

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

English language learning in elementary schools in the 21st century is very necessary along with the development of technology and the current era of globalization, English language learning is not just learning that focuses on basic linguistics such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking but also integrates creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and digital literacy. to face global competition, at this time, English language learning has been introduced to children from an early age.

English language learning at the primary and secondary education levels has a central role. One of its roles can form a young generation that is ready to face an increasingly open and diverse world (Wafi & Faruk, 2023). However, in its application, English is an optional subject in the current *Merdeka curriculum*, which means that schools are given the choice to include English as local content or not. The status of English in elementary schools is one of the local content that is not required to be taught (Oktavia et al., 2023).

Elementary school children, especially Grade 5 (age 10-11), are in the concrete operational stage, a stage where they begin to be able to think logically but are limited to real objects or situations, which requires strategies and methods in teaching English. Role-playing and digital media depicting English-based environments can provide experience and deeper understanding. Creating a new atmosphere can increase learner participation and interest (Wihartanti, 2022)

Education in the 21st century not only focuses on competence but also emphasizes skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration or called the 4C, these four skills are needed to maximize future results (Mardhiyah et al., 2021) 21st century learning also emphasizes contextual understanding with real-life applications. Furthermore, there is a change in approach from *Teacher-Centered* to *Student-Centered*, with technology as a tool and learning media, and the integration of various disciplines. Student Centered Learning (SCL) has a special characteristic, namely the focus of learning on the involvement and independence of students in achieving learning objectives. This requires the activeness of students during learning (Aini et al., 2023) Student-Centered learning and the integration of technology are considered essential for creating meaningful, engaging, and flexible learning experiences (Padmadewi et al., 2023).

Although the concept of learning in the 21st century is quite ideal, the reality in the field shows that there are still many elementary school students in Indonesia who have limited English language skills, this is due to the lack of attention to the language. A study conducted by (Jazuly et al., 2019) elementary schools do not have adequate learning resources with methods that still use textbooks, so students have difficulty in applying learning to real life. Based on interviews conducted with fifth-grade teachers in several elementary schools, researchers found that students have varying levels of English proficiency. Some students still have difficulty recognizing English letters, while others can communicate fairly fluently because they take private lessons. Teachers at these schools also highlighted obstacles such as difficulty in pronunciation, limited vocabulary, and weak writing skills.

However, some teachers have used short stories as teaching media. Most teachers mentioned the need for bilingual storybooks that can support language learning and are also related to the real-life stories of students. These storybooks are also expected to have illustrations and be easily accessible to teachers and students. Limited learning resources and the suboptimal integration of character education have resulted in a learning process that does not yet fully support the balanced development of students' competencies and character (Padmadewi et al., 2023). This situation highlights a gap between the demands of 21st-century learning and current teaching practices (Cahyani et al., 2024).

This condition shows the need for a more effective alternative approach, one of which is bilingual learning. Bilingual learning has been shown to support cognitive development, including the ability to absorb and understand knowledge, and improve students' understanding of subject matter (Entigar, 2016). Bilingual education has been shown to support language comprehension while fostering a more meaningful learning experience and strengthening students' communicative and cognitive development (Ariantini et al., 2024; Loviyani et al., 2024). In addition, bilingual learning can also help children learn new languages by integrating their mother tongue as a medium of understanding.

In line with the bilingual learning approach, the utilization of technology in English language teaching is one of the supporting components that need attention in the 21st century era. Digital technology allows students to learn through various media such as audio, visual, video, podcasts, language applications, and educational games that have been adjusted to the students' abilities. Students who have sufficient literacy skills will understand how to search and sort information obtained

in digital media critically while using the information as a support for (Putra & Budiningsih, 2023). In addition, the use of technology presents methods that can increase student activeness and adapt to the character of the *digital native* generation.

In line with this, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) introduced the Merdeka curriculum as the latest curriculum that has been implemented since 2022. The characteristics of the Merdeka curriculum are the project to strengthen the *Pancasila student profile* with the existence of six dimensions that serve as a reference for educators in building character and fostering student competence. In line with policy developments, based on Regulation of the *Permendikdasmen* Number 10 of 2025 concerning Graduate Competency Standards, changes have been made to the learning achievement benchmarks for students. Previously, the Merdeka curriculum had six dimensions which have now been changed to Eight Dimensions of the Graduate Profile. However, the dimension of spirituality is still included in the Eight Dimensions of graduate Profile and remains a key element reflected in the first dimension. The dimension of spirituality refers to individuals who understand and practice religious teachings/beliefs consciously, demonstrating noble behavior in social life by developing attitudes of compassion, honesty, justice, and responsibility consistently in personal and social life, maintaining a balance between knowledge and morality, and building relationships with God Almighty, fellow human beings, and the surrounding environment (*Permendikdasmen Nomor 10 Tahun 2025*).

The term “spirituality” is used in the first dimension of the Eight Dimension of Graduate Profile in this study because it has a broader meaning in international education studies, not only related to religious practices but also including the search for meaning, moral values, and deep self-awareness. Tisdell (2003), states that spirituality in education is a dimension related to the search for meaning, purpose, and connection with oneself, others, nature, and something transcendent. This understanding of the term is in line with the main objective of the Merdeka Curriculum, which focuses on cognitive aspects and also emphasizes character building and fundamental values of students through a more flexible and student-centered learning approach.

The main objective of the Merdeka curriculum is to provide a more flexible, student-centered approach to education based on the essence of *deep learning*. This goal is in line with the principle of deep learning, which also emphasizes deep conceptual understanding and application of knowledge to real life (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, 2025). Anwar (2017), argues that deep learning does not only understand concepts, but also encourages exploration, reflection, and the development of knowledge, which is broader.

Kemendikbudristek stated that the Merdeka curriculum is designed with the aim of creating a mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experience. *Mindful* learning can encourage student awareness in learning, *meaningful* ensures connection to real life, and *joyful* fosters student involvement in learning. In addition, integrating digital technology into the Merdeka curriculum can strengthen deep learning through interactive media that encourages active participation as well as student

curiosity (Suweta, 2023). Therefore, the mastery of English as a global communication language is a special concern in national education policy.

In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools, English is integrated into one of the optional learning subjects, which means that schools can choose to include English in learning or not. In connection with this, the government has made various efforts in carrying out quality learning of English in elementary schools, one of which is by implementing *Permendikbud Regulation Number 12 of 2024* which regulates that in the 2024/2025 to 2026/2027 school years, English is applied as an optional learning subject that can be applied based on school readiness. Then, it will be applied as a compulsory learning subject for every elementary school or equivalent in the 2027/2028 school year.

In integrating spirituality values into English learning, understanding students' characteristics is one of the important things that need to be considered. Grade 5 elementary school children tend to have high curiosity. In addition, in general, children tend to understand language better through concrete activities that include visuals and movement, such as games, songs, and digital stories. In English language learning, basic concepts are things that need to be understood first and then continued with more complex ones periodically. Educators need to design learning strategies that make children directly involved and involve many senses rather than just listening (Lestari et al., 2024).

Based on children's learning characteristics, the strategies used in schools should be designed to be interactive and fun. In today's digital era, the use of technology is a supporting factor for effective learning, especially for English because it allows children to learn interactively. It can be through image

illustrations, animations, audio, and more interesting formats such as illustrated stories, educational videos, and games. Therefore, the use of interesting technology-based learning media is needed today in creating relevant and effective learning.

One of the relevant learning media in today's digital era is storybook. Storybook consists of two English words, story which means story and book which means book. In general, storybooks are defined as storybooks intended for children (Pasaka et al., 2022). The advantages of storybooks in digital form are easy access and a more attractive format. Digital storybooks are available in a more interactive version that allows users to interact like physical books that are not interactive but still provide a reading experience anywhere and anytime (Pasaka et al., 2022). In addition, digital storybooks are more effectively used in language learning, especially through the use of bilingual children's storybooks that can support the acquisition of English in a fun and contextual way (Widyaningrum, 2012).

In connection with this, several studies in Indonesia have developed digital storybooks for learning and character education in elementary schools. For example, research conducted by Arum et al (2024), developed teaching materials based on digital storybooks for Grade 4 elementary school students, but the application is still based on one language, namely Indonesian. In line with this research, Adityas, (2018) also developed a bilingual children's storybook based on caring characters that are aligned with the third dimension of the Pancasila student profile. Furthermore, Salsabila & Sunaryati, (2024) developed picture storybooks to improve students' independent character.

Based on this study, it can be seen that there is still a gap in research on the integration of digital bilingual storybooks that are in line with the first dimension

of the Eight Dimensions of the Graduate Profile, namely the Spirituality dimension, while also supporting English language learning in elementary schools. This study aims to create a digital bilingual storybook that combine character education based on the Eight Dimensions of Graduate Profile, particularly the Spirituality dimension, with English language learning in an innovative, interactive, and technology-based learning medium that not only instills spiritual values but also improves the English language skills of fifth-grade students in elementary schools.

Children's stories were chosen as a strategy in filling this gap because they are not only practical and entertaining, but can also contain Spirituality values in them while being easy to understand through stories and pictures. Picture storybooks can help the learning process because pictures can motivate students so that it can make it easier for students to express their ideas in the form of language (Apriliani & Radia, 2020).

This This study aims to create a digital bilingual storybook in Indonesian and English that highlights the Spirituality dimension of the Eight Dimensions of Graduate Profiles and is intended for Grade 5 elementary school students. Each part of the story included with illustrations in the form of images to help student understanding accompanied by text in Indonesian and English. In its application, this media is expected to improve the English language skills of 5th Grade elementary school students as well as help students understand and practice the values of Spirituality in everyday life.

1.2 Problem Identification

Although English language learning has been introduced from an early age and plays an important role in facing the challenges of the 21st century, its application at the primary school level in Indonesia still has various obstacles. One of the main obstacles is the limited number of relevant, interactive, and contextual learning resources that are able to integrate foreign language mastery with Spirituality values. In addition, the Merdeka curriculum emphasizes the importance of strengthening the Eight Dimensions of Graduate Profiles, including the first dimension of Spirituality, which currently has not been widely integrated in English language learning.

In addition, the characteristics of students in elementary school who are still at the concrete stage require a learning approach that is fun, and based on direct experience. However, traditional approaches and the use of textbooks that are less contextualized still dominate in teaching English. Meanwhile, the utilization of technology and interactive digital media such as digital bilingual storybooks has the potential to improve the language skills of elementary school students while instilling the character values of Eight Dimensions of Graduate Profiles, especially the dimensions Spirituality. Digital storybooks are more effectively used in language learning, especially through the use of bilingual children's storybooks that can support the mastery of English way (Widyaningrum, 2012).

1.3 Limitations

In this research on the creation of learning media, there are limitations in its implementation, namely, first, the main focus is on creating digital bilingual

storybooks that are specifically designed to insert Spirituality values, especially the first dimension of spirituality, into English language learning. From this focus, it causes media that do not yet cover other dimensions of the Eight Dimensions of Graduate Profile. Second, the implementation of digital media in learning requires adequate electronic devices, supporting applications, and stable internet access. However, some elementary schools still do not have adequate technological infrastructure and facilities, which can hinder the use of this learning media. Third, the target audience of this learning media is specifically for Grade 5 elementary schools, so the results of the study have not covered different Grade levels in elementary schools.

1.4 Research Question

From the background explained, several research questions can be concluded in this research, including as follows.

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

1.5 Research Objectives

This research has several objectives, including as follows.

1. To describe how the values of Spirituality are inserted into a digital bilingual storybook in English language learning in Grade 5.
2. To describe the prototype of the digital bilingual storybook with the insertion of Spirituality value for English language learning in Grade 5.
3. To assess the quality of the digital bilingual storybook with the insertion of spirituality value for English language learning in grade 5.

1.6 Research Significance

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This research is expected to contribute to the material development framework in integrating the values of the Eight Dimensions of the Graduate Profile into English language learning for Grade 5 students. Especially in the dimensions of Spirituality with English language learning, and can contribute to the utilization of digital media as an interactive and fun learning tool. The results of this study can also provide new insights in designing and developing relevant open materials for young learners.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

a. For Teacher

This research can provide significant benefits for educators by presenting digital bilingual storybooks as innovative, interactive and fun learning media while integrating technology. Through the integration of bilingual content and character values based on Eight

Dimensions of the Graduate Profile, especially the dimensions of Spirituality, teachers can deliver learning materials more interestingly and relevant to students' real lives, so as to encourage active participation of students in the learning process.

b. For Student

Through a digital bilingual storybook that integrate spiritual values based on Eight Dimensions of the Graduate Profile, students can gain a more engaging, interactive, and meaningful English learning experience. This learning media can help students develop their English skills in authentic contexts and also foster their understanding of spiritual values. The digital visualizations and interactive elements in these storybooks are expected to enhance students' enthusiasm for learning. These storybooks also enable children to learn independently, without the assistance of teachers or adults.

c. For Future Study

This research is expected to be empirical data for future studies, especially in the development of digital media for English language learning that is innovative and interactive, and supports character building based on the values of the Eight Dimensions of the Graduate Profile, dimensions of Spirituality.