

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces five main parts of the study. It contains the background of the study, research questions, purposes of the research, limitation of the research, significances of the research, and definitions of the key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

The appearance of the internet and technological advancements have significantly transformed literacy practices, giving rise to a new paradigm: digital literacy. This emerging concept, as proposed by Hamidah (2021) and Schmar-Dobler (2003), underscores educators' need to act as facilitators and motivators, guiding students toward digital proficiency in the classroom. By integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into English language teaching and learning, teachers can empower students to navigate the digital landscape effectively.

The effectiveness of digital literacy initiatives depends on teachers' careful selection of instructional materials. By utilizing technology to enhance learning, students can develop essential digital literacy skills, opening doors to a lot of English language acquisition opportunities beyond the classroom. Through digital platforms, students can engage in meaningful communication and content creation, fostering a dynamic and immersive language learning experience.

Digital literacy encompasses four core of language skills: Speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Research by Grimshaw, Dungworth, and McKnight (2007) highlights the potential impact of technology on students' reading comprehension.

By emphasizing digital literacy, educators can significantly enhance students' ability to comprehend text, as evidenced by Ertem's (2010) findings on the positive correlation between digital text engagement and reading comprehension.

In the realm of English education, reading skills are important for language acquisition and proficiency. Exposure to a diverse range of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and idiomatic expressions through reading enhances comprehension and interpretation abilities. Proficient readers are better equipped to navigate written texts effectively, a fundamental skill for mastering any language. Moreover, reading helps students recognize subtle language nuances, improving their communication skills. As Lalicic and Dubravac (2021) assert, reading is a basis of academic success, providing students with a valuable tool for acquiring knowledge, information, and entertainment.

The integration of digital literacy and English language skills is a necessary component of navigating the information age. Proficiency in accessing, evaluating, and utilizing digital resources in English empowers individuals to broaden their knowledge and actively participate in the global community. Furthermore, 21st-century education curriculum increasingly emphasizing the development of digital literacy and English language skills as a foundation for students' future success. By mastering these skills, students can not only perform academically but also adapt to the continuously changing demands of the workforce.

However, EFL students often encounter obstacles in developing their reading skills. Alharbi (2022) identifies several challenges faced by EFL learners in Saudi Arabia, including insufficient language knowledge, limited vocabulary, curricular constraints, and a lack of interest and motivation. Additionally, anxiety, lack of

confidence, ineffective pedagogy, and physiological factors can hinder reading skill development. To address these challenges, targeted language instruction, diverse reading materials, and innovative teaching methods are essential to support EFL students' progress.

The digital divide poses a significant concern in education, as not all students have equal access to digital resources and technology. While digital tools can enhance reading experiences through interactive and multimedia resources, students without access to these tools may be at a disadvantage. The absence of digital devices and internet connectivity can limit exposure to diverse reading materials and educational platforms, hindering the development of reading skills. In an era where digital literacy is increasingly crucial, the digital divide may cause inequalities in language proficiency. Thus, Artini et al. (2020) emphasize the need for teacher training in ICT skills and improved facilities to bridge the digital divide in the EFL context.

Furthermore, this research addresses a notable gap in the existing literature, focusing on the experiences and challenges of public junior high school students and teacher in Jambi. While digital literacy and EFL education have been extensively studied, there is a lack of research specifically exploring the unique context of Jambi. This study aims to understand how digital literacy influences EFL reading skill development in Jambi's public junior high schools, investigating students' access, interaction, and utilization of digital resources, and the challenges and opportunities they encounter.

To achieve this, the research employs a qualitative methodology to explore the perceptions and experiences of both students and teachers regarding digital literacy

and its practices toward reading skills development. Qualitative research methods provide the flexibility to capture the nuanced and context-specific insights necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the topic. By exploring how students and teachers in an EFL classroom in Jambi navigate the digital landscape, perceive the impact of digital literacy and its practices on reading skills development, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the field.

1.2 Research Questions

This study focuses on explaining the role of digital literacy and the integration of digital literacy practices in developing students' reading skills based on the perception and application of the English teacher and the perceptions and experiences of the students. Therefore, based on the background of the study, the researcher formulates two research questions as follows:

1. How does the English teacher at the selected public junior high school in Jambi perceive the role of digital literacy and integrate digital literacy practices in developing students' reading skills?
2. How do students at the selected public junior high school in Jambi perceive and engage in digital literacy practices to develop their reading skills?

1.3 Purposes of the Research

Based on the research questions above, the purposes of this research are:

1. The purpose of this study is to explain how the English teacher at the selected public junior high school perceives the role of digital literacy and integrates digital literacy practices in developing students' reading skills in order to gain insights into the teachers' perception and integration of digital

literacy itself as well as the integration of its practices in the English classroom.

2. The purpose of this study is to explain how students at the selected public junior high school perceive and experience digital literacy practices to improve their reading skills in order to gain insights into their perspectives and experiences in digital literacy practices for developing their reading skills.

1.4 Limitation of the Research

Based on the research questions, the researcher limits the research by focusing on gaining comprehensive insights into the role of digital literacy and its practices in shaping the students' reading skills at SMPN 7 Kota Jambi, with a dual perspective from the English teacher and the students.

1.5 Significances of the Research

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of English language education, particularly in integrating digital literacy into the teaching and learning of reading skills in EFL contexts.

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

The findings of this study are expected to enrich the body of knowledge related to digital literacy and reading skill development in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. By exploring both teachers' and students' perceptions and practices, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital literacy supports reading comprehension, fosters learning motivation, and promotes autonomous learning. The results may also serve as a reference for future researchers interested in examining the integration of digital literacy into language

learning and literacy education. Furthermore, by addressing the lack of localized research in the Indonesian EFL context, particularly in Jambi's public junior high schools, this study fills an important gap in the literature and offers contextually grounded evidence that strengthens the theoretical discourse on the role of digital literacy in shaping students' reading skills.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

From a practical point of view, this research is expected to offer valuable insights and implications for English teachers, students, educational institutions, and future researchers in the field of education.

1. For English Teachers

This study provides valuable insights for English teachers on how digital literacy can be integrated effectively into classroom activities to enhance students' reading comprehension and learning motivation. It may also help teachers design more engaging reading materials and activities by utilizing digital platforms and media.

2. For Students

The findings are expected to encourage students to engage more actively in digital literacy practices to improve their reading skills and to foster independent learning habits. Students can learn how to use digital resources and applications more effectively to support their reading comprehension and self-directed study.

3. For Educational Institutions

The results of this research may serve as an input for schools and curriculum developers to strengthen digital literacy integration in the English learning curriculum, particularly in reading instruction. It can help institutions promote the

use of technology-enhanced learning environments that support students' literacy growth and digital competence.

4. For future Researchers

This research can serve as a foundation and reference for future studies focusing on digital literacy and reading skill development in various educational levels and contexts. It provides empirical insights that may guide subsequent research on the pedagogical use of digital tools in language and literacy education.

1.6 Definitions of the Key Terms

There are several terms used in this research. To provide conceptual clarity and ensure consistency with the theoretical framework, several key terms used in this research are defined as follows:

1. Digital Literacy

In this study, digital literacy refers to learners' ability to access, evaluate, and use digital tools and resources effectively and responsibly to support English learning, especially in reading comprehension. As defined by Gilster (1997), it involves understanding and using information from multiple digital sources, while Martin and Grudziecki (2006) emphasize awareness, attitudes, and the ability to manage and synthesize digital information. Ng (2012) further includes technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional dimensions. In this research context, digital literacy is reflected through students' use of tools such as Canva, YouTube, ChatGPT, and online texts to comprehend and interpret English materials, enhance engagement, and develop independent learning.

2. Reading Skills

Reading skills are defined as the cognitive and linguistic abilities that enable students to comprehend and interpret written English texts. Perfetti (2001) describes reading as a process of constructing meaning, while Urquhart and Weir (2014) and Snow (2002) view it as an interactive act between text and reader knowledge. In this study, reading skills also include engaging with multimodal texts such as videos and visuals, allowing students to understand and analyze information across diverse digital formats that support motivation and comprehension in English reading.

3. EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Context

The EFL context refers to settings where English is learned as a foreign language and not used for daily communication. In this research, the context is SMPN 7 Kota Jambi, where English instruction integrates digital literacy to bridge students' language limitations. Following Jenkins (2009) and Weininger (2020), this integration enables learners to participate in digital and social literacy practices that foster comprehension, collaboration, and critical engagement in reading.