CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives a brief explanation of the study. It consists of the background of the study, the questions and purposes of this research, the research significance, the conceptual framework, and previous studies related to this research.

A. Background of Study

This research aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of game-based learning media for the development of young learners' English Vocabulary in the context of a differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*. Game-based learning can be employed to develop English vocabulary for young learners. By integrating interactive and engaging activities, game-based learning can cater to diverse learning styles and needs. However, teachers' insights on the effectiveness and challenges of implementing these media are crucial for understanding its impact. This study also explores the alignment of game-based learning strategies with the principles of differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide valuable recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance English language instruction for young learners.

The differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)* is a curriculum that aims to provide greater freedom to schools and teachers in designing and compiling curricula according to local needs and context. This approach aims to increase the flexibility, relevance, and adaptability of the curriculum so that it is more suited to the conditions and needs of local communities (Kemdikbud, 2021). The differentiated curriculum *(Kurikilum Merdeka)* is designed to encourage the development of student potential, skills-based learning, and character development. According to Rahayu et al. (2022), the differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)* is interpreted as a learning design that provides students with the opportunity to learn calmly, relaxed, fun, stress-free, and pressure-free, to show their natural talents.

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Meanwhile, teaching vocabulary is the practice of teaching and learning vocabulary to help students acquire a language. Teaching vocabulary is an important part of learning a foreign language because it is the foundation for anyone studying a foreign language (Susanto 2017). Moreover, vocabulary learning is an important component in foreign language learning. The meaning of new words is often highlighted, both in publications and in spoken interactions. Vocabulary is considered to be the heart of language education and is very important for language learners. Vocabulary provides the basis for learning a foreign language.

Young learners who learn English as a second language, often known as a foreign language, are said to be easy learners of the language. Learners are easily divided into three to five-year groups. Nunan (2011) states that a child who is taught young is one who is roughly three to five years old. According to Phillips (2003), young learners are children from the first year of formal schooling (five or six years) to the age of eleven or twelve.

Based on preliminary observations, it was found that students' vocabulary mastery was still limited, and their pronunciation was not entirely correct. Therefore, teachers at the school began using game-based learning media to improve students' English vocabulary mastery. The school is currently implementing a differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*.

However, game-based learning media is a novel strategy that is highly effective in boosting language skills, particularly vocabulary in young learners. Learning through games is absolutely not boring, and it will be more fascinating and entertaining for kids since it generates challenges that expose students to new languages and improve their enthusiasm to extend their vocabulary. Furthermore, because game-based learning is delivered in a fun environment, kids are more engaged, motivated, and able to retain the material presented by the teacher, encouraging students to continue to grow and allowing students to acquire vocabulary more efficiently. According to Zuhdi (2021), using learning media in the learning process increases students' interest when compared to not

using media. Learning media packaged in the form of games will keep students interested and make it easier for them to understand the material offered by the teacher because learning is done in a joyful environment.

In understanding how educational practices are shaped and implemented, it is crucial to consider the role of teacher perceptions. These perceptions are teachers' perspectives, beliefs, and subjective assessments of numerous areas of education. Pajares (1992) claims that teachers' perceptions have the same meaning as teachers' beliefs about the subject matter teachers teach, their roles of responsibility, their students, the curriculum, and their classroom. Several factors influence teacher perceptions, including teaching experience, educational background, personal values, and the school atmosphere. Srakang and Jansem (2013) mention that teachers' perceptions influence what they do both inside and outside the classroom.

Besides that, several previous researchers have addressed this topic. The first study was conducted by Firdaus & Muryanti (2020) research, which focused on English educational games for developing English vocabulary in early childhood. Another study was conducted by Purba and Katemba (2022), which investigates English teachers' perceptions of using game-based learning (GBL) to improve student vocabulary. Watson et al. (2016) researched Teachers' perceptions of barriers to game-based learning in schools. ' Furthermore, Lindgren (2018) conducted a study on understanding what makes a game educational and how teachers view the potential of educational games. Then, Al-Harbi & Madini (2024) explored EFL teachers' perceptions of using game-based learning tools in virtual classes within a Saudi primary school context. However, the current research is different from the previous studies. This study investigates teachers' perceptions of game-based learning media for young learners' English vocabulary development within the context of a differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*.

B. Research Questions

1. How is the implementation of game-based learning media in the EYL class within the context of differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*?

2. What is the teacher's perception of the effectiveness and challenges of using game-based learning media in fostering the development of vocabulary for young learners within the context of differentiated curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka)*?

C. Research Purposes

The research has 2 main goals as follows:

1. To find out how the implementation of game-based learning media in the EYL class is implemented within the context of a differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*.

2. To find out what is the teacher's perception of the effectiveness and challenges of using game-based learning media in fostering the development of vocabulary for young learners within the context of differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*.

D. Research Significances

Theoretical Significances :

Theoretically, this research is expected to be a reference related to game-based learning. It aims to provide insights into how game-based learning can enhance educational outcomes. Furthermore, it seeks to identify best practices and strategies for integrating games into the curriculum effectively. The findings may also contribute to the development of new educational tools and resources that leverage game mechanics to engage students and improve learning retention.

Practical Significances :

Practically this study is a reflection material for teachers on game-based learning in the classroom. It is expected that this research can be useful as material to increase student engagement and improve learning outcomes by aligning learning practices with teacher perceptions and preferences regarding game-based learning media for young learners in the context of a differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*.

E. Research Scope

This study focuses on teacher's perception of game-based learning media, which have the potential to improve the development of young learners' English vocabulary in the context of differentiated curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) because teacher's perception are critical for understanding its effectiveness and informing curriculum development, teacher professional development, and the selection of game-based learning materials appropriate for young learners. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research will investigate these perception by closely examining the implementation of game-based learning in the classroom. Specifically, it will observe how teachers integrate this media into their lesson plans, adapt the materials to meet the varying needs of students under the differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)* framework, and assess its impact on vocabulary development.

F. Conceptual Framework

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│                Teaching Vocabulary                 │
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│               Game-Based learning                  │
│                     (GBL)                          │
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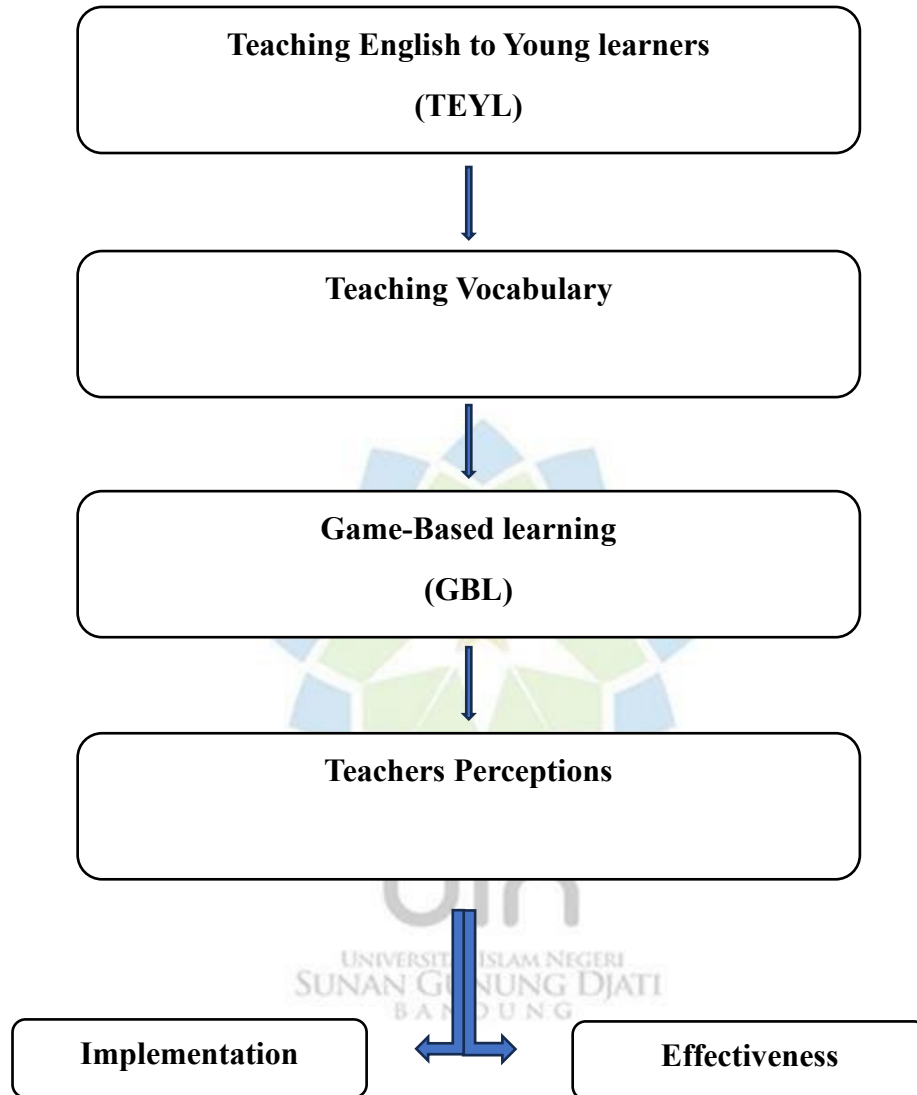
Young learners learn actively and imaginatively, absorbing information from their surroundings by what they see, hear, and interact with. It refers to Suttrisno (2023), that interaction with early childhood is critical to children's growth. This not only promotes language, cognitive, social, and emotional development but also lays the groundwork for solid relationships between children and adults. Adults may help their children grow and develop properly by talking, reading, playing, and paying close attention.

Children who are studying English as a second or foreign language are known as English young learners. Young learners range in age from approximately three to fifteen years old. Nunan (2011) states that "young learners are children aged approximately three to fifteen years." "Young learners mean children from the first year of formal schooling (five or six years) to eleven or twelve years of age," according to Phillips (2003). According to Linse (2006), young learners are defined as children between the ages of five and twelve. The definition of young learners is mostly focused on the years that a kid spends in primary or elementary formal education before making the move to secondary school.

The differentiated curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) is a learning curriculum that refers to the talent and interest approach. The curriculum launched by the Ministry of Education and Technology, Mr. Nadiem Makarim, is an effort to evaluate the improvement of the 2013 curriculum. The 2013 curriculum was used before the pandemic hit Indonesia, where the 2013 curriculum was the only curriculum used in the teaching and learning process (Aisyah et al., 2022). Then, according to Saputra and Hadi. (2022). The government is vigorously promoting the four episodes of the independent learning policy, which serve as a guide for all stakeholders in providing a joyful, happy, and meaningful learning experience for all students in each school up to the tertiary level. A key aspect of creating such a meaningful learning experience is the effective teaching of Vocabulary, which is essential for language acquisition.

In the context of the differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)*, English classes are increasingly suggested to be taught at the elementary level. This is motivated by three primary causes. First, English is required for all Indonesian children. The second step is to align the English curriculum. Third, ensuring equal learning quality (BBPM East Java, 2023). In addition, according to Wahyudin (2023), the differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)* in English study also enables the use of local materials rich in culture, history, and traditional traditions. Teachers can more easily include local values into English

lessons, connecting language skills to students' cultural identities. This not only helps their comprehension of English, but it also broadens their horizons to include the richness of the country's culture. So, English learning in the differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)* is designed to provide learning that is more flexible, contextual, and in accordance with students' needs and local culture.

Vocabulary teaching is the practice of teaching and learning vocabulary to help students acquire a language. Teaching vocabulary is an important part of learning a foreign language because it serves as the foundation for anyone studying a foreign language. This is consistent with Susanto (2017), who stated that vocabulary learning is an important component of foreign language learning. The meaning of new words is frequently highlighted, both in publications and in spoken interactions. Vocabulary is considered the heart of language education and is critical for language learners Vocabulary provides the foundation for learning a foreign language.

Teaching vocabulary is especially crucial for young learners. They will be able to write sentences once they have learned the terminology. Acquiring vocabulary is very beneficial for young learners because it is preferable to master English at a young age. According to Lestari et al. (2024), Learning English at an early age is one method for mastering the language. Many people believe that the sooner someone begins learning new skills, the easier it is for them to master them.

Game-based learning media is a method of learning that incorporates games into ongoing instruction. This game-based learning can help young learners overcome inadequate classroom instruction and expand their English Vocabulary. According to Firdaus and Muryanti (2020), creating an innovative game can help overcome the ineffectiveness of traditional learning in imparting English language to young children. Innovative games can be educative. Educational games are developed utilizing computer technology while taking into account the characteristics, language development, and theories of early

childhood language acquisition, so that children are not bored when recognizing or acquiring English vocabulary. However, the success of such educational innovations depends significantly on how they are perceived by educators and learners alike.

Game-based learning in English can be divided into several types of media and game formats. First, digital games such as online educational applications or games are often used because of their flexibility and interactivity. According to Gros (2007), kids can learn outside of school hours with the flexibility provided by digital educational games, leading to greater independent learning. Students' engagement and drive to learn are increased by this flexibility, which makes it simpler for them to access educational resources at any time and from any location. In addition, Clark, Tanner, & Killingsworth (2016) claim that interactive digital games can boost students cognitive and emotional engagement in learning. Students can actively participate in the game and accomplish challenges, which enhances their comprehension and memory of the material. Duolingo and Kahoot! These are two well-known digital games that let students learn through interactive tests and game-based exercises. In their study, Vesselinov and Grego (2012) found that Duolingo's organized and interactive method works well for assisting users in learning a new language. According to Hartanti (2019), Kahoot is a useful teaching tool for raising students' motivation, comprehension, and involvement in the classroom. Second, traditional or non-digital games that require direct social interaction, such as board games or vocabulary games, are also beneficial for language learning. It refers to Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby's (2006) claim that classic games, such as board games or word games, can be useful teaching aids for language acquisition since they make the classroom enjoyable and lower students' anxiety levels. With the help of social interactions based on the rules of the games, these activities let students practice language in an organic and spontaneous way. These kinds of games all seek to boost students' enthusiasm and quicken their acquisition of vocabulary, speaking, and other language abilities.

Teacher perceptions are critical in the learning setting because they can guide attempts to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Instructors' perspectives of curriculum implementation are particularly crucial since instructors play a significant role in the curriculum development and implementation processes. This is consistent with Mantra et al.'s (2022) finding that instructors are very excited about comprehending curriculum topics and are eager to acquire new values from the differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)* and apply them in classroom instruction. Teachers feel responsibility for fully implementing these curriculum modifications in the classroom learning process. Furthermore, teachers believe they have a significant role in formulating and implementing the curriculum in schools.

In short, teachers' perceptions of game-based learning media's effectiveness in expanding English Vocabulary are critical in determining how to employ game-based learning media for young students.

G. Previous Studies

Several previous research have looked at Game-Based Learning in English language training.

Firdaus and Muryanti (2020) investigated the use of English educational games to enhance English vocabulary in young children. The methodology employed was qualitative research with a literature review approach, where the researchers analyzed scientific articles, books, and other relevant sources without involving human participants directly. The findings indicated that using educational games effectively enhanced vocabulary acquisition, imagination, creativity, and skills in early childhood, making learning more engaging compared to conventional teaching methods. However, there was a research gap concerning challenges in implementation, such as material, preparation, rule interpretation, and classroom management. This study highlighted the crucial role of teachers in supervising the use of games to maximize learning outcomes, as well as the need for further research to address these challenges and optimize the use of games in English language learning.

Second, Purba and Katemba conducted research in 2022 focusing on English teachers' perceptions of using game-based learning (GBL) to enhance students' Vocabulary, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research employed a quantitative survey design, using a questionnaire with 20 questions as the instrument. The study involved 40 high school teachers from Sumatra Island and Java Island as participants. The results indicated that the majority of teachers had a positive perception of GBL, with 94% agreeing that GBL increased their confidence in teaching, and 95% agreeing that GBL made Vocabulary learning more enjoyable. However, the study acknowledged a research gap related to the generalizability of the findings, as the research was conducted in a specific context during the pandemic and with a geographically limited sample, suggesting the need for further studies in different contexts to strengthen these findings.

Third, Watson et al. (2016) focused on exploring the barriers that K-12 teachers in the United States encountered or perceived in using video games for instruction and how these perceptions are influenced by gender, teaching level, and experience with game-based learning. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, starting with individual interviews to identify barriers and teacher attitudes, followed by the development of a web-based survey consisting of 33 statements about these barriers. Participants included 109 teachers varying in teaching levels (elementary, middle/intermediate, and high school) and experience with using games. Factor analysis of the survey responses identified four main factors: challenges in implementing games effectively, challenges with using technology, the current educational system, and challenges in obtaining games, which together explained 47.03% of the total variance. The study found differences in perceptions based on gender, teaching level, and experience with games. This research addressed gaps in previous studies by focusing on U.S. teachers, providing a clear definition of educational games, and using a mixed-methods approach to offer a more authentic and comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions and the barriers they faced.

Fourth, Lindgren (2018) conducted research focusing on understanding what made a game educational and how teachers perceived the educational potential of games. The methodology chosen was qualitative, using open-ended interviews to gather in-depth insights from a dozen teachers. The instruments used included interviews conducted and transcribed by the researcher. The participants were teachers who provided their views on what constituted an educational game and its application in the classroom. The results indicated that teachers found games useful for increasing motivation, introducing new concepts, and developing cognitive and social abilities among students, although challenges such as limitations in the school system and technology issues persisted. The research gap identified included the need for more studies focusing on non-digital games and a deeper exploration of the design elements that contributed to a game's educational value.

Fifth, Al-Harbi and Madini (2024) explored EFL teachers' perceptions of using game-based learning tools in virtual classes within Saudi primary schools. The methodology employed was qualitative, utilizing a descriptive phenomenological approach to gain in-depth insights. The primary instrument used was semi-structured interviews (SSIs) adapted from a previous study by Vogt (2018). Participants included five female EFL teachers from various primary schools in Al-Qunfudhah, who shared Arabic as their native language and Possessed experience in digital game-based English teaching. The results indicated that many EFL teachers had positive perceptions of digital game-based learning (DGBL), recognizing its benefits in enhancing student engagement, time efficiency, and language development, although they also highlighted a lack of comprehensive studies on DGBL's impact at the primary school level in regions like Al-Qunfudhah, suggesting a need for further exploration into the integration of educational technology and its broader implications in various Saudi regions and school environments an exploration EFL.

However, the current research is different from previous studies. This study investigates teachers' perceptions of game-based learning media for young learners' English vocabulary development within the context of a differentiated curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka).* This study uses a qualitative descriptive method using checklist observation instruments and interviews.