

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Language has a very important role to play in successful learning as it is the primary means of understanding, communicating, and applying knowledge. By using language well, students can understand subject matter more deeply, communicate well with teachers and classmates, and express their ideas and thoughts clearly. Language skills also have a significant impact on learning success. To achieve English proficiency, students must excel in both language skills and component skills. Language skills include receptive abilities such as listening and reading, as well as productive skills such as speaking and writing. To strengthen these skills, students must also be proficient in component skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Chiriana, 2015).

Reading skill is one of the essential skills in English language learning as it has a profound impact on students' ability to master the language. The ability to read well enables students to access a wide range of text types in English, from academic articles to fiction books, and from digital media to formal educational materials. By actively reading, students not only increase their vocabulary, but also deepen their understanding of sentence structure and grammar. By encountering a wide range of diverse texts, students not only expand their knowledge but also build effective communication skills in English, which are keys in various social, academic, and professional contexts in this era. Thus, the

development of strong reading skills is an important foundation for comprehensive and sustainable English language learning.

Learning language cannot be separated from learning vocabulary. For English Language Learners, building vocabulary is vital as it significantly impacts their English language proficiency growth. To learn English effectively, a broad vocabulary is essential, especially in the context of developing reading skills. An adequate vocabulary allows students to recognize and understand key words in the English texts they read. As they expand their vocabulary, they can more easily identify sentence structures, decipher complex meanings, and explore various nuances in texts. It is very important for language learners to learn vocabulary which is a critical part of foreign language learning (Alqahtani, 2015). Vocabulary helps speakers express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings during communication. Gaining a large vocabulary can help learners become more fluent in the language and improve their ability to understand and communicate in English as well as strengthen students' reading skills. As such, the development of a strong vocabulary is instrumental in building a solid foundation for deep English reading skills and a comprehensive understanding of the material read.

Despite the importance of vocabulary, it is unfortunate that English language teaching is very likely to face some challenges especially in terms of vocabulary.

According to Varasarin (2007), students in this situation wish they could speak English fluently, but the majority believe that it would be too difficult for them to learn. Junior high school students generally lack interest in learning English because they do not understand it well and lack vocabulary. Students often face

difficulties in expanding their vocabulary. This challenge can arise due to lack of exposure to new words or lack of motivation to actively learn additional vocabulary. In addition, students are also found to be less motivated in learning English because teachers use monotonous teaching methods.

Junior high school students often have limited vocabulary in English because they use their mother tongue more daily. Based on preliminary data that has been observed by the researcher, students at SMPN 1 Pahae Jae tend to use their mother tongue such as Batak or Indonesian. Most of them are even more fluent in using Batak language. This habit reduces their exposure to English vocabulary, which is necessary to develop English language skills holistically, especially in reading and comprehension skills. This is also reinforced based on the results of interviews conducted by researchers with English teachers at SMPN 1 Pahae Jae as follows:

Researcher: What is your point of view about students' vocabulary mastery in this school?

Teacher 1: Students' vocabulary in this school is still quite weak. Because students here mostly speak Indonesian and Batak, so their vocabulary knowledge is still very limited. Students also seem to have difficulty memorizing new vocabulary or difficult words.

Teacher 2: Students' vocabulary in this school is still quite low. It can be seen in terms of students' motivation and activeness in learning. They are often confused by the lessons that I bring using English.

Teacher 3: Vocabulary students in this school is still lacking, it can be seen from the small things that students do not know.

To overcome this problem, educators need to introduce more integrated learning strategies that actively build students' vocabulary. Kartini and Kareviati (2021) state that it is important for teachers to find effective and interesting ways to improve students' vocabulary through appropriate learning techniques or media. Darmawan and Fatmawati (2019) added that games are one of the effective methods to improve vocabulary mastery. Similarly, Ferdinandus and Rahayaan (2020) mentioned that games are a good approach in vocabulary learning, because students tend to feel bored if they only rely on memorization. According to McCallum (cited in Yolageldili, G., & Arıkan, A., 2011), “games can naturally interest students, and a well-introduced game can be one of the most effective motivational techniques.”

The use of games in language learning is not a new concept. There are various types of games, such as board games, role-playing games, or moving games, have long been used by language teachers to enrich students' learning experiences. For example, word puzzles, word games, or role-playing games such as "Charades" or "Role-play", where students interact in authentic language situations that allow students to practice vocabulary use in a fun and relevant context. There are also moving games like "Simon Says" or "Hot Potato", where students have to react to verbal instructions quickly. Some of these games show how language teachers have successfully integrated the use of vocabulary in a fun and relevant context. For example, in the word puzzle game, students are not only exposed to new words, but also given the opportunity to hone their problem-solving skills and creativity. Likewise, in role plays, students not only practice the

use of vocabulary, but also gain experience communicating in real-life situations, which helps them internalize the vocabulary better.

The use of games as a method for vocabulary acquisition makes the learning process fun. Teaching vocabulary using games as learning media with the right method can help students' vocabulary growth. This has been widely proven through previous studies that using games is beneficial to improve students' vocabulary mastery. Azar (2012) supports the finding that games can serve as a platform that provides significant advantages for both teachers and students. Games often provide a fun and interactive learning experience and can motivate students to actively participate in the learning process. In the context of language learning, the use of games as learning media offers various advantages, including improving students' language skills. This is also reinforced based on the results of interviews conducted by researchers with 3 English teachers at SMPN 1 Pahae Jae who also use games as a method to teach vocabulary to students, as follows:

Teacher 1: Using game will be very interesting and the most favorable learning method for students to remember new vocabulary.

Teacher 2: Using games will make learning more active and interesting and certainly students will prefer to learn using these games. When students feel engaged and motivated, they are more likely to actively participate and feel less burdened by learning tasks that are often perceived as monotonous.

Teacher 3: Games are a fun method for students that make students happier to learn and of course they will also be motivated to play an active role in class.

Previous research has shown that the use of games in language learning can help students' vocabulary mastery in a fun and effective way. However, teachers' perceptions towards the use of games in vocabulary learning in junior high school may vary. Some teachers may see games as an effective tool to increase student motivation and engagement, while others may have concerns related to complicated implementation or lack of support in devising effective games. Some teachers may feel limited in the resources and time required to design and structure effective games. In addition, there are also concerns related to how to integrate games with the curriculum and objectively assess student progress.

This study explores teachers' perceptions of using games as a media to teach vocabulary in junior high school. This study was conducted to prove whether teachers' perceptions are in line with previous research, particularly in terms of teachers' understanding and perceptions at SMPN 1 Pahae Jae towards the potential use of games for students' vocabulary acquisition. To date, the available literature has not adequately explored the views held by educators in this school towards the concept of using games in the context of vocabulary learning. Therefore, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap by investigating teachers' perceptions and experiences in implementing games as a learning strategy focused on teaching vocabulary to students at SMPN 1 Pahae Jae.

B. Problems of the Study

Based on the background of the study above, the research problem can be stated as follow:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of using games to teach vocabulary?
2. How are the processes of using games by English teachers to teach vocabulary?

C. Objectives of the Study

In line with problems of the study, the objectives of this study were formulated:

1. To know what Teachers' perceptions on the use of games to teach students' vocabulary
2. To analyzed the process of using games by English teachers to teach vocabulary?

D. Scope of the Study

This study was limited to three English teachers who have experience teaching English at SMPN 1 Pahae Jae. Therefore, this study used observation and interview as research instruments. The researcher focused on the teachers' perceptions of using games to teach vocabulary to students and how the process of using games by English teachers when teaching vocabulary.

E. Significance of the Study

This study can be useful for teachers and other researchers. Teachers who have never used game-based learning in their classrooms may be inspired by the teachers' perceptions in this study regarding the use of games to teach vocabulary

in junior high school. This study also discusses teachers' perceptions of the challenges that may be encountered when they use games. In addition, this study can also help teachers who are already familiar with game-based learning and find similar difficulties. Hopefully, this study can also contribute to future researchers to serve as a reference for further research.

