

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, the identification of the problems, limitation of the problems, formulation of the problems, and significance of the study.

A. Background of The Study

English is a global language that holds significant importance in various fields, including education, travel, and professional environments. As a universal means of communication, English connects people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language starting from elementary school, where students are introduced to the four fundamental language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These skills are closely linked to essential language components such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Among these components, vocabulary serves as the foundation of language learning, enabling students to comprehend text, express ideas clearly, and communicate effectively in both written and spoken forms. Recent studies emphasize the importance of integrating digital applications to support vocabulary acquisition. According to Siregar and Marlina (2023) the use of Duolingo helped EFL learners improve vocabulary mastery through gamified features such as rewards, streaks, and repetition exercises, which foster learner engagement and autonomy. These findings align with the involvement load hypothesis Usman et al. (2021), which suggests that vocabulary learning becomes more effective when learners are

cognitively engaged with the material. Furthermore, according to Deci and Ryan (2000) vocabulary learning strategies involving memory, repetition, and meaningful context are significantly correlated with better retention and student motivation. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, learners may struggle to grasp the meaning of words, form coherent sentences, and engage in meaningful communication.

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in language acquisition because it directly influences the development of other language skills. According to Setiawan and Wiedarti (2020), vocabulary comprises the words used to communicate, each carrying specific meanings depending on the context. Rahayu (2023) similarly defines vocabulary as the total set of words that represent particular ideas within a given language framework. Learning vocabulary is not merely about memorizing words it involves understanding their meanings, usage, and connotations in different contexts. Mastering vocabulary contributes to improved reading comprehension, fluent speaking, and effective writing skills. Nation (2023) further elaborates that vocabulary mastery is the ability to comprehend, retain, and apply words in both productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (reading and listening) contexts. This mastery is developed through repeated exposure, meaningful usage, and consistent practice.

One important aspect of vocabulary mastery is vocabulary retention, which refers to a student's ability to remember and recall learned words over time. Many students struggle with retention due to ineffective memorization techniques, where words are learned in isolation and quickly forgotten. Gamification can potentially address this issue by providing interactive and repetitive exposure to vocabulary through engaging activities that reinforce memory. According to Ahdal (2020), gamified learning environments increase learner motivation and provide repeated contextual exposure to vocabulary, which enhances both retention and recall. Duolingo, for example, employs spaced repetition, instant feedback, and interactive challenges that students may perceive as helpful in strengthening their vocabulary retention Siregar and Marlina (2023). In this context, students' perspectives on how Duolingo helps them remember and retain vocabulary become essential to understanding the role of gamification in vocabulary learning. Another supportive feature of Duolingo is the use of visual context, where vocabulary is presented with images, examples, and sentence placement. This aligns with the Dual Coding Theory by Paivio (2007), which states that combining verbal and visual input leads to better memory retention. These features may influence how students experience vocabulary learning, especially in terms of engagement, understanding, and recall.

Traditional vocabulary learning methods, such as rote memorization and textbook-based exercises, often fail to maintain student engagement and motivation. These methods typically emphasize repetition without meaningful

context, making it difficult for students to retain new vocabulary in the long term. Furthermore, such approaches rarely provide immediate feedback or interactive elements that encourage active participation. This creates a gap between the way students learn vocabulary and the strategies that could potentially enhance their learning experience. Research by Usman et al. (2024) demonstrated that digital-based, gamified vocabulary instruction significantly improved students' vocabulary achievement and increased learning motivation compared to traditional methods. Although gamified language applications like Duolingo have gained popularity globally for their interactive and motivational features, there is still limited understanding of how students perceive their effectiveness, especially in the context of junior high school learners in Indonesia.

These features aim to address common challenges in traditional vocabulary learning. Despite its significance, many students still struggle with vocabulary retention and application. Vocabulary acquisition should be an interactive and enjoyable process to ensure long-term retention. Gamification, which integrates game-like elements into learning, has emerged as an effective strategy to make vocabulary learning more engaging and meaningful. As noted by Hamzah and Yusuf (2023), gamification not only increases learners' motivation but also contributes to sustained vocabulary recall. Therefore, this study aims to explore how gamification, specifically through the use of Duolingo, contributes to vocabulary mastery among eighth grade students at MTs Al Fakhriyah Baturaja. By incorporating gamified learning experiences,

the research seeks to explore students' experiences and perceptions of how Duolingo supports their vocabulary learning process.

Gamification has been widely recognized as a successful educational approach that combines game elements such as rewards, progress tracking, and interactive exercises with learning objectives. These elements encourage student motivation, engagement, and consistent participation. Duolingo, a popular language learning application, employs gamification to make learning fun and accessible. According to Ahn (2023), Duolingo offers a personalized and engaging experience through gamification, fostering a sense of achievement and reinforcing vocabulary acquisition. Gamification enhances learning by creating a dynamic and immersive environment where students actively participate in language exercises, receive immediate feedback, and track their progress. Unlike traditional methods, which often lead to disengagement, gamification transforms the learning process into an enjoyable and interactive experience.

Based on preliminary information gathered from discussions with teachers at MTs Al Fakhriyah Baturaja, it was found that eighth-grade students struggle with vocabulary mastery, particularly in memorization, sentence application, and long-term retention. Although English is taught from early grades, traditional learning methods such as textbook-based exercises and rote memorization are still dominant. Teachers have observed that these methods often fail to support active learning or sustain student interest. Research supports these observations; according to Hamzah and Yusuf (2023), traditional

vocabulary instruction that relies heavily on repetition without context tends to result in low student engagement and limited vocabulary retention. However, there are indications that students respond positively to digital tools, especially those that are interactive and gamified. Studies by Siregar and Marlina (2023) found that Duolingo, a gamified language learning application, significantly improved vocabulary mastery among junior high school students through features like repetition, feedback, and rewards. These features align with the principles of gamification in education, which, according to Ahdal (2020), foster learner motivation and deeper cognitive processing. This suggests that incorporating applications like Duolingo into vocabulary instruction may help address the limitations of traditional methods by providing a more engaging and effective learning experience.

Considering these factors, this study aims to explore how Duolingo, as a gamified learning tool, supports the vocabulary mastery of eighth grade students at MTs Al Fakhriyah Baturaja. By focusing on students' experiences and perceptions, this research to understand the role of gamification in enhancing vocabulary learning and overcoming common challenges such as low motivation and poor retention. This study was conducted under the title "Students' Perceptions on the Use of Duolingo as Gamification Toward Their Vocabulary Mastery at MTs Al-Fakhriyah Baturaja."

B. Limitation of the problem

This study focused on the use of Duolingo as a gamification tool to support vocabulary mastery among Eighth Grade students at MTs Al Fakhriyah Baturaja. It is limited to exploring students' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of Duolingo in learning vocabulary, particularly on how the application support vocabulary mastery in term of motivation, angagement and ease of use

C. Formulation of the problem

Considering the background of the research above, the researcher can formulate the problem : How did Eighth Grade students at MTs Al Fakhriyah Baturaja perceive the use of Duolingo as a gamified learning tool in supporting their vocabulary mastery?

D. Objectives of The Research

To explore the perceptions of Eighth Grade students at MTs Al Fakhriyah Baturaja toward the use of Duolingo as a gamified learning tool in support their vocabulary mastery.

E. Significant of The Research

1. For the Teachers

This study provides teachers with insights into how students perceive the use of gamified learning technologies, particularly the Duolingo application, to improve their vocabulary mastery. The findings may assist

teachers in realizing the benefits of integrating digital applications into English instruction to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

2. For the Students

This study may benefit eighth-grade students at MTs Al Fakhriyah Baturaja by encouraging them to reflect on their learning experiences with Duolingo. Understanding their perspectives can support the development of a more student-centered approach and promote the use of gamification to increase motivation and vocabulary mastery.

3. For School

This study can help improve the school's approach to English language instruction by providing alternative, technology-based strategies that students enjoy. The findings may encourage school stakeholders to support the integration of gamified learning tools such as Duolingo into extracurricular programs or enrichment activities.

4. For Other Researchers

This study can serve as a reference for future researchers interested in gamification, vocabulary mastery, and educational technology. It provides a foundation for further qualitative or mixed-method studies on students' perceptions of game-based language learning tools such as Duolingo.