducted by Nadira et al. (2020). Students may gain contextual and relevant learning experiences if teachers use adaptive curriculum-based strategies during the learning process.

One potential solution is an approach that uses local cultural media packaged through storybooks. Research from Mahayanti et al. (2017) and Ratminingsih et al. (2020) shows that improvements not only occur in students' reading abilities, but students are also introduced to cultural values through the storybooks used. In addition, this study is also related to the use of storybooks that bring a local culture-based picture that is effective in teaching English, especially in reading and speaking skills (Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018). Moreover, a potential strategy to be used as a solution is storytelling, as it is not limited to local culture and can improve students' reading skills. Storytelling is a strategy that uses a narrative to transfer information to students to make it more interesting and interactive for them in learning. According to Ghaderi et al. (2017), students' auditory memory increases through the use of storytelling, since it has been effective for those with reading disabilities. Another study conducted by La et al. (2023) also identified how storytelling can increase students' activeness or involvement in participating in learning, especially in learning English.

However, with current technological developments, storytelling is no longer limited to traditional strategies, but can be enriched through the use of digital storytelling. In this case, storytelling functions as a pedagogical strategy that emphasizes narrative delivery, while digital story acts as a learning medium that

combines multimedia learning, such as visual, audio, animation, and narrative to create an interactive learning experience. Bartan, (2020) & Fatmawati et al. (2024) emphasized that the use of images and sounds as elements in digital storytelling can improve students' skills in reading. This study is in line with the findings put forward by Simorangkir, (2021) digital storytelling can encourage students to train themselves to retell a story, and students' speaking skills would be developed. Digital storytelling has become an important strategy in improving students' literacy skills, especially at the elementary school level, with their current great achievements. Digital storytelling will be relevant in the context of traditional or digital learning and will provide flexibility for teachers to apply this method, which can be adapted to the needs of students and teachers. (Hamdy, 2017)

Although the use of digital storytelling has been proven effective in various learning areas, previous studies have only examined aspects of students' learning motivation and speaking skills, as well as the use of local cultural storybooks as the main focus of their research (Ratminingsih et al., 2020; Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018; Simorangkir, 2021). Few studies explicitly explore the effect of storytelling on students' reading comprehension, especially in fourth-grade elementary school students. Students' academic success and lifelong learning are inextricably linked to the importance of understanding, which is essential for their literacy skills. Strategies that can further explore their reading comprehension skills are needed, not just for engaging the elementary school students, especially fourth-grade students who are in the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" (Deda et al. 2023). However, elementary school students in Indonesia still experience difficulties in achieving reading skills, and therefore, a more effective and engaging

strategy is needed. The combination of visuals, audio, animation, and narration as multimedia elements in digital storytelling can hone creativity and imagination, which will influence their comprehension of the text and create an active and interactive learning environment (Radaideh et al. 2020; Hamdy, 2017; Maya et al. 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring more about reading comprehension with the use of digital storytelling in grade-four elementary school and what their perceptions are of the use of this strategy in learning, which may not have been widely discussed in previous studies. SD Negeri 3 Banjar Jawa was selected based on preliminary observations and interviews with fourth-grade teachers, which indicated that many students still struggle with reading. Furthermore, the Merdeka Curriculum has been integrated into students' learning, providing teachers with opportunities to apply innovative and efficient teaching strategies, such as using digital media in English language instruction. Consequently, the research site selected is considered relevant and appropriate for the successful collection of data. In addition, this study not only provides theoretical views on the benefits of using storytelling, but also provides practical strategies that teachers can use as a strategy that help improve student literacy.

1.2 Problem Identification

From the research background explained, the problem identification can be made as follows:

First, the literacy skills of elementary school students in Indonesia, particularly in terms of reading comprehension, are still less than optimal and have not yet reached the required target. The majority of students still struggle to identify

the main ideas and supporting details in a text. This situation has an impact on their ability to understand other subjects that also rely on reading skills. If this problem is left unaddressed, students will continue to face difficulties in improving their literacy skills.

Secondly, a learning strategy is required that not only aligns with the topics in the curriculum but is also effective in maximizing students' reading comprehension. The teaching strategies currently employed in the classroom often fail to capture students' attention or motivate them to read carefully. When learning activities seem boring, students' motivation to read weakens, resulting in their ability to comprehend reading material becoming less than optimal. This situation highlights the urgent need for a more innovative and varied learning strategy so that students are more enthusiastic and able to understand texts more comprehensively.

Third, the implementation as a learning strategy, digital storytelling has been rarely explored, especially for fourth-grade elementary school students in Indonesia. Although storytelling strategies have long been proven effective in increasing student participation, its digital form, which integrates text, visual, and audio elements, has not been widely utilized in elementary-level learning practices. Given that today's generation of children is very familiar with technological devices, digital storytelling has the potential to make it more attractive and relevant. However, its specific impact on improving reading comprehension and student response to this approach still requires more comprehensive study through in-depth research.

From the identification of the problems, it was found that the development of reading skills must be done early on using interesting strategies, in line with the

current Independent Curriculum, with the application of technology in the learning process. Therefore, Digital Storytelling was used as a learning strategy in this study to examine whether it improved students' reading comprehension and to explore their responses toward the use of Digital Storytelling in the learning process.

1.3 Limitation of the Study

This research is limited to findings on the use of Digital Storytelling in English language learning for fourth-grade students at SD Negeri 3 Banjar Jawa, a public elementary school, focusing on students' reading comprehension and their perceptions of its use.

1.4 Research Question

The research questions that need to be answered in this research, based on the background and problem identification, are:

1. Does the use of digital storytelling affect the reading comprehension of fourth-grade elementary school students at SD Negeri 3 Banjar Jawa?
2. How are the perceptions of fourth-grade students at SD Negeri 3 Banjar Jawa towards the use of digital storytelling in their learning?

1.5 Research Objective

This study was conducted to confirm whether or not there is an influence on the use of digital storytelling in fourth-grade students' reading comprehension and their perceptions of its use.

1.6 Research Significance

1. Theoretically, the contribution of this study is the existing literature on the use of digital storytelling in English language teaching for early learners. By concentrating on fourth graders in Indonesian elementary schools, a population underrepresented in previous research, this study addresses the limited literature among elementary EFL learners. In addition, this study also offers data on how narrative-based instruction can affect literal and inferential comprehension, especially in EFL contexts, and offers insights into how digital storytelling can be used to improve reading comprehension. This research also contributes to the limited literature linking student perceptions and storytelling in the educational process.
2. The practical significance of this study is: 1) This study assists elementary school teachers on how digital storytelling can be used as an interesting and effective reading teaching strategy for students, 2) This study can also open students' views on digital storytelling which will help teachers adjust students' needs in class, 3) With this research, it can be a reference for the continuation of similar research with a different focus.