

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comprehensive explanation of the research conducted. It contains the background of the study, formulation of the problems, operational definitions, aims of the study, and significance of the study.

A. Background of the Study

Vocabulary mastery is one of the key components in the language learning process for EFL learners. Before learners can use listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills effectively, they must first understand the vocabulary used in the language. According to Jaelani and Sutari (2020) explain that vocabulary is one of the language components that needs to be learned. In addition, Rosyada and Apoko (2023) state that no one can learn a language without first mastering vocabulary. Furthermore, Nuraeni and Intan Lube (2020) explain that vocabulary plays an essential role in learning English. Without vocabulary knowledge, we cannot communicate well in language skills.

Mastering vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of language learning that can influence students' ability to learn English. However, students often face challenges in learning English vocabulary. According to Refi et al. (2018) Students have trouble memorising new vocabulary and are unsure of the meaning of words. Their lack of practice outside the classroom also limits their ability to use new vocabulary. Therefore, learning English will be a challenge if students do not have a good command of vocabulary (Ajisoko, 2020). Therefore, teachers must implement effective learning methods for vocabulary learning. As stated by Susanto (2017) teachers must prepare and find appropriate vocabulary learning techniques to apply to students and must equip themselves with a variety of up-to-date and creative techniques to ensure students understand and engage.

Problems in vocabulary mastery also occurred in a junior high school in Tasikmalaya, particularly in a seventh-grade class. Based on the initial research results conducted through pre-observation, pre-interview, and pre-test, it was revealed that students face difficulties in mastering vocabulary. Based on the results

of pre-observations, many students did not understand the questions because they had no idea about the meaning of the words in the questions. Only a few students were able to complete the assignment when the teacher gave them a task to match the words related to daily activities. The students then asked the teacher about the meaning of certain words, such as "take a bath" and "breakfast." In addition, the results of the pre-interview with the English teacher revealed that many students were unfamiliar with learning English, as it had not been taught to all students during their time in elementary school. As a result, students had difficulty understanding and remembering English vocabulary. The pre-test was also carried out, and four problems were found that students faced, such as not understanding the meaning, spelling words, grammar, and pronunciation. The pre-test results proved that students had problems learning English vocabulary; the mean score was 61.45 among the 31 students. The test results revealed that the lowest score obtained by students was 30, while the highest score reached 90. This issue indicated that only four students scored above the success criteria or the school standard score of 85. In addition, students had not yet achieved the minimum criteria for success.

Based on the problems above, an effective learning method is required to assist students in improving their English vocabulary and learning English more quickly. The urgency of this research is to help students overcome serious problems in learning English vocabulary, which affects all other language skills. Many students have low scores and struggle to understand even simple words, showing the need for an effective solution that can improve their vocabulary in a fun and accessible way. Integrating technology into vocabulary learning to address students' low motivation and limited practice opportunities. Using technology can make learning more engaging, flexible, and accessible, helping students' vocabulary mastery (Hassan Taj et al., 2017). One of the right ways to improve students' vocabulary is through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). MALL supports language learning using mobile devices, such as smartphones or tablets. According to Miangah (2012), MALL refers to mobile technology in language learning, which allows students not to be tied to second language learning only in the classroom. Aziz and Fageeh (2013) conducted research, the results showed that the use of

smartphone technology in vocabulary learning positively contributes to increased student motivation and engagement, especially when students have direct access to connected devices. This integration of mobile technology creates a more personalized and interactive learning environment that supports students' autonomy and encourages consistent vocabulary practice. By learning languages with specially designed applications and platforms, students can access various vocabulary materials flexibly, anytime and anywhere. This method allows students to learn in an interactive and fun way, such as through games and quizzes.

There is an application of MALL that is considered effective in helping improve vocabulary mastery for EFL students. It is called Duolingo. Duolingo was chosen because it is easy to use, flexible, and engaging. As a MALL tool, it lets students learn anytime and anywhere using their phones. Its game-like activities, instant feedback, and adjustable levels keep students motivated and make learning vocabulary more enjoyable and effective. This app uses gamification to encourage student engagement, providing fun challenges and motivating them to keep practicing, making vocabulary acquisition more effective and engaging. Purwanto and Syafryadin (2023) stated that Duolingo can help students learn new vocabulary through games, making learning fun and less boring. In addition, students can adjust the type of exercises and their difficulty level in the learning settings using Duolingo according to their needs. With direct feedback feature, students can speed up learning by knowing and correcting their mistakes. In addition to Duolingo being a MALL application that helps students learn new vocabulary. The research found that Duolingo was perceived as an effective vocabulary learning tool, as students appreciated its flexible access anytime and anywhere, and reported that it made learning more enjoyable and easier to understand (Fakhrurriana et al., 2024). Therefore, students tend to be more motivated to study English longer if given a fun learning experience that can be done flexibly. This shows that using technology in education, especially in language learning, can effectively improve students' learning outcomes and help them master the English vocabulary.

Many studies have used the Duolingo application in the learning process. Several studies, such as Niah (2019), have investigated improving students'

speaking and listening using the Duolingo application. As a result, students' English skills, specifically listening and speaking skills, can improve using Duolingo. Another research by Budiyanto and Ridho (2024) who has investigated the effectiveness of teaching speaking using Duolingo. The researcher pointed out that Duolingo is a valuable tool in teaching speaking skills, offering more significant benefits than traditional learning methods. In addition, Damayanti et al. (2023) investigated the improvement of students' writing ability on procedural texts using the Duolingo application. The researcher showed that using Duolingo to improve writing ability on procedural texts is an effective technique.

Therefore, the researcher used Duolingo in vocabulary learning to overcome the problems in the class. While many studies have examined using Duolingo in the English language learning process, most studies have focused on its impact on speaking, listening, and writing skills. There is still limited research focusing specifically on its role in developing vocabulary mastery among junior high school EFL learners. Therefore, to fill the gap in previous studies, this study, "Improving Vocabulary Mastery for EFL Learners through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning with Duolingo," investigated how Duolingo improves students' English vocabulary learning in seventh-grade junior high school using mixed methods research.

B. Formulation of the Problems

This research's formulation of the problems, based on the explained background, is as follows:

1. How is the improvement of EFL learners' vocabulary mastery after using Duolingo as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning?
2. To what extent do EFL learners use Duolingo as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning to improve their vocabulary mastery?

C. Operational Definitions

1. Vocabulary Mastery

This refers to the ability to understand and use words or phrases appropriately in a language. Students can understand words and phrases of a

language, including aspects such as meaning, spelling, grammar, and pronunciation. In this context, students' English vocabulary mastery is developed through learning activities using the Duolingo application as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL).

2. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning

This refers to the use of mobile devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and internet-connected applications, to facilitate language learning anytime and anywhere. In this context, the Duolingo application, as a form of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), is used to improve English students' vocabulary mastery.

3. Duolingo

This refers to a multi-language learning platform accessible through its mobile app and website. The platform provides lessons that focus on vocabulary, grammar, and listening skills for learners through various interactive features such as selecting images exercises, translation activities, listening activities, speaking activities, and fill-in-the-blank questions. In this context, Duolingo is used to improve the vocabulary mastery of junior high school students.

D. Aims of the Study

This research's aims, based on the research question to answer the problem above, can be seen below:

1. To explore the process of improving EFL learners' vocabulary mastery through the use of Duolingo as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning.
2. To know the improvement of EFL learners' vocabulary mastery using Duolingo as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning.

E. Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical use

This research provided information and enriched theoretical knowledge about using Duolingo as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning in facilitating

EFL learners in the process of improving vocabulary mastery, and to know the improvement of their vocabulary mastery.

2. Practical use

As a practical contribution, this study could be a learning strategy reference for readers, especially English teachers, to use this method in teaching and learning activities. So, interactive and fun learning activities are created to make vocabulary learning more enjoyable.

3. Empirical use

This study offered insights and understanding on collecting data on students' vocabulary mastery outcomes and analyzing the data to improve vocabulary mastery for EFL learners through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning with Duolingo.