

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Study

Advances in information and communication technology will bring significant changes to the process of English language learning. (Ilmiah & Dan, 2024). The development of digital technology will also lead to major changes in the field of education, including the teaching and learning of English at vocational high schools (SMK). One clear manifestation of this development is the increasing use of digital devices, particularly smartphones, among students. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) indicate that in 2025 more than 75% of internet users in Indonesia come from school-aged and university student groups, with smartphones serving as the primary device for accessing the internet. This condition shows that vocational high school students live closely with digital devices in their daily activities, including within the school environment.

In line with this development, the government, through the Merdeka Curriculum, encourages the integration of digital technology into the learning process. In English subjects at vocational high schools, students are expected to use technology to search for information, access learning resources, and support independent learning. Digital devices are positioned as learning tools that can enhance students' motivation, engagement, and the overall effectiveness of the learning process (Liu, 2022).

However, various classroom phenomena indicate a gap between curricular expectations and actual teaching practices. Based on observations in vocational high school English classes, students' use of digital devices often does not align with instructional objectives. Many students use their smartphones to access social media, watch entertainment videos, or play games during lessons. This behavior not only disrupts students' concentration but also results in low engagement in English learning activities. Teachers also face difficulties in controlling the use of digital devices, and in some cases, this behavior is tolerated in order to keep the lesson running smoothly.

From a motivational perspective, students' behavior in using digital devices during English lessons can be closely related to their learning motivation. Some students show low intrinsic motivation, as they do not feel interested, challenged, or personally engaged in English learning activities. As a result, digital devices are used mainly for entertainment rather than for learning purposes (Lamb, 2020). At the same time, students' extrinsic motivation may also be weak, particularly when classroom rules, teacher supervision, and learning goals are not clearly emphasized. Without sufficient motivation, digital devices are no longer perceived as learning tools, but merely as sources of distraction. This condition indicates that students' misuse of digital devices is not solely a matter of discipline or technology, but is also strongly influenced by their learning motivation.

Jaelani and Rahmah (2019) conducted a qualitative study entitled *Students' Perceptions toward the Use of Mobile Learning in Learning English*. The study explored students' perceptions of mobile learning applications in English learning. The findings revealed that most students had positive perceptions toward the use of mobile learning, as it allowed flexible access to learning materials, supported independent learning, and improved English skills such as vocabulary, reading, and listening. However, the study mainly focused on perceptions and learning benefits, without examining students' underlying learning motivation in depth.

Similarly, Pratiwi and Nuryanti (2018) examined smartphone usage in English learning in relation to school policy. Their study found that smartphones could support English learning activities, but also caused distractions when not properly regulated. The research highlighted behavioral and policy-related issues but did not analyze students' motivation from a theoretical perspective.

Hidayati and Diana (2022) explored students' motivation in learning English using mobile applications such as Duolingo and Hello English. Their findings indicated that mobile applications increased students' interest and enjoyment in learning English. Although motivation was discussed, the study focused more on general learning motivation and application features, without

linking students' motivation to a comprehensive motivational framework such as Self-Determination Theory.

In addition, Johari (2021) investigated EFL students' perceptions of using smartphones for vocabulary learning. The study found that smartphones helped students learn vocabulary more effectively and flexibly. However, similar to other studies, the research concentrated on learning outcomes and perceptions, rather than explaining why students sometimes misuse digital devices during classroom learning.

Previous studies extensively examine the use of digital devices or smartphones in English language learning. Most of these studies highlight the benefits of technology in improving vocabulary acquisition, reading skills, and learning flexibility. Other studies focus on students' and teachers' perceptions of smartphone use in the classroom. However, the majority of these studies tend to emphasize benefits, attitudes, or technical challenges, without exploring in depth the motivational factors underlying students' behavior in using digital devices.

In other words, although the topic of digital device use in learning is widely investigated, there remains a research gap concerning why students tend to misuse digital devices from the perspective of learning motivation. Particularly in the vocational high school context, studies that connect digital device use with motivational theories, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT), are still very limited. In fact, learning motivation is a key factor influencing students' engagement, discipline, and the quality of learning in English classrooms.

If this problem is left unaddressed, its impact may affect multiple stakeholders. For students, unregulated use of digital devices can reduce learning motivation, hinder the achievement of English language competencies, and foster passive and unfocused learning habits. For teachers, this situation may decrease instructional effectiveness, increase classroom management challenges, and create a mismatch between curricular goals and classroom practices. In the long term, such conditions may hinder the readiness of vocational high school graduates to enter the workforce, which

increasingly demands strong English proficiency and digital literacy.

Therefore, this study aims to examine students' learning motivation in using digital devices during English lessons at vocational high schools. Specifically, this research seeks to understand students' use of digital devices from the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, which includes the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By understanding the motivational factors underlying students' behavior, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding as well as practical recommendations for teachers in guiding students toward more meaningful and goal-oriented use of digital devices in English learning.

1.2 The Problems of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulate the problem of the study as follow :

1. What learning motivations are reflected in students' use of digital devices during English lessons at a vocational high school?
2. Why do students use digital devices during English lessons from a motivational perspective?

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

Based on the above problem formulation, the objectives of the study are as follows :

1. To identify students' learning motivation as reflected in their use of digital devices during English lessons at a vocational high school.
2. To explain the motivational reasons why students use digital devices during English lessons.

1.4 The Scope of the Study

This study will focus on examining students' learning motivation in using digital devices during English lessons at a vocational high school. The scope of this research will be limited to students from one class at a vocational high school (SMK) and one English teacher as a supporting informant. The study

will specifically explore students' use of digital devices, particularly smartphones, during classroom learning activities.

This research will be conducted within the context of English language learning and will not investigate the use of digital devices in other subjects. In terms of theoretical perspective, the study will be limited to the framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which will emphasize three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The focus will be placed on how these motivational aspects will be reflected in students' behavior when using digital devices and how they will influence students' tendency to use the devices for academic or non-academic purposes.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of English language education by enriching existing literature on digital device use in the classroom from a motivational perspective. By applying Self-Determination Theory, this research offers a deeper understanding of the underlying motivational factors that influence students' use and misuse of digital devices in English learning, particularly in the vocational high school context, which has received limited attention in previous studies.

Practically, the results of this study are expected to benefit English teachers by providing insights into students' motivational needs when using digital devices during lessons. These insights may assist teachers in designing learning activities and classroom strategies that encourage more meaningful and focused use of digital devices.

In addition, this study may serve as a reference for schools and curriculum developers in formulating policies or guidelines related to the integration of digital devices in English language learning.

For future researchers, this study can be used as a reference and foundation for further research on digital learning and student motivation in similar educational contexts.