

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Study

In today's global world, mastering English vocabulary is key to helping students truly understand what they read. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results indicate that Indonesian 15-year-old students scored only 371 in reading literacy, significantly below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 476, highlighting persistent challenges in reading comprehension (OECD, 2022). Similarly, Indonesian seventh-grade students continue to face difficulties, with only 42.7% achieving proficiency in reading comprehension based on the 2023 *Asesmen Kompetensi Siswa Indonesia* (AKSIOMA) national assessment (Kemdikbud, 2023). Reading comprehension involves not only word recognition but also understanding meanings, relating ideas, and interpreting the author's intent (Snow, 2002).

Nation (2001, p. 1) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is essential for text comprehension, underscoring the need for innovative learning tools to address this gap. However, data from the same assessment reveals that 74% of students lack sufficient vocabulary mastery, directly impeding their ability to comprehend descriptive texts independently (Kemdikbud, 2023).

At the junior high school level, descriptive texts pose particular challenges for seventh-grade students due to their reliance on precise vocabulary. This aligns with Nation's (2001, pp. 144-145) assertion that learners need to recognize 95-98% of words in a text for adequate understanding. Consequently, vocabulary deficiencies directly hinder students' ability to identify word meanings in context and connect ideas within descriptive texts.

Learning theories support interactive media development. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development emphasizes scaffolded learning through social interaction and guided activities, which gamified e-worksheets can provide via immediate feedback and peer collaboration features.

Recent studies (2019–2024) demonstrate the effectiveness of gamification in vocabulary learning. Zhang (2023) found that gamification significantly improves students' motivation, engagement, and retention, while Panmei and Waluyo (2023) showed that it supports independent learning. Pratiwi et al. (2024) also reported improved academic achievement, and Budiarti et al. (2024), through a systematic review, confirmed its positive impact on motivation and engagement. Nevertheless, these studies tend to focus on general effectiveness rather than the development of context-specific media. In particular, research on Educaplay-based e-worksheets for teaching descriptive text vocabulary at the junior high school level, especially for seventh-grade reading comprehension, remains limited, indicating a gap in innovative, curriculum-aligned instructional materials.

Based on preliminary observations and interviews with an English teacher at MTs Negeri 2 Medan, it was found that seventh-grade students, particularly in class VII-G, still face difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. Most students rely heavily on dictionaries or translation tools when encountering unfamiliar words, and only a few are able to infer meanings from context. In addition, students' motivation in learning vocabulary is relatively low, and classroom activities are still dominated by textbook-based instruction and printed worksheets with limited interactivity. These conditions indicate a gap between expected learning outcomes and actual classroom practices, highlighting the need for more innovative and interactive learning media. The findings from the interview are presented as follows:

R: "How is the general English vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade students?"

T: "Many students still have limited English vocabulary because they have just transitioned from elementary school to junior high school. However, in some classes, students' vocabulary mastery is already quite good for their grade level."

R: "How is students' reading ability in relation to their vocabulary mastery?"

T: "Students are expected to understand the content of reading texts, but many of them depend heavily on dictionaries or digital translation tools to understand unfamiliar words. Some students also experience difficulties in using dictionaries effectively because they became accustomed to using online translation applications during distance learning."

R: “What learning media are commonly used in the English classroom?”

T: “In daily classroom practice, digital media such as PowerPoint presentations are rarely used. The teaching process mostly relies on government-issued textbooks and instructional notes prepared by the teacher. Additional supporting media have not been optimally utilized in classroom instruction.”

R: “What type of worksheets are used in the classroom?”

T: “The worksheets are mainly taken from the government-issued textbook, which provides various practice activities and competency tests at the end of each chapter.”

Therefore, this study develops an Educaplay-based e-worksheet specifically for Class VII-G at MTs Negeri 2 Medan to enhance vocabulary acquisition for descriptive text reading. It aims to boost motivation, strengthen word mastery, and improve comprehension through interactive, technology-driven activities tailored to their needs.

1.2 The Problem of the Study

Based on the background of the study previously described, the problem of the study is formulated as follows:

1. What are the students' needs in learning vocabulary in descriptive text for seventh grade students?
2. How is the design of an Educaplay-based E-Worksheet for vocabulary learning in descriptive text for seventh grade students?

3. How is the development of an Educaplay-based E-Worksheet for vocabulary learning in descriptive text for seventh grade students?
4. How is the validity of the developed Educaplay-based E-Worksheet for vocabulary learning in descriptive text for seventh grade students?

1.3 The Objective of the Study

Based on the problems of the study above, the objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the students' needs in learning vocabulary in descriptive text for seventh grade students.
2. To design an Educaplay-based E-Worksheet for vocabulary learning in descriptive text for seventh grade students.
3. To develop an Educaplay-based E-Worksheet for vocabulary learning in descriptive text for seventh grade students.
4. To determine the validity of the developed Educaplay-based E-Worksheet for vocabulary learning in descriptive text for seventh grade students.

1.4 The Scope of the Study

Based on the research problems and objectives presented previously, this study focuses on developing an Educaplay E-Worksheet for vocabulary learning in reading descriptive texts for seventh-grade students of Class VII-G at MTs Negeri 2 Medan. The Educaplay E-Worksheet is proposed as a solution to address the identified problems. The development of this learning media is limited to vocabulary learning in reading descriptive texts through a variety of interactive learning activities available on the Educaplay platform. The E-Worksheet is

developed based on the results of the learners' needs analysis and is expected to enhance students' motivation and engagement in the learning process.

1.5 The Significances of the Study

Overall, the results of this study are expected to contribute significantly to the learning process and benefit various parties involved in education.

1. Theoretical Significance

The findings of this study are expected to enrich the literature on the development of Educaplay E-Worksheets for vocabulary learning in reading descriptive texts at the junior high school level. In addition, this study is expected to contribute to the field of English language education, particularly in the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into English language learning in line with the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. Practical Significances

a. The Students

This study is expected to support seventh-grade students' vocabulary learning in reading descriptive texts through the use of an Educaplay E-Worksheet. The interactive learning activities provided in the E-Worksheet are expected to increase students' motivation, engagement, and participation in the learning process while helping them learn vocabulary more effectively.

b. The Teachers

The findings of this study are expected to provide English teachers at MTs Negeri 2 Medan with an innovative and practical learning medium for teaching vocabulary in reading descriptive texts. The Educaplay E-Worksheet can help teachers create more engaging learning experiences and facilitate the delivery of vocabulary materials through interactive activities.

C. The Researcher

This study is expected to serve as a useful reference for future researchers interested in developing technology-based learning media, particularly Educaplay E-Worksheets for English language learning. Furthermore, this study may inspire future research involving different language skills, text types, grade levels, or learning contexts.