

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

In the era of globalization and the Industrial Revolution 4.0, English language skills are one of the fundamental factors in enhancing human resource competitiveness from an early age. English has emerged as the global *lingua franca*, with proficiency in the language being required across various fields, including education, technology, and international communication (Vina Agustiana & Nani Ronsani Thamrin, 2024). This is in line with Mauliska and D'Angelo, (2024), who underline that early exposure to English is crucial in preparing students for global competition. Therefore, it is essential for basic education, particularly at the elementary school level, to begin the systematic and enjoyable development of English language skills. Although, despite the increasing knowledge, the 2022 PISA results show that Indonesian students' scores are still below the average of other countries, especially in terms of reading literacy (OECD 2023, 2022). This issue underscores the need for improvements in foreign language learning strategies, including the development of more contextual and engaging learning materials. Research conducted by Hanifa et al. (2024) and Anwas et al. (2022) shows that Indonesian students' low reading skills are closely linked to a lack of interesting and relevant teaching materials, especially in foreign language education.

In practice, the Indonesian national curriculum requires elementary English learning to be at the A1 to A2 CEFR levels (Muliastuti, 2024). At this level, students should be able to introduce themselves, ask and answer simple questions, and comprehend short and straightforward texts. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced in 2022, strengthens this approach by emphasizing functional literacy, the use of language in real-world contexts, and character development through interdisciplinary study. One strategy in this new curriculum is the implementation of Indonesia's eight graduate profile values, which emphasize values such as spirituality, citizenship, critical thinking, creativity, independence, collaboration, health and stamina; and communication (Datadikdasmen.com). Learning English can be a successful way to develop all of these aspects when implemented with the

appropriate approach.

On the other hand, the current situation suggests that English instruction in many elementary schools, particularly in Buleleng Regency, remains conventional. The findings from the researcher's preliminary observations at a local state elementary school indicated that teachers still focus on memorizing vocabulary, grammar, and written practice questions. Narrative and bilingual learning are infrequently implemented due to limited media, teacher training, and a lack of suitable digital teaching materials. This condition is contrary to findings showing that storytelling-based instruction can effectively improve students' English abilities and learning interest when supported by appropriate visual media (Ramendra et al., 2025). Artini and Padmadewi (2021) emphasize that teacher creativity plays a crucial role in creating meaningful and enjoyable English learning environments, particularly through the use of varied teaching strategies and instructional media. Moreover, learning tends to be dominated by textbooks that fail to link the content to character values or the context of students' lives (Li & Wang, 2024). This condition indicates the need for more engaging instructional media that can integrate language learning with meaningful context and values. Research by Ratminingsih and Budasi (2018) demonstrates that picture storybooks incorporating local culture can effectively support English learning among young learners while simultaneously introducing character values and contextual experiences.

Meanwhile, the 2013 Curriculum, which had previously served as the national reference, emphasized an integrated thematic approach as well as the significance of literacy and character development in learning. However, its implementation is still not optimal due to the limited application of interactive and digital media in the teaching and learning process (Salim et al., 2021). From several studies (K. A. Rahman et al., 2021) (A. W. Rahman, n.d.) (Situmorang et al., 2019), the most significant challenges include the number of summative exams, the limited opportunity for teacher training, and the lack of contextual instructional materials. The Merdeka Curriculum addresses these limitations by offering greater flexibility for teachers and students to explore topics and learning media. One of the main innovations is enhancing digital literacy and integrating character values through

project-based learning. This change is an important momentum to redesign learning media to better align with current demands.

The government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, has emphasized the importance of character education as the foundation of the learning process at all educational levels. Character education is not merely an addition but the fundamental basis for cultivating students who are globally competitive and have good morals. Dewi et al. (2024) argue that the transformation of character education within the Merdeka Curriculum facilitates reflective and meaningful learning for students, primarily through the use of narrative media. Narrative is an effective way to convey values as it fosters imagination, empathy, and role models. Character education at the elementary level can be effectively integrated into daily learning activities through contextual and meaningful learning experiences (Indraan et al., 2018). Narrative-based digital media allows this integration to be more effective and enjoyable for children.

One of the most important character values to be developed at the primary school level is independence. Independence is closely associated with autonomous learning, which encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning processes, make decisions, and actively engage knowledge construction (Padmadewi et al., 2020). This value not only refers to the ability to complete activities independently but also incorporates initiative, responsibility, and reflection on the learning process. This is supported by Indriani & Asfia (2023), who explain that cultivating independence in young learners develops a foundation for lifelong learning and self-regulation. In the context of English Learning, independence can be seen by the willingness to try, repeat, and actively produce a foreign language without relying much on the teacher. Although the framework of the Pancasila Student Profile has undergone several adjustments in recent curriculum developments, Independence value continues to be maintained as a core value within the Graduate profile. Independence remains a defining characteristic of the ideal Indonesian student as envisioned by the Ministry of Education. The ability to adapt to rapid global changes and challenges highlights the enduring importance of independence as a guiding principle in character education.

According to Huda et al. (2022) Stories are an effective way of establishing moral and character values, such as independence, through real examples that children can imitate. Therefore, it is crucial to create learning media that are not only bilingual but also consciously shape students' independence values from an early age.

According to research conducted by Margunayasa (2024), Literacy learning that integrates character values has been demonstrated to enhance critical thinking abilities, teamwork, and value awareness among students. The integration of digital literacy with character education has proven to be a practical approach to 21st-century learning. Effective digital literacy instruction requires not only appropriate technological tools but also teachers who are prepared to integrate technology into meaningful literacy activities (Padmadewi et al., 2023). Digital-based learning provides opportunities for students to search for, evaluate, and create their content. Digital literacy, as defined by Tinnmaz et al. (2022), Includes the skills of using technology to find, evaluate, and produce information ethically and creatively. When integrated with stories, digital literacy serves as a reflective and engaging medium for children. The digital storybook serves as a bridge between linguistic literacy, character values, and technology. Furthermore, digital storybooks provide opportunities for student to engage actively with multimodal content that supports language development while fostering meaningful learning experiences (Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2020).

Children of elementary school age have unique learning traits, specifically requiring concrete, visual, and interactive learning experiences. At this stage, their ability to think abstractly is still developing, making visual and narrative learning media more accessible and easier to understand. This statement is supported by Patimah & Nurhayati (2023), who highlighted that children in this developmental phase acquire knowledge most effectively through concrete and sensory-oriented activities. In line with this Tajik et al. (2023), highlights the importance of differentiated instruction that uses visual and interactive media to accommodate diverse learning needs. Digital storybooks have shown remarkable effectiveness in engaging children's imaginations while quietly imparting moral lessons and character values. Previous studies reveal that story-based media can facilitate young

learners' comprehension, motivation, and participation in English learning through visual contextualized support (Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018). This aligns with findings by Cordes et al. (2023), who believe that a digital storybook is an effective teaching tool for encouraging both cognitive and emotional involvement. Stories empower children to listen, comprehend, and connect the narrative to their everyday experiences. Narration opens up possibilities for children to express their thoughts and emotions, allowing for the use of foreign languages like English. Digital storybook serves as an excellent tool for enhancing English learning while promoting character education simultaneously, as supported by (Pahlevi et al., 2024).

The digital storybook approach has been widely adopted in various countries for language learning and early literacy development. Arum et al. (2025) found that digital storybooks effectively integrate Pancasila values and enhance student engagement in the learning process. Stories presented visually and interactively help students understand the material and connect it to the values they aspire to develop, such as love for their country, mutual collaboration, and independence. Furthermore, students engage more actively in reading and discussions, using both Indonesian and basic English. This media provides teachers with the opportunity to investigate more innovative and flexible pedagogical approaches. Digital storybooks have proven to be an effective alternative to traditional learning methods, being both engaging and meaningful.

In the context of bilingual learning, a digital storybook offers even greater potential. The use of two languages in stories can provide children with exposure to the structure, vocabulary, and context of a foreign language without placing academic pressure on them. A recent by Umar et al. (2023) Found that bilingual digital storybook significantly boosts student engagement, enhance understanding of character values, and improve communication skills in both languages. Children gain confidence in using English as they engage with enjoyable stories through listening and reading. Story-based learning has been shown to increase learners' interest and participation in English language activities because stories provide meaningful contexts for language exposure and use (Ramendra et al., 2025). Bilingual stories also stimulate cognitive abilities, including translanguaging, which refers to

the capacity to navigate and apply two languages smoothly. This aligns with the aims of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes communicative and character skills as the main foundations of education.

Although the potential for bilingual storybooks is considerable, their implementation in elementary schools, particularly in Buleleng Regency, remains very limited. Researchers' observations in the field revealed a lack of digital learning media that offered bilingual stories integrating relevant and contextual character values. At the school, teachers relied on printed materials or monotonous worksheets, without integrating language content and character education. According to Cruz et al. (2023) When students were introduced to short digital videos or stories, they responded positively. This highlights a significant demand for innovative learning tools tailored to the unique needs and characteristics of elementary school children. Furthermore, the media must be adaptable to the needs of both teachers and students when they are at home.

A further issue is the lack of teacher training in designing and implementing character-based digital media. Numerous teachers reported that they had never received special training on incorporating character education into English instruction, particularly in digital formats (Syafryadin et al., 2020). This becomes worse due to a lack of technological equipment, including computers and sufficient internet connectivity, in numerous schools. Consequently, there is a demand for learning media that is easily accessible, easy to understand, yet extensive in content and value. The development of bilingual digital storybook media is one potential solution to answer this challenge.

Fifth-grade students are at a stage where they start to engage in reflective thinking and demonstrate greater independence in their learning journey. At this stage, they can connect personal experiences with story content, recognize moral lessons, and show initiative in learning (Zee & Koomen, 2020). Instilling the value of independence at this stage is crucial for developing independent learning habits, fostering responsibility, and building the courage to make decisions. Independence is also important in English learning, as it allows students to try, make mistakes, and then improve themselves with minimal coaching. Therefore, learning media

that aim to establish the concept of independence will be highly beneficial to their cognitive and affective development. Media that integrates character, language, and technology must be carefully crafted.

In this context, the Deep learning approach is beneficial since it emphasizes a meaningful, reflective, and real-world learning process. Deep learning emphasizes the learning process, including understanding, processing, and applying knowledge and values in daily life, rather than just the outcome. When used in narrative and bilingual learning, this strategy enables students to reflect on the significance of the story, its values, and how they relate to their own identities. Students learn not only vocabulary through a digital storybook, but also how to express themselves, understand the context, and learn lessons from the story. This aligns with the development of the profile of independent Pancasila students. Deep learning can provide a conceptual framework for creating more meaningful media.

Several studies have been carried out on the development of digital storybooks that focus on character education. However, the emphasis remains general and has not explicitly addressed the bilingual narrative component. In a study conducted by Pratiwi et al. (2022) focused on creating a digital storybook based on local wisdom (Wayang Punokawan) specifically for elementary students in Sukoharjo, without emphasizing foreign language use. Meanwhile, research by Umar et al. (2023) has started to explore the bilingual aspect, but has not yet been particularly developed for 5th-grade elementary school students or strengthened particular qualities such as independence. Research on the effects of digital image storybooks on student motivation or character is still common, such as that conducted by Al Kamil et al. (2023) found a rising interest in learning and self-efficacy using digital media in general. Although digital storybooks and character education have been widely studied, limited research has explicitly developed bilingual digital storybooks that integrate the value of independence for fifth-grade students. This gap highlights the urgency of designing media that not only improve English learning but also cultivate Independence values.

1.2 Problem Identification

As technology improves and the world becomes more open, students need to be able to speak more than one language, primarily English, to be competitive in the global era. English is now a common means of communication for people from different countries, used in various fields, including science, education, and international connections. Therefore, improving English language skills since elementary school is becoming more important and necessary. However, the current situation reveals that the literacy accomplishments of Indonesian students, particularly in reading and comprehending texts, are still relatively low. The 2022 PISA data indicated that Indonesian students' reading literacy scores were below the international average (OECD 2023, 2022). This situation suggests that language instruction, particularly English, has not provided students with significant and contextual learning experiences. This issue gets worse by conventional learning patterns, as noted in the researcher's preliminary observations in one of the elementary schools in Buleleng regency, where educators mainly focus on rote memorization of vocabulary, mastery of grammatical structures, and practicing questions without developing communicative and critical language skills.

In reality, the Independent Curriculum's education concept proposes a more flexible, contextual, and integrated learning method that incorporates character values. One of the particular programs included in this curriculum is the Graduate profile, which, among other things, emphasizes the principle of independence. However, based on field observations, the integration of these character qualities, particularly in English language learning, has not been correctly executed, primarily through digital media that are appropriate for primary school children's characteristics.

Previous research has shown that narrative learning media, such as digital storybooks, can enhance interest, understanding, and teach character qualities (Cordes et al., 2023) (S. Huda et al., 2022). The bilingual approach in digital stories has been proven to enhance students' communication skills in both languages while also instilling important moral values (Umar et al., 2023). However, there is still a gap in the development of narrative digital media that explicitly combines enhancing the character of independence, the use of two languages, and

modifications to the needs of fifth-grade elementary school students, particularly in local contexts such as Buleleng Regency. If these issues are not quickly solved, the English learning process in elementary schools will remain monotonous and less meaningful. It will not provide a significant contribution to the development of independent and critical students in facing future challenges. The lack of innovation in educational media will reduce the efficiency of curriculum policies and increase the disparity between students' needs and the instructional methods used in the classroom.

1.3 Research Limitation

This research is an Instructional Material development (IMD) study focusing on the development of a digital bilingual storybook as English as English instructional material for Grade 5 students. This media is designed to cultivate the character value of independence, which is integrated into English learning by the Merdeka Curriculum. The scope of development only includes the stages of needs analysis, design, development, and expert validation, as well as limited trials, without involving large-scale implementation or long-term evaluation of the media's effects. This study's limitations include a focus on independence as the only character value, which does not cover other levels of education beyond Grade 5 of primary school, and does not assess the longitudinal effectiveness of media on learning outcomes or character enhancement.

1.4 Research Question

From the background of the study, several questions can be formulated as follows:

1. How is the character value of Independence inserted into a digital bilingual storybook in English classes in Grade 5?
2. How is the prototype of the digital bilingual storybook with the insertion of the Independence value for English language learning in Grade 5?
3. What is the quality of the digital bilingual storybook with the insertion of Independence value for English Language Learning in Grade 5?

1.5 Research Objective

This research has several objectives, including the following.

1. To describe how the character value of Independence was inserted into a digital bilingual storybook in English classes in Grade 5.
2. To describe the prototype of the digital bilingual storybook with the insertion of the Independence value for English language learning in Grade 5.
3. To assess the quality of the digital bilingual storybook with the insertion of the Independence value for English language learning in Grade 5.

1.6 Research Significance

This research is suggested to make a significant contribution in two areas: theoretical and practical, as stated below.

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This research aims to enhance theoretical studies on the integration of the Independence value into primary school English learning. Furthermore, this study makes significant scientific contributions to the development of bilingual digital learning media that combine narrative approaches, digital technology, and contextual learning through methods tailored to the characteristics and learning needs of fifth-grade primary school students.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

a. For Teachers

This research provides practical recommendations for educators in delivering creative and relevant learning materials to enhance students' independence in English education. The bilingual digital storybooks facilitate teachers to encourage learning that emphasizes linguistic skills while also developing students' initiative, responsibility, and courage for independent learning, connecting with the principles of 21st-century education and the Merdeka curriculum.

b. For Future Studies

This study provides an empirical foundation for future research on integrating independent ideals into digital English learning. The findings of

the study may also motivate the creation of similar media with an emphasis on specific character qualities, particularly in the context of basic education in the digital era.

