CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In an era characterized by rapid technological innovation, digital literacy has become essential across various fields. This chapter provides the background of the research, including the research questions and purposes, the significance of the research, the theoretical framework, the hypothesis, and a review of previous studies.

A. Research Background

In an era of rapid technological advancement, digital literacy has become increasingly crucial in various domains, including education, enabling people to access information at a speed and with the convenience that was previously impossible. Furthermore, multiple platforms, including digital libraries (Google Scholar, ProQuest, JSTOR), social media (Twitter, Instagram, TikTok), search engines (Google, Bing), and educational applications (Kahoot!, Quizlet, and Duolingo), have expanded the methods in which information can be consumed.

These developments demonstrate how digital literacy skills—which include the ability to effectively access, evaluate, and apply digital information in both academic and non-academic contexts—are becoming increasingly important. Numerous facets of digital literacy and its impact on educational achievement have been examined in earlier research. For example, the ability to effectively use technology, conduct information searches, and communicate on digital platforms is all components of digital literacy, which is essential for contemporary education (Fajri et al., 2024). Because they were raised in a technologically oriented atmosphere, Generation Z (Gen Z) stands out among the current generation for its digital orientation.

According to Wajdi (2024), Generation Z has a strong digital orientation and uses multiple gadgets simultaneously, which enhances their multitasking skills. Consequently, their ease with technology facilitates easy communication and information retrieval, promoting a fast-paced society. Another assertion by Buchan

(2024) is that programs aimed at improving digital literacy frequently incorporate elements that emphasize ethical considerations and critical analysis in the consumption of digital content. For example, gamified learning techniques are utilized by platforms like Quizlet, Socrative, and Kahoot! to enhance student engagement. At the same time, digital textbooks and Google Forms provide self-paced learning and immediate feedback (Pratiwi, 2023).

Notwithstanding its advantages, problems such as the digital divide and the need for teacher preparation persist, including the digital gap, disparities in technical skills, and the requirement for robust infrastructure support. Matthews (2021). The availability of digital resources has not always translated into improved reading outcomes. Critical reading comprehension is a challenge for many Gen Z students, particularly when it comes to identifying trustworthy and untrustworthy sources. This issue is exacerbated in academic settings when students are expected to engage with texts in a meaningful way, integrate their knowledge, and reach well-founded conclusions. Furthermore, despite their proficiency in digital communication and navigation, Gen Z still struggles with understanding critical reading, particularly in academic settings, according to Pramerta (2024). For EFL learners, low motivation, a limited vocabulary, and a lack of prior knowledge are significant obstacles to critical reading comprehension (Nanda, 2020).

The role of digital literacy in education has been explored by authors such as Martínez-Bravo et al. (2015) and Pratiwi (2023). However, little research has been conducted on the relationship between digital literacy and critical reading comprehension among EFL learners, particularly in Indonesia. Higher education students, including those enrolled in UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung's English Education Department, are particularly affected by this. Understanding how digital literacy skills impact critical reading comprehension is crucial for creating effective teaching strategies, especially as digital tools become increasingly integrated into academic programs. Thus, the purpose of this study is to look into the relationship between critical reading comprehension and digital literacy skills among EFL fourth-

semester students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. By filling this knowledge gap, the study aims to shed light on how digital literacy skills impact reading outcomes and provide valuable suggestions for enhancing EFL instruction in technologically advanced classrooms.

B. Research Questions

The study's foundation is the research question, which directs the investigation of the connection between EFL students' critical reading comprehension and digital literacy. The study aims to answer the following primary questions in light of the importance of digital tools in influencing learning outcomes, especially in critical reading comprehension:

1. What are EFL university students' digital literacy skills?
2. What is EFL university students' critical reading comprehension?
3. To what extent do digital literacy skills correlate with critical reading comprehension in English among EFL students in the English Education Department of the Tarbiyah Faculty of UIN SGD Bandung?

C. Research Purposes

Based on the above questions, this research aims to obtain three objectives:

1. To describe the digital literacy skills of these students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.
2. To describe the critical reading comprehension abilities of these students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.
3. To analyze the extent to which digital literacy skills correlate with critical reading comprehension among EFL learners in the English Education Department at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

D. Research significance

This study holds significance for several key stakeholders in the field of education, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning:

1. Theoretical Significance

By providing insights into the cognitive and metacognitive processes of digital text interpretation, the study enhances theoretical frameworks on how digital literacy abilities affect EFL students' critical reading comprehension. These shall be done by contextualizing its significance in critical reading comprehension, especially in non-native English-speaking environments; it advances our understanding of digital literacy and is consistent with studies such as Martinez-Bravo (2020) and Pratiwi (2023). While previous research has addressed digital literacy and critical reading comprehension separately, this study fills the gap by examining their relationship and providing a thorough understanding of how they both impact EFL learning environments.

2. Practical Significances

The results will provide EFL teachers with practical suggestions for incorporating digital technologies into their lessons in a way that will improve students' reading abilities. Understanding how digital literacy impacts critical reading comprehension enables schools to create targeted interventions that enhance students' academic achievement, particularly in online learning environments. The study provides a foundation for incorporating digital literacy elements into the EFL curriculum, ensuring that students learn how to effectively navigate and comprehend digital texts. Thus, the results can be used by education policymakers to develop policies that support efforts for fair access to digital resources and teacher preparation programs by promoting digital literacy as a core skill.
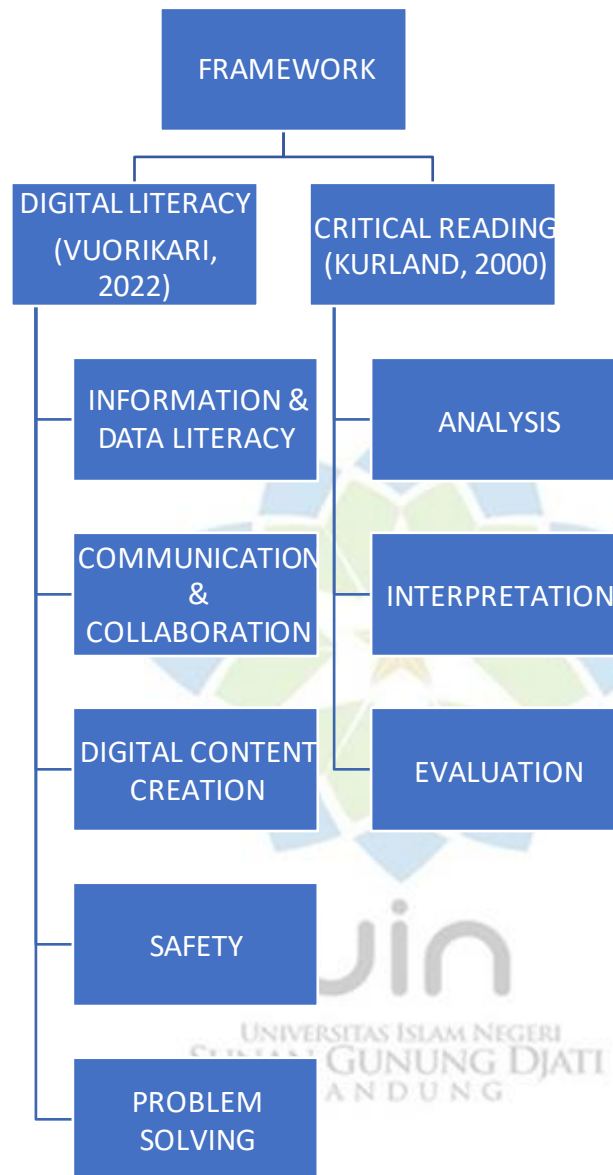
E. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the theoretical relationships between digital literacy and critical reading comprehension in EFL learning contexts. Higher digital literacy enhances a student's ability to comprehend complex texts by enabling them to navigate online resources, identify credible information, and synthesize knowledge.

Digital literacy is a multidimensional notion that includes media, information, technology, communication, and software and hardware expertise in a variety of forms and levels, as this variable consists of five components by DigComp 2.2 (Vuorikari, 2022), such as Information & Data Literacy, Communication & Collaboration, Digital Content Creation, Safety, and Problem Solving.

The measurement of this variable in this study adapts from the DigComp 2.2, Digital Literacy Test Question, and WBQ National: Foundation KS4 from BBC Bitesize. The paradigm aligns with the socio-cognitive theory of learning, which emphasizes the interaction between personal abilities, resources, and learning objectives. According to Sari et al. (2024), students with higher digital literacy demonstrate stronger reading comprehension abilities due to their enhanced capacity to access, evaluate, and process digital information.

Whereas the term 'critical reading' is often associated with individuals trying to show why their interpretation of some idea or observation is better than someone else's, it is perceived as a formula but also as a social process. Wallace (1999) highlights that a reader's critical reading skills grow when they believe they can evaluate each idea. Furthermore, according to Kurland (2000), critical reading is an analytical process that involves text analysis, interpretation, and evaluation, as it is impossible to separate the use of reading strategies from the development of critical reading skills. The critical reading practice material in this study adopts exercises from 501 Critical Reading Questions (2017).

Figure 1. 1 Conceptual Framework

F. Research Scope

This study's scope includes the research place, object, and subject. First, the setting is fourth-semester students of the English Education Department at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. Second, this study examines the relationship between students' digital literacy skills and their critical reading comprehension. Third, the study is conducted

in Indonesia, focusing on EFL learners who are frequently exposed to digital resources such as BBC Learning, Duolingo, Quizlet, and Kahoot within their instructional activities.

The participants are selected from fourth-semester students who actively engage in English classrooms and frequently utilize digital learning platforms. These students are considered appropriate subjects because they are regularly involved with online reading materials and interactive digital tools, making them ideal for investigating the connection between digital literacy and critical reading comprehension.

Regarding research instruments, the measurement of digital literacy skills in this study adopts the Digital Literacy Test Question – WBQ National: Foundation KS4 from BBC Bitesize. The adoption of this standardized test ensures a more objective, comprehensive, and internationally aligned measurement of digital literacy skills. As for critical reading practice material, this study adopts exercises from. Unlike other similar studies that typically use adapted instruments, this study incorporates a formal digital literacy test, providing a stronger empirical basis for analyzing the correlation between digital literacy and critical reading comprehension

G. Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and research objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):**

   There is no positive correlation between digital literacy skills and critical reading comprehension among EFL fourth-semester students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

2. **H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):**

There is a positive correlation between digital literacy skills and critical reading comprehension among EFL fourth-semester students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

Two hypotheses are formally included in a statistical hypothesis-testing problem. The alternative hypothesis (H_a) and the null hypothesis (H_0) are these two theories. The first step in statistical hypothesis testing is to believe the null hypothesis and then determine whether the data supports the alternative hypothesis, Ha, sufficiently to change your conviction in H0.

H. Previous studies

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between digital literacy and reading comprehension, particularly within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. These studies provide an essential foundation for the present research, yet also reveal gaps that justify further investigation. A significant study by Ahmed and Akyıldız demonstrates that both teachers and students benefit greatly from the successful integration of digital literacy into EFL instruction (Ahmed, 2022). The authors argue that teachers proficient in digital literacy can offer their students more educational options, thereby enhancing their overall educational experience.

Sari et al. (2024) conducted a correlational study among Indonesian university students to explore the link between digital literacy and general reading comprehension. Their findings indicated a moderate positive correlation (r = 0.562), suggesting that students with higher digital literacy skills tended to perform better in reading comprehension tasks. However, their study measured general reading comprehension using TOEFL-style questions rather than critical reading, leaving open the question of whether the same relationship applies to higher-order reading skills.

One relevant study is by Frima (2022), titled "A Study on Students' Digital Literacy in Critical Reading Comprehension at SMAN 5 Pekanbaru," published in the Jurnal Kependidikan DISCOVERY, which investigates the digital literacy skills of second-

grade students at SMAN 5 Pekanbaru, focusing on their reading comprehension. The research involved 35 students from class XI MIPA 2 as participants, using an open-ended Test designed around four key digital literacy indicators: operational skills, thinking skills, collaboration skills, and awareness skills. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the level of digital literacy among students and its impact on their ability to interact with and comprehend digital content. To determine the students' strengths and shortcomings in digital literacy, the researchers employed a case study design to analyze their responses.

In a different context, Marsanah et al. (2023) investigated digital literacy and reading comprehension among Indonesian high school students using a self-reported digital literacy Test and TOEFL reading tests. Their study reported a robust correlation ($r = 0.9789$), which may have been influenced by the use of self-perception measures and a smaller sample size (34 participants). Unlike Marsanah's study, the present research employs objective tests for both digital literacy and critical reading, providing a more accurate assessment of students' actual competencies. Silvhiany (2021) examined the interplay between digital literacy and critical reading in the context of digital academic materials. Their qualitative analysis revealed that students often struggled to evaluate the credibility and bias of online sources despite being frequent users of digital platforms. This supports the notion that functional digital skills (e.g., operating devices) do not necessarily translate into higher-order critical reading abilities—a distinction directly addressed in the current study. On an international level, Luo (2025) analyzed digital literacy as a predictor of critical reading performance among EFL learners in China. The study highlighted that students with stronger digital information-evaluation skills were significantly better at identifying argument structure and author intent in academic texts. Luo's findings highlight the global significance of integrating digital and critical literacy in EFL education, aligning with the objectives of this study.

Additionally, Khabiri (2012) investigated the role of critical reading instruction in improving reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners. While not directly

focused on digital literacy, their research underscored the challenges students face in evaluative reading tasks, reinforcing the need to examine whether digital literacy can support the development of such higher-order skills. These studies collectively demonstrate that digital literacy and reading skills are interrelated across various educational contexts. However, most prior research has either focused on general reading comprehension rather than critical reading, relied on self-reported measures of digital literacy, or involved small sample sizes. The present study addresses these gaps by employing objective assessments of both digital literacy and critical reading comprehension among a larger cohort of Indonesian university students, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of their relationship in an academic EFL setting.

The results showed that while most children had a basic understanding of digital literacy components, such as cognitive and presentation abilities, there were still issues with areas like creativity and safety. To enhance critical reading comprehension in academic settings, this study emphasizes the importance of developing critical digital literacy skills.

Another study by Zuhri (2021), titled "Digital Literacy: Text Credibility on Critical Reading Material," investigated the role of digital literacy in assessing text credibility and its impact on critical reading skills. Conducted at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, the study involved 76 students from the English Literature Department, specifically third - semester students taking a Critical Reading course. This qualitative study collected data through observations and Tests to analyze students' ability to evaluate online texts for academic purposes. The findings indicated that while students easily accessed digital texts, many lacked the skills to properly assess text credibility. The researchers introduced four-step credibility checks to help students differentiate between reliable and unreliable sources. The study concluded that enhancing digital literacy directly improves students' critical reading abilities, including their ability to process, analyze, and comprehend digital texts.

While this study highlights the importance of digital literacy in critical reading, it does not explicitly examine its direct correlation with reading comprehension performance in broader EFL learning contexts. Therefore, the present research seeks to address this gap by analyzing the correlation between digital literacy and reading comprehension among 4th-semester EFL students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. By doing so, this study aims to provide empirical data on how digital literacy influences students' reading comprehension, contributing to the development of effective digital-based EFL reading strategies.