

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter encompasses various components of the research, including the research background, research questions, research purposes, research significances, conceptual framework, research scope, hypothesis, and a review of related previous studies.

#### **A. Research Background**

Vocabulary plays an important role in learning a foreign language because it is the foundation of the language. “Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language” (Ur, 1991: 60). In the context of learning English, the first aspect students must master is vocabulary. It is the most crucial factor in improving students' English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Therefore, learning vocabulary is an integral part of the language-learning process. Without sufficient vocabulary, students may face challenges in enhancing their proficiency across the four language skills.

Cameron (2001) defines vocabulary as the initial stage that students must learn and master because students will find it challenging to learn more about the primary language. The level of language ability possessed by a person correlates with the amount and level of vocabulary they have (Ismail et al., 2023). In communication, vocabulary helps people exchange knowledge, comprehend others, and build relationships. Furthermore, Anggita and Sudarman (2023) define vocabulary as one of the fundamental elements of language that refers to the use of words in the communication process.

Students with a restricted vocabulary tend to struggle to express their thoughts clearly and effectively, whether through verbal or written communication. As stated by McCarthy (1990), communication can only occur meaningfully if students know adequate words to express their ideas despite having acceptable grammar and pronunciation. It indicates that vocabulary is a language aspect of human communication. In addition, students who have a restricted vocabulary will struggle to comprehend the words used by others.

English is regarded as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia, and it is either a first or second language. This status was officially declared at a teacher trainers' conference 1995 (Lauder, 2008). In addition, Rahayu (2015) mentioned that students face challenges in understanding English due to the difference in language structure between English and Indonesian. Despite studying English for a long time, many students still struggle to master English. This challenge is common among EFL students in Indonesia and is frequently linked to insufficient practice and the lack of motivation to expand their vocabulary. Additionally, this issue is closely linked to the teaching and learning process, as insufficient teacher creativity, specifically in utilizing learning media, can lead to student boredom, hindering their engagement and progress. Umar (2020) stated that teacher creativity refers to an educator's ability to develop innovative concepts that can foster students' motivation for learning and ensure the learning process is interesting and not monotonous. These challenges can be overcome by utilizing interactive and engaging media to inspire students and create a more interesting and meaningful learning environment.

The rapid development of technology plays an essential role in various sectors of life, including transportation, health, economics, business, and education. Schatzberg (2018) defined technology as the set of practices humans utilize to modify the material environment, including practices involved in generating and using material things. Moreover, technology in education has a broader meaning because the technology used in education is a combination of management, machines, humans, and ideas. Harmer (2007) believes that instructors should consider technology as an instrument to support them in whatever techniques and approaches they have decided to utilize. One of the technologies used to teach and learn vocabulary is mobile applications.

According to Jain and Viswanathan (2015), mobile applications are computer programs designed specifically for smartphones. Mobile apps are widely used in numerous fields, including education, travel, healthcare, entertainment, and politics (McCabe, 2013). Users utilize mobile applications to do activities, learn new things, acquire languages, and interact with others daily. Using mobile applications in the classroom can be an engaging substitute for traditional media and benefit both

educators and learners. This aligns with Ramlan et al. (2023) that mobile application offers an interactive and engaging learning experience. Therefore, using mobile applications can be an interesting medium for learning English because engaging media offers learners a new learning experience and makes it more enjoyable and meaningful.

Based on preliminary observations at the research site, the researcher discovered that seventh-grade students there lack vocabulary skills. The minimum variety of teaching and learning English methods makes students bored quickly. In addition, students still think that learning English is enough only at school and that they only need to complete assignments and get good grades. Besides, since English subjects were omitted at the elementary level in the last curriculum, Kurikulum 2013, it has affected the students' English competence. They barely understand the basic vocabulary and how to pronounce each word.

Several previous studies have dealt with using mobile applications as a medium for teaching and learning to improve students' vocabulary. The first study was carried out by Hamdani and Puspitorini (2021) with the aim of examining how the BBC Learning English application affects students' vocabulary knowledge. The second study, conducted by Mutmainah, Wahab, and Ferdianto (2023), looked into how Hello English affected students' vocabulary acquisition.

The third study from Rahmani, Asadi, and Xodabande (2022) examined how student vocabulary knowledge was affected by mobile-assisted language learning using digital flashcards (DFs) or DF applications. The last study by Rong (2022) aims to evaluate the effects of vocabulary development on a single reading application called "Fluent Reading" at a Chinese university for EFL learners with intermediate English proficiency.

However, the present study differs from previous studies. This study uses the mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary* to assess students' vocabulary mastery. Additionally, this study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental research design. Therefore, one class of seventh-graders from SMP Negeri 2 Limbangan Garut are the participants of this research.

## **B. Research Questions**

Based on the previous background, this research aims to answer three questions:

1. What is students' vocabulary mastery before using the mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary*?
2. What is students' vocabulary mastery after using the mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary*?
3. Is there any significant difference in students' vocabulary mastery before and after using the mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary*?

## **C. Research Purposes**

Regarding the three research questions above, the following is the purpose of this research:

1. To determine the students' vocabulary mastery before using the mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary*.
2. To determine the students' vocabulary mastery after using the mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary*.
3. To identify the significant difference in students' vocabulary mastery before and after using the mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary*.

## **D. Research Significances**

This study expected that the results would be useful both theoretically and practically.

### **1. Theoretical Significance**

Theoretically, this study can contribute to the literature on the use of learning media, especially the use of the *Learn English Vocabulary* mobile application, in improving students' vocabulary mastery.

### **2. Practical Significance**

Practically, this study offers significant value for teachers, as it can serve as a resource for teaching English to students, particularly in terms of mastering vocabulary. Teachers and students can create a meaningful learning experience by utilizing an engaging medium of learning. Teachers can provide a new language learning experience, and students can boost their motivation to master vocabulary and enjoy the learning process. Furthermore, for other researchers,

this study is intended to be a reference for developing further research on similar problems or media using different research approaches or designs.

### **E. Research Scope**

This research examined the impact of a mobile application in improving students' vocabulary ability. The mobile application utilized in this study is *Learn English Vocabulary*. This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Limbangan, involving one class of seventh-grade students as participants. The learning materials provided to students were adapted from the Merdeka Curriculum and the content available on the *Learn English Vocabulary* application.

Material in the *English for Nusantara* book that refers to the Merdeka Curriculum for seventh-grade students consists of five chapters: About Me, Culinary and Me, Home Sweet Home, My School Activities, and This is My School. Due to research limitations, the material used for this study was chapter 3. Home Sweet Home and only two units were selected from this chapter, namely, My Home and My House Chores.

### **F. Conceptual Framework**

The objective of this study is to investigate EFL students' experiences of utilizing mobile apps to improve their English language skills, specifically vocabulary mastery.

Vocabulary refers to a set of words that belong to a language and are used by people or other entities. Vocabulary includes a group of target words in a particular language or a collection of words used by a speaker (Hatch & Brown, 1995). Alqahtani (2015) defines vocabulary as the initial number of words required to express concepts and indicate the speaker's intent. A person's vocabulary is the collection of all the words they understand or are likely to employ to create new sentences. Moreover, McKeown and Curtis (1987) define comprehension of word meanings as vocabulary. Furthermore, vocabulary encompasses all the words a person learns while learning a language, whether written or spoken.

Vocabulary mastery is a person's ability to study and understand a word in a language, such as English. A person's ability to know as much vocabulary as

possible in a language and its meaning (Habibah, 2019). Furthermore, Lewis and Hill (1992) emphasize the importance of students mastering vocabulary because English is a global language that is often used to share information and knowledge. Students can learn and master vocabulary in many ways and use interesting learning mediums. One of the learning mediums that students can use is mobile applications.

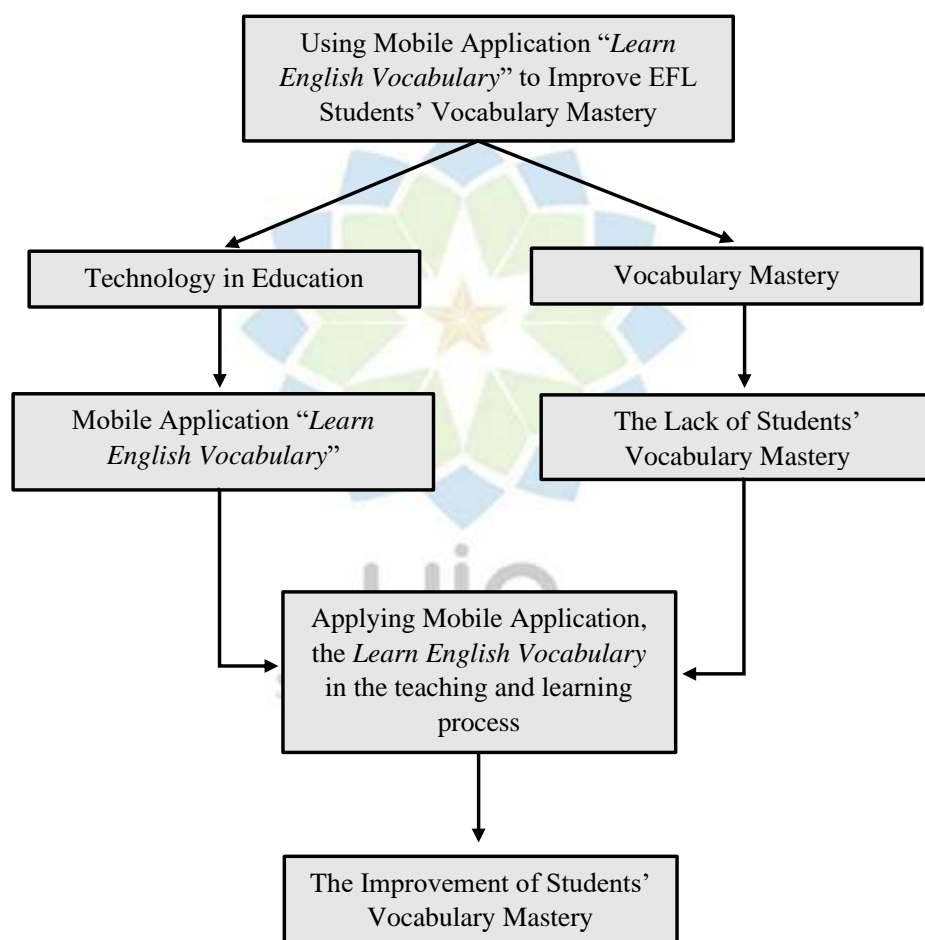
Mobile applications are an example of using a learning medium in terms of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). Hsieh (2024) defines “Mobile Assisted Language Learning” (MALL) as the use of mobile devices, particularly smartphones or tablets, to improve the language learning experience for all ages in formal or informal circumstances. Chinnery (2006), who created the term Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), argues that mobile devices might be employed as pedagogical instruments for language learning. Following technological advancements in education, mobile applications have gained in popularity and utility as a tool for language learning (Kayra, 2024).

Mobile applications provide flexibility in English learning schedules, where users can access the apps anytime and anywhere. As stated by Lutfiansayh (2016), mobile applications allow users to access information anywhere and anytime, including information about learning the English language. Not only that, mobile apps also open up opportunities for students to expand their vocabulary easily and quickly. The variety of mobile applications we can utilize in English learning includes Duolingo, Cake, Hellotalk, and others. These mobile apps have some features that support students in the learning process.

*Learn English Vocabulary* is the mobile application employed in this study as a teaching and learning medium. This app can assist students in enhancing their language abilities. The mobile application Learn English Vocabulary is helpful for learners at different levels because this app begins with basic words for any topic and supports features such as listening, speaking, and writing tasks, tests, reviewing learning, and examples of the sentence of the words.

Along with learning vocabulary with various topics, through this application, students can learn the meaning of words, examples of the words used in sentences, and how the words are pronounced. This application also has various features to

test the student's ability, such as listening tests, speaking, writing, and right-answer tests. The material in the *Learn English Vocabulary* application is a basic vocabulary, but this application has some features to support students at the beginner level. This app allows them to learn easily and improve their vocabulary and English skills. The conceptual framework of the research is illustrated in the figure below.



**Figure 1. 1 Conceptual Framework**

### G. Hypothesis

The preliminary answer to the research questions is known as a hypothesis (Sugiyono, 2015). Furthermore, Kothari (2004: 184) stated, "hypothesis may be defined as a proposition or a set of propositions set forth as an explanation for the occurrence of some specified group of phenomena either asserted merely as a

provisional conjecture to guide some investigation or accepted as highly probable in the light of established facts.” A hypothesis should be tested to see whether it is accepted or rejected. The variable of this research consists of two variables: Mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary* is variable "X" while EFL Students' Vocabulary Mastery is variable "Y." The following is the proposed relationship of the research hypothesis: Using the Mobile Application “*Learn English Vocabulary*” to improve EFL Students' Vocabulary Mastery: A Pre-experimental Study at Junior High School in Garut. The following hypothesis forms of the study:

1. Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): There is no significant difference in students' vocabulary mastery before and after using the mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary*.
2. Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_a$ ): There is a significant difference in students' vocabulary mastery before and after using the mobile application *Learn English Vocabulary*.

#### **H. Previous Studies**

Several previous studies dealt with utilizing mobile applications in teaching and learning vocabulary. The first research was conducted by Hamdani and Puspitorini (2021) under the title “Applying BBC Learning English Application in Students' Vocabulary Mastery.” This study examined the use of the BBC Learning English app to improve students' vocabulary. Twenty-six fourth-semester accounting students from Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya University participated in this research. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. According to the findings, at each meeting, students acquired 10 new vocabulary words.

The second research was carried out by Mutmainah, Wahab, and Ferdiyanto (2023) under the title “Utilizing Mobile App: (Hello English) Has Significant Impact on Students' Vocabulary Mastery.” The purpose of this research is to ascertain how the Hello English app affects students' vocabulary mastery. A pre-experimental research design one group pre-test post-test with 25 students in the seventh grade at MTS Salafiyah Pajajaran in the academic year 2022/2023 as a sample of the research. The study's conclusions demonstrate that the Hello English app significantly enhances students' master vocabulary.



The third research was conducted by Rahmani, Asadi, and Xodabande (2022), entitled “Using Mobile Devices for Vocabulary Learning Outside the Classroom: Improving the English as Foreign Language Learners' Knowledge of High-Frequency Words.” This study investigates the efficacy of digital flashcards (DFs) in mobile-assisted vocabulary acquisition. The study involved 44 adult language learners. The results show that using DF for vocabulary acquisition outside the classroom considerably improves short-term and long-term knowledge of high-frequency terms.

The last research was conducted by Rong (2022), entitled “Mobile Assisted Vocabulary Learning with Chinese EFL Learners: Effectiveness and Evaluation.” This study examines how vocabulary learning affects EFL students using the “Fluent Reading” reading software at a Chinese institution with intermediate English proficiency. The four participants were instructed to utilize the reading app daily for the 30-day reading treatment. Learners' vocabulary progress in 100 randomly chosen target words was evaluated using a vocabulary pre-test and post-test. The findings indicate that significant vocabulary improvements can be achieved by mobile-assisted language learning.

Nevertheless, the present research differs from the previous studies. This study investigates students' vocabulary mastery using different research sites and mobile applications. Thus, the *Learn English Vocabulary* app is the mobile application utilized in this study. This research employed a quantitative approach and a pre-experimental research design. In addition, one seventh-grade class at SMP Negeri 2 Limbangan Garut serves as the research's participants.