

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Vocabulary is an important part of learning and understanding a language, especially English. Mastering the language well can help improve communication skills, especially in the teaching and learning process. Students who have a good understanding of vocabulary will be better able to learn other skills such as speaking, writing, listening, and reading. When learning vocabulary, students should be familiar with the meaning, pronunciation, and spelling of words. Thornbury (2011) stated that almost nothing can be communicated without grammar or vocabulary. It indicates that having excellent grammar alone will not matter if a person lacks an extensive vocabulary. Further evidence that vocabulary is one of the most crucial subjects to master when learning a foreign language comes from Ur (2011), who stated that it is impossible to speak without an extensive vocabulary. This statement underlines the importance of vocabulary teaching for foreign language learners.

Students who want to master English need to develop a strong vocabulary (Puspita & Sabiqoh, 2017). To facilitate mastery of other language skills and components, students need to ensure that they have adequate vocabulary. Conversely, without vocabulary, the ability to express oneself orally and in writing becomes impossible (Thornbury, 2011). While it is possible to understand language with less precise structures, vocabulary acquisition is still one of the most important elements. Without vocabulary, the process of producing and understanding language is not possible (Laufer, 2006). In other words, vocabulary is closely related to other language skills. Moreover, without grammar, little information can be conveyed, and without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed (Wilkins, 1992).

In this modern era, technology has had a significant impact on various aspects of human life. The development of technology has enabled people to use technology more independently in their daily lives. Technology also has a significant impact on education, particularly in English language learning. Technological advancements have created a variety of resources and tools for

learning English that are easily accessible to everyone. Today's technological advancements offer significant benefits in various aspects of life, including in terms of learning. Children today are familiar with technological advances through devices such as gadgets, cell phones, and other electronic devices. The utilization of technology in the form of applications for learning English can make the learning process easier and more enjoyable (Puspita et al., 2022). Technology can improve student and teacher performance both in and outside the classroom. This is reinforced by Purba and Saragih (2022), who argue that learning English through the use of technology can have a positive impact on learning outcomes. The use of learning materials can help improve the effectiveness of learning methods (Herlina et al., 2021).

Duolingo is a popular application of technology for learning English. Nursyamsiah (2021) said that Duolingo is a gamification-based learning platform that carries the concept of learning while playing, designed to be easy to use by all ages. The application aims to help students learn languages in a fast and fun way so that the learning process feels like an entertaining activity. Through Duolingo, students complete a series of lessons in one of six available languages. Each lesson consists of different types of problems, such as translating text, responding to voice commands, identifying pictures that correspond to specific words or sentences, and selecting answer in multiple-choice format. With over 300 million users, Duolingo is the most popular language learning platform and the most downloaded education application in the world. Duolingo's mission is to provide free, accessible, and fun education for everyone. In addition, the company also developed the Duolingo English Test (DET), an affordable and practical English certification option recognized by more than 200 universities.

Based on the background of the study above, the problem can be identified as: (1) Students have difficulties understanding the meaning of the vocabulary they learned. A study found that 68.57% of first-grade students experienced difficulties in understanding the meaning of the source language, making it challenging for them to translate into the target language. Difficulties in understanding the meaning of the source language can have far-reaching effects on understanding the meaning

and application of vocabulary in a wider context; this can be due to limited vocabulary understanding, difficulty in using vocabulary in context, limitations in critical thinking and analysis, low self-confidence, and a hindered learning process (Sibuea et al., 2023); (2) Students had difficulties in applying the vocabulary. Observations revealed that students had difficulties in developing their writing and tended to rely on examples from the teacher, hindering their ability to expand their writing. Difficulties in developing writing and a tendency to rely on examples from teachers can have a negative impact on understanding the meaning and application of vocabulary in a wider context; this can be due to limited creativity, shallow vocabulary understanding, difficulty in applying vocabulary, limitations in critical thinking, mastery of structure and writing style (Zhao, 2019); (3) Most of the students have limited diction in using vocabulary. Research showed that students experienced code-switching and difficulty in grammar and diction, leading to a mix of languages and limited diction. Difficulties with diction or vocabulary use can have a significant impact on the understanding of meaning and the application of vocabulary in a wider context; this can be due to limited understanding of meaning, difficulty in conveying ideas, limitations in critical thinking, inappropriate use of vocabulary, and lack of confidence. (Lisdiana et al., 2022); and (4) Students have less interest in learning vocabulary. A study indicated that students showed less interest in learning vocabulary, particularly when using conventional teaching methods, which led to a lack of motivation. Lack of interest in learning vocabulary, especially when using conventional teaching methods, can have a significant impact on understanding the meaning and application of vocabulary in a wider context; this can be due to lack of active engagement, superficial understanding, limitations in social interaction, and limitations in independent learning (Crerar & Mullins, 2019).

Previous research has used a preliminary experimental design to investigate the effects of using Duolingo on vocabulary acquisition in high school students, but further research applying a quasi-experimental design is needed to make more detailed observations. This is important given the complex relationship between Duolingo usage and students' vocabulary acquisition as well as external factors that may affect the results of the study.

1.2. Formulation of the Problem

Based on the explanation above, the researcher formulates the problem as follows: “Is there any influence of using Duolingo on ninth-grade students’ vocabulary mastery in one of the junior high schools in Tasikmalaya?”

1.3. Aim of the Study

The aim of the research is to find out whether there is an influence or not of using Duolingo on students’ vocabulary mastery in the ninth grade of one of the junior high schools in Tasikmalaya.

1.4. Significance of the Study

1.4.1. Theoretical Significance

This research hopes to give meaningful information for the development of English teaching, especially in using Duolingo in teaching-learning activities.

1.4.2. Practical Significance

This research expects to motivate teachers to be more creative in using teaching techniques and to give them a reference about the use of Duolingo in teaching vocabulary.

1.4.3. Empirical Significance

This research provides useful information for future studies that wish to look into vocabulary mastery and Duolingo.