

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive description of the research study. It includes the background of study, problem formulation, operational definition, research objectives, and research significance.

1.1. Background of the study

Vocabulary is a crucial component in language learning because it becomes the foundation for developing other English skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Liu & Zhang (2018), vocabulary is essential in the development of all macro skills, including speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Therefore, the extent of vocabulary mastery reflects learners' language proficiency and overall comprehension. Listyani et al., (2021) stated that vocabulary mastery refers to the ability to recognize and express the meaning of words. This highlights that for second language learners, especially those learning English in an EFL context, vocabulary is a key aspect that supports effective communication and academic achievement. However, many students still struggle with limited vocabulary, leading to difficulties in understanding texts and expressing ideas, indicating the need for learning strategies that can support sustainable vocabulary development.

One strategy that can significantly support vocabulary development is extensive reading. Extensive reading allows learners to read large amounts of texts for general comprehension and enjoyment, helping them build good reading habits and expand vocabulary naturally through repeated exposure. Suharjuddin et al. (2024) stated that students who engage in extensive reading read without pressure and unintentionally acquire new vocabulary from the process. Unlike intensive reading, extensive reading encourages students to freely choose reading materials based on their interests—such as magazines, short stories, and novels—which fosters positive attitudes toward reading. This is supported by Wijaya (2021), who emphasized that when students read texts they enjoy, they feel more motivated and engaged in the reading activity.

Moreover, curiosity about unknown words also drives learners to seek meanings. As Virgiyanti et al. (2023) found, students become curious when they encounter unfamiliar vocabulary in enjoyable reading materials, leading them to explore and learn new words. Thus, extensive reading plays an important role in helping students expand vocabulary in a more natural and enjoyable way.

Based on preliminary classroom observations conducted by the researcher during the Extensive Reading course, it was found that students exhibited various levels of engagement in reading English materials. Some students were actively involved in reading digital content such as blogs, novels, and self-improvement books, while others demonstrated limited exposure to English texts outside classroom assignments. During classroom activities, it was also observed that several students attempted to guess meanings of unfamiliar words using contextual clues rather than relying solely on dictionaries, indicating initial development in contextual vocabulary learning strategies. However, despite the availability of reading resources, challenges such as inconsistency in reading habits, difficulty maintaining motivation, and hesitancy in applying newly acquired vocabulary in speaking tasks were still present. These observations guided the researcher in selecting participants who had different levels of academic performance in the Extensive Reading course, as this diversity was expected to provide varied insights into how extensive reading influences vocabulary mastery from multiple learner experiences.

Previous studies have shown that extensive reading positively impacts students' vocabulary mastery. Arrasul & Halim (2021) found that extensive reading significantly improved ninth graders' vocabulary mastery through natural exposure to new words in various English texts. Similarly, Sariayu (2019) confirmed that students engaging in extensive reading achieved higher vocabulary mastery than those using conventional reading instruction. From a broader perspective, Liu & Zhang (2018) reported that extensive reading

enhanced both vocabulary breadth and depth, as well as reading proficiency and motivation among Chinese university students. Meanwhile, Syafinaz et al. (2024) highlighted that students' motivation, particularly the ideal L2 self, played a crucial role in sustaining engagement in extensive reading activities, demonstrating that motivational factors influence vocabulary development through reading.

Although previous studies consistently revealed the effectiveness of extensive reading in improving vocabulary mastery, most research employed quantitative approaches focused on measuring gains through pre-test and post-test results, while offering limited insight into how vocabulary develops through reading and how students experience the process (e.g., Arrasul & Halim, 2021 — significant t-test improvement; Sariayu, 2019 — higher post-test score in ER group; Liu & Zhang, 2018 — vocabulary breadth and depth improvement). These studies emphasized numerical outcomes rather than students' learning processes or strategies when encountering new vocabulary during reading. Only a few studies examined specific vocabulary aspects, such as spelling accuracy, contextual usage, and depth of word meaning, which are crucial dimensions of vocabulary mastery but have been understudied. Moreover, research investigating extensive reading in the Indonesian EFL university context using qualitative inquiry remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by investigating not only the outcomes but also students' cognitive and experiential processes while engaging in extensive reading, contributing richer insight into its role in vocabulary development.

1.2. Formulation of the Problem

This research will focus on answering the question, “What are the impacts of extensive reading on students' vocabulary mastery?”

1.3. Operational Definition

1.3.1. Extensive Reading

In the context of this study, extensive reading refers to a reading practice in which English Education students engage with a wide range of English texts such as novels, self-improvement books, blogs, or children's books, selected freely based on their personal interests and accessibility—particularly material that is easy to access through digital media. The purpose of extensive reading in this research is to observe how students naturally acquire vocabulary while reading for pleasure and overall comprehension rather than for translation or detailed analysis. As students frequently encounter new vocabulary in meaningful and repeated contexts, extensive reading in this study is expected to contribute to the improvement of specific aspects of vocabulary mastery: spelling accuracy, vocabulary growth, vocabulary use in real communication, and deeper understanding of word meanings.

1.3.2. Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary mastery in this research refers to students' ability to understand, store, and use English vocabulary effectively after engaging in extensive reading activities. It encompasses multiple dimensions including (1) spelling improvement, (2) vocabulary quantity growth, (3) vocabulary use in writing and speaking, and (4) meaning and depth of vocabulary knowledge such as understanding polysemous words and context-dependent meanings. In this study, vocabulary mastery is not measured through test scores, but interpreted through students' experiences, perceived improvements, and real application of vocabulary, as revealed in interview data. Thus, vocabulary mastery is viewed as a continuous development process influenced by students' reading habits and exposure to varied English input.

1.4. Aim of the Research

The expected purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of extensive reading on students' vocabulary mastery.

1.5. Significance of the Research

- a. Theoretical Use : Theoretically, this study contributes to the existing literature on extensive reading by providing qualitative evidence of its impact on students' vocabulary mastery. This research extends previous studies by conceptualizing vocabulary mastery as a multidimensional construct, including spelling improvement, meaning and depth of vocabulary knowledge, and vocabulary use, thereby strengthening theoretical understanding of vocabulary development through extensive reading.
- b. Practical Use : Practically, the findings of this study offer insights for students and English teachers regarding the importance of extensive reading as an effective strategy for vocabulary development. The results indicate that extensive reading supports students in improving spelling accuracy, understanding word meanings in context, and applying vocabulary in written and spoken communication. Thus, this study may encourage the consistent use of extensive reading in EFL learning contexts.
- c. Empirical Use : Empirically, this study provides in-depth qualitative data on students' experiences with extensive reading in an Indonesian EFL university context. The findings serve as empirical references for future research and may support further investigations using broader participants or different research designs to examine vocabulary mastery through extensive reading.