

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Speaking is a crucial skill in language learning, as it allows students to communicate effectively and accurately in real-life situations. It is often considered the most important skill when acquiring a foreign or second language. This is because speaking demonstrates how capable someone is at expressing themselves and getting their point across, not just understanding. Focusing on speaking helps learners use English in real conversations, which is the primary goal of learning a language—being able to communicate well in different situations. The Kurikulum Merdeka, a curriculum in Indonesia, emphasizes the objective of developing students' ability to communicate in both written and spoken English as a key goal of the English subject in Junior High School.

Based on the preliminary observation at SMPN 1 Raya Kahean, some challenges were identified in the students' English language skills, particularly in speaking. Many students lacked of confidence when practicing spoken English, feeling embarrassed, especially during individual speaking activities. One big issue was that many students felt shy because they didn't have enough words to use. They still lacked a sufficient vocabulary. They had difficulties to find the appropriate words to create sentence or expression. This made them hesitant or even refused when asked to speak in front of the class. Due to the lack of vocabulary, the students' speaking ability was hindered, resulting in challenges in expressing themselves fluently and effectively in spoken communication. So, in

reality, students face challenges in enhancing their speaking skill, particularly in the context of vocabulary use.

Vocabulary knowledge is a crucial aspect of speaking skills, as it enables students to express themselves accurately and fluently. There is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and speaking skills in language learning. Vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental aspect of language use and is crucial for effective communication. Vocabulary knowledge is a good indicator of learners' language performance and proficiency (Koizumi & Yo In'nami, 2013). Enhancing vocabulary knowledge can lead to an increase in speaking skills. A strong vocabulary enhances speaking skill by enabling students to express themselves clearly and precisely. On the other hand, a limited vocabulary can hinder speaking skill, leading to difficulties in conveying thoughts coherently. Hence, developing a rich vocabulary is essential for enhancing speaking skills, and providing students with the confidence to communicate effectively in diverse situations.

Despite the importance of speaking and vocabulary knowledge, many students struggle to develop these skills. This is due to a lack of opportunities to practice, limited exposure to authentic language use, and a lack of engaging and effective teaching methods. To address this issue, educators have explored various methods to enhance students' speaking proficiency, including the use of vocabulary games. Vocabulary games are instruments that can assist students in expanding their vocabulary, ultimately contributing to the improvement of their speaking skills. Hadfield (1998:4) defines a game as an activity with rules, a goal,

and an element of fun. The element of fun in games provides the learners with more real-life situation with more chances to express their ideas in their own ways but under the rule.

According to Hadfield's perspective, it can be inferred that vocabulary games are instruments that really can help students expand their vocabulary and enhance their speaking skills. Vocabulary games are beneficial in improving students' speaking abilities. They provide an active and engaging way for students to practice and retain new words, while also promoting real-world context and friendly competition. By encouraging active communication, motivation, and spontaneity, these games can help students develop fluency and confidence in using the target language, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective. For these reasons, it is clear that vocabulary games can be effective tools to enhance students' speaking skills by broadening their vocabulary.

The previous study "The Use of Language Games to Improve the Students' Speaking Ability of Class VII A of SMP Ma'arif Terpadu Muntilan in the Academic Year of 2012/2013 by Arini Siska Savitri stated that the implementations of language games were effective to improve the student's speaking ability. The improvement covers: (1) the students were more motivated and more interested in getting involved in English lessons, (2) the students' fluency, pronunciation, accuracy and vocabulary were increasing, and (3) it was easier for the students to perform speaking by using language games.

The use of vocabulary games in language teaching has gained popularity in recent years due to their potential to provide an engaging and effective platform

for improving vocabulary knowledge and speaking proficiency. However, there is still a need for more research, particularly in understanding how these games impact students' perceptions and which aspects of speaking are most improved. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating seventh-grade students' perceptions of using vocabulary games in learning English at SMPN 1 Raya Kahean. By exploring students' experiences and identifying the specific speaking skills enhanced through these games, this research will provide valuable insights for educators looking to implement more engaging and effective teaching methods in their classrooms.

B. Problem of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the problem of this study can be formulated as follows:

1. How are the seventh-grade students' perceptions of using vocabulary games in learning English at SMPN 1 Raya Kahean?
2. What aspects of speaking can be improved by using vocabulary games in learning English?

C. Objective of the Study

Related to the problem of the study, the objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the seventh-grade students' perceptions of using vocabulary games in learning English at SMPN 1 Raya Kahean.

2. To identify the aspects of speaking that can be improved by using vocabulary games in learning English.

D. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on investigating the perceptions of seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Raya Kahean regarding the use of vocabulary games in learning English. The research aims to explore how these games affect students' learning experiences, particularly in the context of speaking skills. Additionally, the study will identify which aspects of speaking may be improved through the use of vocabulary games and will examine any challenges or limitations faced by students in engaging with vocabulary games. The scope of this research is limited to the seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Raya Kahean and does not extend to other grade levels or schools.

E. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are significant for both theoretical and practical knowledge relevant to the use of vocabulary games in English language learning.

1. Theoretical Perspectives

This study offers valuable insights into how seventh-grade students perceive the use of vocabulary games in learning English. It provides a foundation for understanding the role of such games in enhancing students' speaking skills and can inform future research on educational games and their effectiveness in language acquisition.

2. Practical Perspectives

a. For teachers:

The study offers practical strategies for integrating vocabulary games into English lessons, helping educators find effective ways to engage students and support their language development. It provides actionable recommendations to improve teaching practices and encourage student participation.

b. For students:

The research aims to help students by demonstrating how vocabulary games can address challenges in learning English. It offers insights into how these games can make the learning process more enjoyable and effective, potentially enhancing their speaking skills and overall language proficiency.

c. For other researchers:

The findings offer a basis for further investigation into the use of educational games in language learning. Other researchers can build upon this study to explore additional dimensions of vocabulary games or different educational contexts, contributing to the broader knowledge base on effective teaching strategies.