

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the study. It outlines the background and elaborates on the research questions, objectives, significance, and scope. Additionally, the conceptual framework and a review of the related literature are also included.

#### **A. Research Background**

In today's technological and information age, digital literacy has emerged as one of the most essential skills, particularly for students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The ability to access, evaluate, and utilize information effectively through digital platforms is not only essential for academic success but also for functioning in a globalised, technology-driven world. In EFL contexts, digital literacy enhances students' ability to engage with authentic texts, participate in online learning environments, and develop language skills independently.

However, a critical issue in utilizing digital literacy effectively lies in students' underdeveloped essential reading skills. While students may have access to vast amounts of digital information, their ability to analyse, evaluate, and interpret this content critically is often lacking. Critical reading involves more than understanding the text; it requires the ability to question sources, identify bias, and assess the reliability of digital information. This skill is crucial for EFL learners, who must navigate content not only in a second language but also in a complex digital landscape. (Kurniati, 2024).

Empirical evidence has highlighted this challenge. Rini and Nabhan (2023) found that EFL instructors acknowledge the difficulty students face in critically engaging with digital texts and stressed the need for more explicit instruction in critical digital literacy. Similarly, a study by Maspufah et al. (2025) demonstrated that integrating digital tools, such as Kahoot, into reading activities significantly improved students' motivation and critical engagement with texts. However,

students often struggle with analysing digital content deeply due to limited exposure to critical thinking instruction and the lack of structured strategies for critical reading.

Previous studies have indicated that digital literacy and reading skills are generally positively related. For example, Sari et al. (2024) reported a significant correlation between digital literacy and the reading comprehension abilities of EFL university students. Likewise, Agustiani (2022) reported a similar pattern in high school students. However, these studies primarily focused on general reading comprehension rather than the higher-order skills involved in critical reading, such as evaluation, synthesis, and inference.

Moreover, little research has examined this relationship in *pesantren*-based higher education contexts. EFL students from *pesantren* backgrounds often have different experiences with digital technology and reading habits shaped by their Islamic boarding school education. These unique characteristics influence the way they develop and apply digital literacy and critical reading skills. In addition to the limited studies on critical reading and EFL university students with a *pesantren* background, another reason for selecting this sample is their distinctive literacy practices. Students from *pesantren* are accustomed to traditional forms of literacy such as reading and interpreting classical Islamic texts, which often emphasize memorization and literal understanding rather than analytical or evaluative skills. When they enter university, especially in the context of EFL, these students face a significant transition, as academic literacy demands higher-order skills such as evaluating, synthesizing, and critically analyzing information. Furthermore, *pesantren* education generally provides limited exposure to digital technologies and English academic reading materials, making the integration of digital literacy and critical reading even more challenging. Considering the growing number of *pesantren* graduates enrolled in higher education, especially in English education departments, examining how their educational background influences the relationship between digital literacy and critical reading becomes increasingly necessary (Indah et al., 2022).

For this reason, the present research aims to examine the relationship between digital literacy and critical reading skills among fourth-semester EFL students enrolled in the English Education Department of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. This study specifically focuses on learners with a *pesantren* background, addressing an existing gap in the literature and offering a more comprehensive understanding of how digital literacy influences the development of critical reading skills within this unique context. The results of this investigation are expected to support the enhancement of teaching practices and inform the development of more effective learning strategies that integrate digital literacy into EFL reading instruction.

### **B. Research Questions**

Based on the background described earlier, this study is designed to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent are digital literacy skills among EFL university students with *pesantren* background?
2. To what extent are critical reading skills among EFL university students with *pesantren* background?
3. Is there any correlation between digital literacy and critical reading skills among EFL university students with *pesantren* background?

### **C. Research Purposes**

In line with the research questions outlined earlier, this study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To identify digital literacy skills among EFL university students with *pesantren* background.
2. To determine critical reading skills among EFL university students with *pesantren* background.
3. To examine the correlation between digital literacy and critical reading skills among EFL university students with *pesantren* background.

#### **D. Research Significance**

This research is expected to contribute theoretically and practically:

1. Theoretically, this research provides information about the relationship between digital literacy and critical reading skills among EFL students. This study investigates the impact of students' proficiency in digital literacy on their ability to critically analyse and evaluate texts. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for future research in the field of digital literacy and critical reading.
2. Practically, educators can emphasize the importance of integrating digital literacy into reading instruction, enabling them to develop more effective teaching strategies that foster critical reading skills. For students, increased digital literacy can contribute to improved critical reading skills, allowing them to engage with texts more analytically.

#### **E. Research Scope**

This study investigates the correlation between digital literacy and critical reading skills among EFL university students from Islamic boarding schools. Specifically, the research sample consisted of fourth-semester students of the English Language Education Department at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung in the 2023/2024 academic year. According to Paul and Elder (2014), critical reading consists of several indicators, one of which is evaluation. Similarly, students' digital literacy skills are also assessed through evaluation indicators. Digital literacy data were collected using a Likert-based questionnaire distributed to students. Meanwhile, data on critical reading skills were obtained from a test.

#### **F. Conceptual Framework**

Before discussing the conceptual framework diagram, it is important to understand the relationship between digital literacy skills and critical reading skills.

This chart will illustrate the interaction between two key variables in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). By highlighting this relationship, readers can more easily understand how digital literacy contributes to the development of critical reading skills. Here is the framework for this research.

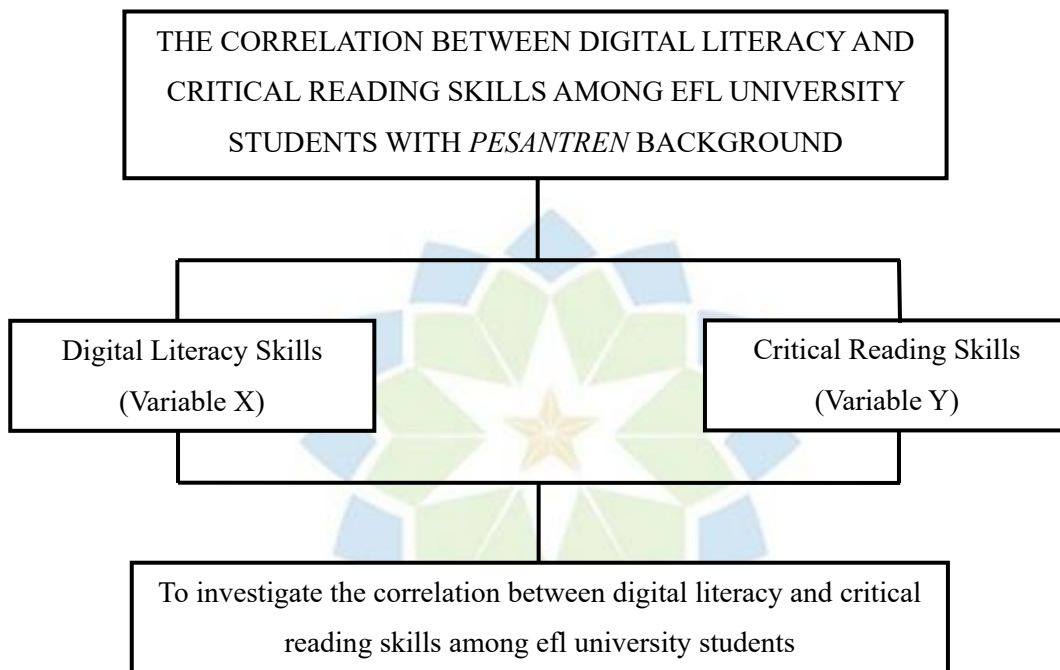


Figure 1.1 The Framework thoughts of this research

This framework focuses on the correlation between Digital Literacy Skills (Variable X) and Critical Reading Skills (Variable Y) among EFL university students. In the digital era, digital literacy is becoming increasingly important as it equips students with the ability to access, evaluate, and utilize digital resources effectively. Critical reading skills also play an important role for EFL university students as they navigate complex texts and engage with academic materials that require comprehension, analysis, and evaluation.

Digital Literacy is broadly defined as the ability to use digital technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). It encompasses several dimensions, including technical proficiency, information literacy, and cognitive skills necessary to process digital content. Digital literacy is

not only about operational skills but also involves critical thinking and ethical considerations when interacting with digital information (Hague & Payton, 2010). These multifaceted skills are essential for EFL learners, who often rely on digital devices and online resources to support their learning. Moreover, Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) explains that individuals constantly process vast amounts of information in digital environments. Those with strong digital literacy skills can better manage cognitive load, enabling them to analyze and assess the credibility of sources effectively.

Meanwhile, Critical Reading refers to the ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate texts with a questioning mindset (Paul, R., & Elder, 2014). It involves identifying the author's arguments, detecting bias, and assessing the reliability and relevance of information. Critical reading is particularly challenging for EFL students due to language barriers and unfamiliarity with the cultural or disciplinary context embedded in academic texts (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Additionally, current advances in digital literacy necessitate that EFL students develop critical reading skills for a range of digital texts. This adds to the level of difficulty and the challenges they face.

According to Luke & Freebody (1997) in their Four Resources Model, readers take on the role of text analysts, meaning they must be able to critically examine texts from multiple perspectives. In the digital era, where information can be manipulated or presented with bias, critical reading depends heavily on digital literacy, particularly in navigating, evaluating, and interpreting digital texts. Therefore, examining sources and comparing information from various digital platforms is critical reading in this digital age. (Leu et al., 2011).

Several theoretical perspectives support the correlation between digital literacy and critical reading skills. Potter (2004) in Media Literacy Theory states that individuals with high digital literacy levels are more capable of identifying misinformation and bias in digital content. Similarly, Anderson & Krathwohl (2001), in their revised Bloom's Taxonomy, highlight that critical reading requires

higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating, which are closely linked to digital literacy competencies.

The goal of this research is to investigate the correlation between digital literacy and critical reading skills among EFL university students. As students engage with digital texts, their ability to navigate, filter, and analyse information contributes to the development of their critical reading skills. For example, the ability to discern credible sources online fosters evaluative reading skills, while the use of annotation tools can enhance text analysis and interpretation. Moreover, students with high digital literacy are more adept at employing strategies such as keyword searches and cross-referencing, which align with critical reading practices (Leu et al., 2011).

### **G. Hypothesis**

The study presents a set of hypotheses derived from a theoretical correlational investigation into the relationship between digital literacy and critical reading skills.

1. Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_a$ ): There is a significant correlation between digital literacy and critical reading skills among EFL university students with a pesantren background.
2. Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): There is no significant correlation between digital literacy and critical reading skills among EFL university students with a pesantren background.

### **H. Previous Studies**

In recent years, numerous researchers have investigated the connection between digital literacy and students' reading abilities. The first study written by Agustiani (2022) with the title "The Correlation between Digital Literacy and Students' Reading Comprehension at Eleventh Grade of Senior High School 1 Jambi," the study examined how digital literacy affects reading comprehension. Using a descriptive research method with a correlational approach, the study involved 32 students, and data were collected through tests and questionnaires. The findings

revealed a strong and meaningful relationship between digital literacy and students' reading comprehension, with digital literacy rated very high and reading comprehension as good. The study emphasises the importance of digital skills in improving students' reading abilities.

The second study, written by Widiarti (2023) and titled "The Correlation between Digital Literacy and Students' Critical Thinking on Reading Mastery," found a robust positive correlation ( $r = 0.993$ ) between digital literacy and critical thinking on reading mastery among sixth-semester English Education students at UIN Salatiga. While 93% of students demonstrated high digital literacy, critical thinking skills varied, with 46% scoring above average and 54% scoring below average. The results highlight the significant role of digital literacy in improving critical reading skills.

The third study, conducted by Fadila (2024) with the title "The Correlation Between Students' Digital Literacy Competence and Their Reading Comprehension," examined the connection between digital literacy and the reading comprehension abilities of ninth-grade students at SMPN 1 Bandar Sribhawono. Using a quantitative correlation design, the study involved 54 students and collected data through questionnaires and tests. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation ( $p = 0.004$ ), indicating a strong relationship between digital literacy skills and reading comprehension.

The fourth study, "A Correlation between Digital Literacy and EFL Students' Reading Comprehension at Higher Education," was written by Sari et al. (2024). This study examines the connection between digital literacy and reading comprehension among college students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This study, which employed a correlational methodology and a saturated sample of 25 fifth-semester students from the University of Riau Kepulauan, found a substantial correlation between reading comprehension and higher levels of digital literacy. At a significance level of 5%, data analysis using Pearson's  $r$  indicates that the  $r$ -count value ( $0.562$ )  $>$  the  $r$ -table value ( $0.039$ ). According to this

study, incorporating digital tools into instruction can help students develop both their reading comprehension and computer skills simultaneously.

The fifth study, “The Correlation Between English Digital Literacy with Reading Comprehension,” was written by Marsanah et al. (2023). The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between English digital literacy and reading comprehension among eleventh-grade students at Nurul Hikmah High School in Bogor during the first semester of the 2023–2024 school year. A quantitative technique employing a correlational methodology was used to collect data from 34 randomly selected students during June and July 2023. With a correlation value of  $r_{xy} = 0.9789$ , the analysis's findings demonstrate a strong positive relationship between reading comprehension and digital literacy in English. The results of the coefficient of determination test show that reading comprehension accounts for 95.83% of students' digital literacy, indicating a significant positive correlation between the two variables.

The last study, “Digital Literacy and Reading Comprehension Achievement: A Correlation Study” by Belingga et al. (2025). This study examines the relationship between digital literacy and reading comprehension among 99 aspiring teachers in their fifth semester of the English Education Program at Raden Fatah State Islamic University, Palembang. According to the study's findings, individuals' reading comprehension is moderate, but their digital literacy is strong. Digital literacy and reading comprehension had a very weak and non-significant link, according to data analysis utilizing regression analysis, Pearson correlation, and descriptive statistics.

Based on various previous studies conducted, it is evident that there is a significant relationship between digital literacy and reading comprehension among students at different educational levels. These studies demonstrate that high digital literacy can contribute to enhanced reading abilities, encompassing both general comprehension and critical thinking skills. Nevertheless, no research has specifically examined the relationship between digital literacy and critical reading skills, particularly among EFL students with a *pesantren* background. Unlike

previous studies, this study focuses more on the correlation between digital literacy and critical reading skills among EFL students from *pesantren*, which is expected to provide new and in-depth insights into the importance of digital literacy in developing critical reading skills in higher education settings.

