

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

English language learning in elementary schools during the 21st century has become increasingly crucial as globalization demands continue to rise and the need for cross-cultural communication becomes more prominent in our interconnected world (Menggo et al., 2022). The English language, serving as a lingua franca in international contexts, functions not merely as a tool for international communication, but also acts as a vital bridge that enables students to access a vast array of global information and knowledge resources that would otherwise remain inaccessible to them (Fiedler, 2022). Within the specific context of Indonesian education, achieving strong mastery of English at the elementary level represents a key determining factor that significantly influences each individual's development and their potential contributions to national growth and innovation in the years to come (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). When students possess solid English language proficiency, they gain access to broader opportunities for advancing their education to higher levels while also positioning themselves to make meaningful contributions in an increasingly competitive global workforce.

However, throughout the learning process, it becomes absolutely essential for educators to recognize and understand that children possess fundamentally different learning methods and approaches compared

to adults. Children inhabit a world characterized by unique traits and characteristics that differ significantly from those of adults (Kusumadewi & Mufidah, 2017). They naturally tend to be more active and energetic, while simultaneously possessing an exceptionally high level of curiosity about the world around them. This inherent curiosity demonstrates that they have already begun their learning journey, though their learning processes are still predominantly conducted through play-based activities and exploration. Additionally, children possess remarkably vivid imaginations, enjoy exploring new concepts and environments, and are easily influenced by novel experiences and stimuli in their surroundings. These fundamental characteristics play a crucial role in English language learning, particularly in terms of how children absorb, process, and subsequently utilize language in their daily interactions.

Based on Jean Piaget's theory about how children think and learn, fifth-grade students who are 10-11 years old are in what is called the concrete operational stage of development. At this stage, children start to show they can think logically about real and concrete objects and situations. They also develop skills to group information, put events in order, and understand important ideas like conservation and reversibility. Children at this stage also start to develop organized thinking skills. They learn to think about cause-and-effect relationships and begin to understand other people's points of view in a more clear and logical way (Marinda, 2020). Piaget also explains that children at this stage learn best through hands-on activities, direct work with learning materials, and meaningful social interaction. This

makes them very suitable for learning methods that use real-life contexts and story-based teaching approaches. These characteristics are very important for creating educational media like digital bilingual storybooks. This type of media can show content in interactive and contextual ways that match their developmental needs. With their well-developed thinking abilities, fifth-grade students have the readiness needed to learn character values like creativity. This learning can be done through interactive, story-based, and bilingual media that connects with their life experiences.

The Indonesian government has taken various strategic steps to meet the growing need for educational changes and 21st-century learning demands. These steps are designed to create better quality and more relevant educational experiences for students. One important policy change is the launch of the Merdeka Curriculum by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology since 2022.

The Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers more freedom to design learning experiences that match individual student needs. Teachers are no longer limited by minimum achievement score requirements. Instead, this curriculum focuses on meaningful, character-building, and contextual learning processes. The goal is to develop students who are not only good at academics but also have strong character traits and practical skills (Kemendikbudristek, 2024).

Before this, the 2013 Curriculum used a scientific-based learning approach that focused on five different learning stages. These five stages were: watching phenomena, asking questions, doing experiments with

concepts, thinking through problems, and sharing findings and conclusions (Budiyanto et al., 2016). While this approach aimed to improve students' critical thinking abilities, it faced serious challenges during implementation. This was especially true at the elementary school level where younger students needed different teaching approaches.

Suryawan et al. (2020) found that many teachers continued to have problems implementing scientific learning approaches. These problems were caused by limited professional training opportunities and not enough supporting facilities. As a result, the Merdeka Curriculum appeared as a more flexible option that puts student learning needs and developmental suitability first (Ningsih et al., 2024).

One of the key features of the Merdeka Curriculum is the integration of the Graduate Profile, which serves as the main guide for teachers in helping students develop good character and essential life skills. This framework replaces the previous Pancasila Student Profile (P5) that had six main dimensions. The new version, called the Graduate Profile with Eight Dimensions, was introduced to give a clearer picture of what students are expected to achieve upon graduation.

The eight dimensions of the Graduate Profile are faith in God Almighty and noble character, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical thinking, creativity, lifelong learning, and well-being. These dimensions represent the values and competencies that students need to live successfully and meaningfully in society (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Although the name changed from Pancasila Student Profile to

Graduate Profile, the purpose remains the same, which is to develop students who are intelligent, creative, independent, and have strong moral values. In this research, the focus is on the creativity value because it is closely related to English language learning. Through digital storytelling, students are encouraged to express their ideas creatively and communicate more confidently in English.

In the context of 21st-century learning, elementary school students are expected not only to acquire academic knowledge but also to develop creativity, communication skills, and adaptability to real-life challenges. These competencies are closely related to the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning and the development of character alongside academic skills (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). Findings from preliminary interviews with fifth-grade teachers in four different elementary schools reveal that English language learning is still largely focused on basic vocabulary mastery and textbook-oriented activities, providing limited opportunities for students to explore ideas creatively. Teachers also reported challenges in addressing diverse levels of English proficiency and in using learning media that are engaging and relevant to students' daily experiences. These conditions indicate a clear need for innovative learning media that can support English language learning while also fostering creativity in line with 21st-century educational demands (Menggo et al., 2022).

One important value that becomes the main focus in English language learning for children is creativity. This value encourages students to

think originally, generate innovative ideas, and express themselves actively through various media and forms of communication. Teachers play crucial roles as facilitators, motivators, and mentors in helping students understand and internalize these fundamental values. Within the concept of the Graduate Profile, creativity is specifically defined as students' ability to generate original ideas, possess flexible thinking capabilities, and produce works and actions that benefit both themselves and their surrounding environment. By the end of Phase C (grades 5-6 elementary), students are expected to be capable of expressing themselves through various forms and media, evaluating their creative processes, and revising and improving their ideas independently (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

This expectation shows that fifth-grade students have reached a developmental stage where they can imagine new ideas, express themselves effectively, and find creative solutions to problems using media such as digital storybooks. Therefore, learning that integrates creativity not only supports the achievement of the Graduate Profile but also aligns with the cognitive characteristics of children aged 10-11 years, who are developing systematic and productive thinking skills. Strengthening creativity can also be meaningfully connected to foreign language learning, especially English, which plays a significant role in children's cognitive and social development.

In the context of the creativity value of the Graduate Profile, the indicators that become the focus at the end of Phase C (grades 5-6 elementary) include students' ability to generate original ideas, express these ideas through various forms and media, and demonstrate appreciation for the creative

process itself. Students are also expected to be able to evaluate the creative processes they undertake, revise their ideas thoughtfully, and improve their work independently. Consequently, strengthening creative character in learning is not only directed toward final outcomes but also emphasizes the process of exploring ideas and the courage to express them authentically. These indicators serve as the foundation for creating a digital bilingual storybook in this research, ensuring that the resulting product can encourage students to think flexibly, courageously try new approaches, and appreciate both their own work and others' work in positive ways.

To ensure that the implementation of the Graduate Profile values is effective and relevant to the characteristics of 21st-century learners, learning strategies that promote deep understanding and exploration are needed. One approach that supports this goal is deep learning. According to Anwar (2017), deep learning is not only about understanding concepts passively, but also involves encouraging exploration, reflection, and the development of broader knowledge networks and connections.

Within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, the philosophy of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning serves as the foundation for educational practices. Mindful learning helps students become more aware and conscious of their learning processes, while meaningful learning ensures that acquired knowledge remains relevant and can be implemented in daily life situations. On the other hand, joyful learning emphasizes that learning should be an enjoyable experience that naturally increases student motivation and engagement levels (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). Therefore, learning

experiences for children must be designed to combine elements of enjoyment, emotional engagement, and relevance to students' real-life experiences and contexts.

One approach that successfully integrates all these elements is story-based learning. Children's stories are not only practical and entertaining, but can also contain valuable educational elements embedded within their narratives. Educational children's stories represent literary works that contain implicit elements woven throughout their storylines, enabling readers to gain knowledge and insights after reading them (Apriliani & Radia, 2020; Paramita et al., 2022; Purwani, 2020). Literature at the elementary school level should encourage students not only to enjoy and utilize literary works to improve their English language knowledge and skills, but also to develop their personalities and character traits.

In today's digital era, story-based learning can be developed further through the utilization of technology, particularly in the form of digital storybooks. Technology possesses tremendous potential for strengthening children's learning experiences, especially because children today are highly familiar with and even proficient in using digital devices such as smartphones and tablets. This phenomenon represents a concrete example of changes caused by 21st-century developments and becomes an important consideration for educators when designing learning media that aligns with the learning styles of the digital generation (Ratminingsih, 2017). The use of digital media enables children to learn in more visual, interactive, and enjoyable ways. Illustrations, animations, and audio elements in digital

materials can help children more easily understand vocabulary and language structures while supporting their imagination and creativity.

One form of digital media that proves highly relevant in this context is the storybook. The term "storybook" consists of two English words: "story" meaning narrative and "book" meaning written work. Generally, storybooks are defined as story books intended specifically for children (Pasaka et al., 2022). In their digital versions, storybooks appear in both interactive and non-interactive formats, both of which provide engaging and meaningful reading experiences. Digital storybooks come in interactive forms that allow interactions similar to physical books, as well as non-interactive formats that still provide valuable digital reading experiences (Pasaka et al., 2022). The ease of access and high visual appeal make digital storybooks effective media for increasing learning motivation while simultaneously strengthening student understanding.

Furthermore, digital storybooks also possess significant potential as English language learning media, particularly when developed in bilingual formats. Language learning can be accomplished through various methods, one of which involves reading bilingual children's storybooks, which has proven effective in supporting English language learning processes (Widyaningrum, 2012). By presenting content in two languages, storybooks not only provide contextual English language exposure but also maintain children's connection to their native language. Bilingual education helps students develop more mature conceptual understanding and enhanced cognitive abilities, preparing them to participate effectively in the global

community (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). In line with the study by Turahman and Mutiarani (2024), habituation of using English in everyday contexts, not only in classroom settings can increase student confidence and strengthen their foreign language abilities.

By combining story-based approaches, digital technology, and bilingual learning, digital bilingual storybooks become ideal learning media for supporting English language development while simultaneously fostering elementary school children's character development. This media enables joyful, contextual, and meaningful learning processes, perfectly aligned with the deep learning principles promoted in the Merdeka Curriculum.

According to guidelines prepared by the Language Development and Cultivation Agency (Trimansyah, 2020), quality children's storybooks should fulfill various standards. These standards include content appropriateness for children's world, simple language usage, illustrations that support understanding, and story presentation that is not overly moralistic while still implicitly instilling character values. Storybooks also should show real child characters, interesting storylines, and fun visual elements. These standards work as guides in creating research products to make sure that the digital storybooks produced are not only suitable in content and format but also able to fulfill children's learning needs and character growth based on their development stages.

In Indonesia, various research studies have been conducted in elementary school contexts. For instance, research by Hati et al. (2026) developed digital storybook-based teaching materials for character education

among fourth-grade elementary students. However, this research was still limited to using only one language, which was Indonesian, and had not yet included foreign language learning. In line with that study, Aditya (2019) developed bilingual character-based children's storybooks focusing on caring character traits that align with the Graduate Profile framework, particularly in the dimension related to cooperation and empathy.

Other research by Umar et al. (2023) developed bilingual digital storytelling aimed at nurturing students' character in line with the Graduate Profile, although this study remained at the needs analysis stage and had not yet produced a final product that could be directly implemented in classroom learning.

Based on interviews with fifth-grade teachers from four different elementary schools, students' English proficiency levels were found to vary considerably, ranging from those who still struggle with recognizing the alphabet to those who can communicate more fluently due to private lessons. Teachers consistently reported challenges such as limited vocabulary, difficulties in pronunciation, and weak writing skills. While some have incorporated texts or short stories into their teaching, these often require additional translations or contextual illustrations to support comprehension. All of the teachers interviewed expressed a clear need for a digital bilingual storybook that not only supports language learning but also fosters students' creativity, especially if it is designed with engaging illustrations and contexts relevant to their daily lives.

The learning conditions identified across the four elementary

schools reflect broader challenges faced in 21st-century education, where students are expected to master communication skills, creativity, and digital literacy simultaneously. While the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, character development, and student-centered learning, teachers in these schools still encounter limitations in learning media that effectively integrate language skills, creativity, and technology. This gap indicates that the implementation of 21st-century learning principles has not yet been fully supported by appropriate instructional media. Therefore, the development of a digital bilingual storybook becomes relevant not only as a response to students varied English proficiency levels, but also as a concrete effort to align classroom practices with the demands of 21st-century learning and the Graduate Profile framework (Direktorat Guru Pendidikan Dasar, Kemdikbudristek, 2024).

Considering the various analyses presented above, creating digital bilingual storybooks that are enjoyable, contextual, and character-based becomes a strategic solution. This product can not only be used to improve students' English language abilities but also serve as a means for instilling character values, particularly creativity, as emphasized in the Graduate Profile. Through story-based approaches and digital media, students learn in enjoyable, meaningful, and profound learning environments that align with their developmental characteristics and learning preferences.

1.2 Problem Identification

In Indonesia, several research studies have been conducted on the development of digital storybooks for character education in elementary schools within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. For example, a study by Hati et al. (2026) developed digital storybook-based teaching materials for character learning in fourth-grade elementary classrooms. However, this study was still limited to the use of the Indonesian language and did not yet include foreign language learning components.

In line with this research, Aditya (2019) developed bilingual children's storybooks that focused on caring character traits. These traits align with one of the dimensions of the Graduate Profile, particularly the dimension related to cooperation and mutual assistance. The findings showed that bilingual storybooks could function as effective learning tools to support both language development and character formation simultaneously.

Similarly, Salsabila and Sunaryati (2024) developed illustrated storybooks to strengthen students' independent character in character education. However, their study had not yet integrated digital elements or bilingual approaches into the learning materials.

In contrast, the research by Umar et al. (2023) created digital bilingual stories that were specifically designed to build students' character development according to the Graduate Profile framework. Their study focused on digital media innovation as an effective strategy to support English language learning while also strengthening the character-building process among students. This approach showed how important it is to

combine technology with the art of storytelling in order to create more engaging and meaningful learning experiences that suit modern students. However, even though their ideas were innovative, the research only reached the needs analysis phase and did not produce a finalized product that could be readily used and implemented in actual classroom learning settings.

At the same time, the study conducted by Safitri et al. (2024) examined the practical implementation of the creativity value as emphasized in the Graduate Profile framework in fourth-grade elementary classrooms. Their research provided detailed discussions about the strategies used, the developmental stages involved, and the overall impact of creativity-based projects on student learning. The findings showed that these projects successfully improved students' abilities in expressing their ideas, creating works, and developing a sense of independence in their learning process. However, it should be noted that this study focused its attention on creativity within the broader context of general character-building activities and did not make any connection between creativity and English language learning. Furthermore, the study did not use or incorporate bilingual digital media as part of its approach.

Based on these previous research studies, a significant research gap can be clearly identified. There is still a notable lack of research that successfully combines digital bilingual storybooks as educational media that can simultaneously strengthen creativity as an important dimension of the Graduate Profile while also supporting English language learning for elementary school students. In addition to this gap, there is a strong need for

further and deeper exploration to understand comprehensively how digital bilingual storybooks can work effectively as powerful tools for developing and fostering creativity specifically in the context of English language learning, with particular focus on fifth-grade elementary school students.

Therefore, considering the research gaps that have been identified, this study aims to develop innovative learning media that successfully integrates several crucial elements. These elements include the creativity value as emphasized in the Graduate Profile, English language learning specifically designed for fifth-grade students, the use of digital technology through interactive storybooks, and a bilingual approach that effectively helps understanding in two different languages. Through this comprehensive integration of various components, the present study not only addresses and solves the limitations found in previous research but also makes a valuable contribution toward English language learning in elementary education that is more contextual, more creative in its approach, and more globally oriented in its direction.

1.3 Research Limitation

This research acknowledges several limitations that need to be carefully considered during the development process and potential classroom use of the developed product.

First, the development of the bilingual digital storybook focuses only on the creativity value, as emphasized in the Graduate Profile, even though the Graduate Profile consists of eight comprehensive dimensions. Creativity was deliberately selected because it closely relates to the way

fifth-grade elementary students think and learn. In addition, creativity aligns well with interactive digital media, which can effectively support students' curiosity, imagination, and engagement through digital storytelling activities.

Second, the target users of this research product are limited to fifth-grade elementary school students. Therefore, the content, language level, and learning materials are specifically designed to suit the cognitive and developmental characteristics of students at this grade level. As a result, the findings and the developed product may require further adaptation if they are to be applied to students at different grade levels or age groups with different learning needs.

Third, the use of digital storybooks may face technical and infrastructural limitations. The effective use of digital learning media requires access to electronic devices, supporting applications, and stable internet connections. However, not all elementary schools in Indonesia have adequate technological facilities. Limited access to devices, unstable internet connections, and insufficient technical support may reduce the effectiveness of the digital storybook when used in real classroom contexts.

Fourth, the bilingual approach employed in this research is limited to Indonesian and English and does not yet include regional languages that are also important in the Indonesian educational context. In addition, this study does not comprehensively measure the long-term effects of using bilingual digital storybooks on students' English language proficiency or character development over extended periods. These

limitations provide opportunities for future research to expand the scope of languages, target users, learning outcomes, and technological features of bilingual digital learning media.

Based on the analyses presented above, the development of digital bilingual storybooks that are enjoyable, contextual, and character-oriented becomes a strategic solution. This product not only supports students' English language learning but also serves as a medium for strengthening creativity as one of the key dimensions of the Graduate Profile. Through story-based learning and digital media, students can learn in meaningful and engaging ways that align with their developmental characteristics and learning preferences.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the background and research focus that have been comprehensively explained above, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the direction and scope of this study.

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

1.5 Research Objective

This research has the following objectives to guide the development process of the designed media:

1. To describe how the value of Creativity is inserted into a digital bilingual storybook in English classes in primary school.
2. To describe the profile of the created digital bilingual storybook with the insertion of Creativity value for English language learning in primary school.
3. To assess the quality of the created digital bilingual storybook with the insertion of Creativity value in Grade 5 English Class in primary school.

1.6 Research Significance

This research is expected to provide significance in two main aspects as follows:

1. Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to contribute to the advancement of theory related to the integration of the creativity value, which is part of the Pancasila-based character education, into English language learning. In addition, this study supports the application of digital media to create fun, engaging, and interactive bilingual learning experiences for primary school students.

2. Practical Significance

For teachers, this research may offer meaningful advantages

by presenting a digital bilingual storybook as an innovative and interactive learning medium. Through the integration of technology, bilingual content, and the creativity value, teachers can deliver learning materials in a way that is more interesting and relevant to students' everyday lives. This can potentially increase students' activeness and engagement in learning.

For future studies, the results of this research may provide empirical data that can be used as a reference in conducting further investigations, particularly those focusing on the creation of bilingual learning media that incorporates digital technology and promotes the creativity value within English language learning for primary school students.

