

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as an introduction to the research, highlighting the initial discussion of this thesis, which argues that integrating digital literacy into English learning can improve elementary school students' critical thinking skills. Therefore, this section introduces the background, research questions, research objectives, and research contributions.

1.1 Background of the research

Digital literacy has become a crucial skill for every individual, including children, to learn. Digital literacy encompasses not only the ability to use technology effectively and efficiently, but also a deep understanding of how information is collected, disseminated, and evaluated. This skill is crucial in the context of education, particularly in English lessons at the elementary school level. As a fundamental competency for students, digital literacy can help them think critically about the information they receive and use, ultimately improving their critical thinking skills.

The importance of digital literacy in elementary education is increasingly recognized in various studies (Sari & Wijaya, 2020). Digital literacy consists of students' abilities to understand, evaluate, and use information from various digital sources, which is highly relevant in the rapidly evolving information age. Through digital literacy, students not only receive information but also critique it. This plays a role in developing critical thinking skills, especially in English lessons (Ahmad & Mustafa, 2021).

Learning in elementary schools still faces challenges in integrating technology effectively and efficiently. One solution to this problem is to improve students' digital literacy through technology-based learning updates, including in this case the use of technology in English learning. Students will not only gain language knowledge, but also be trained to filter information, evaluate arguments, and make better decisions, which are the core of critical thinking. In this case, it is important to understand how digital literacy can be applied to improve students' critical thinking.

According to Piaget (1972), students' cognitive abilities develop through a series of stages in which they actively construct knowledge based on their experiences and interactions with the environment. Piaget emphasized that learning occurs when students engage in the processes of assimilation and accommodation, which enable them to adapt their mental structures to new information. In the context of digital literacy, these cognitive processes can be stimulated through the use of digital technologies that encourage exploration, experimentation, and problem-solving. When students interact with digital platforms, they not only consume information but also organize, interpret, and construct knowledge in meaningful ways. This engagement with digital media supports the development of critical thinking, as students are challenged to evaluate the credibility of information and make reasoned judgments. Therefore, this study aims to explore how digital literacy practices can influence the growth of students' critical thinking skills in English language learning. By examining how technology-based learning environments support cognitive development, this study seeks to highlight the role of digital literacy as a catalyst for deeper understanding and intellectual growth in the modern classroom.

SD Laboratorium UPI Cibiru is one of the schools that implements a digital technology-based curriculum to support modern learning. This school integrates various digital devices and platforms into classroom activities to increase student engagement and understanding. As a model school under the auspices of the Indonesian University of Education, this school also serves as a place for educational research and innovation. The implementation of a digital curriculum allows students to access interactive and multimedia learning materials that support language development. This study focuses on examining the effect of digital literacy on students' critical thinking skills in English learning. This study aims to identify how students use digital media to analyze, evaluate, and create information during English lessons. The results of this study are expected to provide a clearer understanding of the relationship between digital literacy and critical thinking. Furthermore, these findings can be valuable input for teachers and policymakers in improving English learning through technology-based

education.

Critical thinking skills are crucial in English language learning, as they enable students to analyze, evaluate, and interpret various types of texts critically and thoughtfully (Nation & Newton, 1997). These skills enable learners to go beyond surface-level understanding by questioning ideas, identifying assumptions, and forming reasoned conclusions based on evidence. In the modern educational context, where digital media and online information dominate, critical thinking becomes increasingly important to help students distinguish between credible and unreliable sources. However, the development of critical thinking cannot be separated from strong digital literacy skills, as students need to know how to access, assess, and utilize digital information effectively. Digital literacy empowers learners to navigate digital platforms, understand multimodal texts, and engage critically with online content. It also supports students in producing their own digital texts, such as essays, presentations, or media projects that demonstrate logical reasoning and creativity. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the relationship between digital literacy and critical thinking skills in English language learning, with the aim of understanding how digital competencies contribute to students' analytical, evaluative, and reflective abilities. By investigating this relationship, this study hopes to provide insights into effective teaching strategies that integrate technology to enhance higher-order thinking skills in the English language classroom.

This research is expected to contribute to the fields of education and linguistics by providing valuable insights into the role of digital literacy in improving students' critical thinking skills in English learning. These findings will offer practical implications for teachers and curriculum developers to integrate digital literacy into classroom practice more effectively. By understanding how digital devices affect students' analytical and evaluative skills, educators can design more engaging and meaningful English learning activities. This research will also provide a clearer picture of how digital literacy affects students' cognitive development at SD Laboratorium UPI Cibiru. Furthermore, the results can guide teachers in fostering independent and reflective learners through

technology-based learning. For curriculum developers, this research highlights the need to align learning objectives with 21st-century skills. This research emphasizes that digital literacy should not only focus on technical skills but also on cognitive aspects and critical thinking. Ultimately, this research aims to support the creation of a more holistic and modern English learning framework that integrates language proficiency, technology use, and higher-order thinking.

According to Krashen (1982), students' language skills can develop through exposure to authentic and meaningful language. In the context of digital literacy, students' language skills can develop through the use of digital technology to access and process language information. Therefore, this study examined how digital literacy and critical thinking skills improving English Skills of Students. Digital platforms such as videos, online articles, and interactive applications provide students with real-world language input that enhances comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Through interaction with a variety of digital texts, students can analyze language use in various contexts while developing the ability to critically evaluate information. Thus, digital literacy not only supports language development but also fosters higher-order critical thinking skills that are essential for successful English learning.

This research used a qualitative research method with a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach. This research is conducted at SD Laboratorium UPI Cibiru, with 6th grade students as research subjects. This research is expected to provide a clearer picture of the influence of digital literacy on students' critical thinking skills in English learning. The Classroom Action research design involved several cycles consisting of planning, action, observation and reflection to improve the learning process continuously. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation to gain comprehensive insights into students' learning experiences. The findings of this research are expected to be a reference for teachers in implementing digital-based learning strategies that effectively improve critical thinking skills in English classes.

Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the field of education and linguistics, as well as provide implications for teachers and curriculum developers to include digital literacy in English learning. In addition, this research can also provide a clearer picture of the influence of digital literacy on students' critical thinking skills in English learning at SD Laboratorium UPI Cibiru.

1.2 Research questions

Digital literacy not only helps students understand the use of technology, but also equips them with the skills to analyze, evaluate, and use information critically. This is especially relevant in learning English in elementary schools, where in-depth understanding and critical analysis of texts are important aspects of language acquisition.

Integrating digital literacy into the classroom can help students access a variety of digital educational resources, broaden their perspectives, and stimulate critical thinking as they evaluate the information they receive. Furthermore, digital literacy offers innovative new methods to support a more interactive and immersive learning process, which can help students achieve a stronger understanding of the English language.

However, to understand more deeply how digital literacy can be integrated effectively, further study is needed to determine the appropriate integration and the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence its effectiveness in developing students' critical thinking skills. With this in mind, this study poses the following primary research questions:

1. How are digital literacy and critical thinking skills integrated in improving English language skills?
2. What Students 'challenges emerge in integrating digital literacy and critical thinking skills to improve English language skills?

1.3 Purpose of the study

This study aims to understand how digital literacy contributes to students' cognitive development in English learning. The increasing integration of digital devices in the classroom has changed the way students to access, process, and evaluate information. As critical thinking becomes increasingly important in 21st-century learning, examining the impact of digital literacy on students' analytical skills becomes increasingly important. However, research focusing on how digital literacy specifically supports critical thinking in elementary English learning is still limited. Therefore, this study aligns its direction with the formulation of the research question to examine the benefits and challenges of integrating digital literacy into English learning.

Based on the research questions, the purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To analyze how digital literacy and critical thinking skills are integrated in improving students' English language skills through classroom activities, particularly in fostering interpretation, analysis, and evaluation within listening, speaking, reading, and writing practices.
2. To analyze the challenges that emerge in integrating digital literacy and critical thinking skills in English language learning, including issues related to student readiness, teacher competence, technological access, and instructional constraints.

Through this research objective, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital literacy influences the development of students' critical thinking skills in English learning, while also revealing limitations that may hinder its effective implementation. By identifying strengths and challenges in integrating digital practices, these findings aim to support teachers and education practitioners in refining teaching strategies that encourage deeper cognitive engagement. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to the creation of a more effective, equitable, and responsive digital literacy-based learning environment that enhances students' higher-order thinking skills in English classes.

1.4 Contribution of the study

This research contributes theoretically by enriching the existing literature on digital literacy and its role in developing elementary school students' critical thinking skills. Specifically, this research bridges the gap between digital literacy practices and their impact on critical thinking development. By focusing on students' cognitive patterns, this research provides a deeper understanding of how literacy is adapted to meet diverse classroom needs (Leu et al., 2013).

Practically, this research provides educators with insights into how to effectively integrate digital literacy into English language learning. It offers practical strategies for designing inclusive digital literacy activities that enhance critical thinking skills. Practically, this research equips elementary school teachers, particularly English teachers, with strategies that can be implemented to encourage critical thinking using digital tools. These strategies include multimedia-based reading exercises, digital mind mapping, inquiry-based projects, and online collaborative storytelling. These activities are designed to stimulate engagement and analysis, thus addressing two key learning challenges: low motivation and weak critical thinking capacity.

This study also supports the design of professional development programs focused on digital pedagogy. Many elementary school teachers still lack confidence in using technology critically. This study offers a model and evidence to support training programs that prepare teachers to plan, implement, and assess digital literacy-based learning for cognitive enhancement (Tondeurd et al., 2017).

Finally, this research is expected to provide a significant contribution to the world of education, especially in the development of learning methods that combine technology and digital literacy. Specifically, this research aims to help elementary school teachers in designing more effective learning strategies to improve students' critical thinking skills through digital literacy. In addition, this research is expected to be a reference for educational policy developers who integrate technology to improve the quality of education at the elementary school level, which will ultimately contribute to improving educational practices in schools as a whole.