CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter elaborates on the background of the research, research questions, and purposes, which become the foundation of the research, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, hypotheses, and previous studies.

A. Research Background

This study examines the implementation of modified Indonesian-Thai traditional games in improving students' vocabulary mastery. According to Nation & Coxhead (2022), vocabulary is one of the crucial aspects of language in acquiring language proficiency. Regarding language proficiency, the newest data on English proficiency in Thailand, according to The EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) (2024), ranked it 106th of 116 countries with a score of 415. This data shows that the English proficiency level in Thailand is still low. Based on a preliminary observation done in a school located in the southern part of Thailand, the low level of proficiency may be caused by the stagnancy of the learning method. An early observation by Thomas (2016) shows that the classroom situations are pretty much the same as the current observation. When the teacher walks into the classroom, a student will shout "Stand up, please!" and greet the teacher with "Good morning/afternoon, teacher." When the teacher asks how they are doing, they will reply, "I am fine, thank you, and you?" The exact conversations also happened in the current observation, although nine years apart.

Moreover, the methods are also more book-oriented, in which the students will sit and write down some words in their book or read the text from the book. Translating is also a huge part of the learning, which makes the learning quite rigid. Therefore, to raise Thai's English proficiency, an improvement should be made by exploring some new methods or approaches that have never been or rarely been used, which have the possibility to make a change. This study, "The Effect of Implementing Indonesian-Thai Traditional Games on Students' Vocabulary

Mastery in Thai Elementary Students," offered the possibility of implementing traditional games in the learning process by analyzing their impact on students' vocabulary mastery.

This study focused on vocabulary mastery since vocabulary is a crucial aspect of language learning to master. It can scaffold the other skills, such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing, in order to achieve language proficiency (Nation & Coxhead, 2022). In other words, vocabulary is the pillar of language proficiency. With this importance, Christ & Wang (2010) recommend that vocabulary should be taught since early childhood. In learning vocabulary, young learners have the ability to capture and remember vocabulary subconsciously; however, it will be easier and faster for them to capture the vocabulary if they are engaged and have an interest in the vocabulary (Christ & Wang, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial to avoid being long-winded in explaining the material, which can cause the learners to lack understanding and experience boredom (Magnussen & Sukying, 2021).

One of the options to make the learning more interesting and engaging is by addressing games. According to Qizi & Muhammadqosimovna (2021), games can boost motivation, engagement, and overall performance since they create a fun, interactive atmosphere. Numerous studies demonstrate that games can have beneficial affective and motivational (cognitive) learning and behavioral impacts in addition to increasing students' motivation and engagement. These effects ultimately result in the growth and enhancement of learners' language abilities (Krath et al., 2021). Given these benefits, games might be the greatest way to teach vocabulary to young students.

In its implementation, games are divided into two types, namely digital and non-digital games (Talan et al., 2020). In non-digital games, there are also several types, such as board games, card games, and physical games, which include traditional games. Amongst these games, traditional games could be chosen to teach vocabulary to young learners. It is because they are appropriate for children since they are traditionally played by children, unlike digital games, which sometimes consist of violent elements (Çat, 2022).

The games administered in this study are the games played in Indonesia and Thailand, but they are similar to each other. The games are *Kursi Panas* and ม้าหมุน *(เก้าอี้ดนตรี) (Mahmun/Carousel), Gobak Sodor* and เตยกัก *(Telkak), Ular Naga* and งูกินหาง *(Ngu kin hang), Oray-orayan* and รีรี ข้าวสาร *(Ree ree khao sarn),* and *Engklek* and ตั้งเต *(Tangte).* These games were then modified to align with the learning objectives. The modifications of these games are including the songs used in the games and its procedures.

Traditional games, in particular, hold unique potential, as they combine learning with cultural experiences, making lessons more engaging and memorable. The games also often require learners to move their bodies, use their senses, and maintain their focus, which is in line with Scott & Ytreberg (1990), who stated that in teaching English to young learners, the learning cannot only rely on oral work but also require movement, rhyme, objects, and pictures to keep the learners engaged in the materials.

Besides boosting students' engagement and motivation, traditional games possess significant cultural and heritage value, as they are traditionally transmitted across generations (Hassani & Afazeli, 2024). The inclusion of these games in educational settings invests learning with cultural relevance, making it more relatable and meaningful for students. Not only that, traditional games also can foster students' collaboration and teamwork (Ekawati et al., 2015) and physical competence (Hassani & Afazeli, 2024).

Numerous studies have emphasized the positive impact of traditional games on language learning. Hidayati (2020) demonstrates that Indonesian traditional games significantly improved vocabulary acquisition among kindergarten and elementary students. Ningsih et al. (2022) also show that there is a significant increase in students' vocabulary mastery after the implementation of traditional games, which was proven by the increase in students' average score. And in the Thai context, Octaviani et al. (2019) states that in general, games can increase students' vocabulary mastery. Therefore, it can be concluded that these findings collectively affirm the efficacy of game-based learning in general. However, the study of

implementing traditional games is still rare, especially in the Thai context within the teaching English to young learners (TEYL) scope. The rarity of studies of the implementation of traditional games in the Thai context within TEYL leaves a gap that this study addressed.

By addressing this gap, this study not only contributed to the theoretical framework of teaching English to young learners (TEYL) but also offered practical insights for educators in Thailand and beyond. The combination of cultural exchange and innovative pedagogy has the potential to transform vocabulary acquisition, making it more meaningful and effective for young learners.

B. Research Question

Based on the research background, this research examined two variables. The variables are the independent variable (X), which is the use of Indonesian-Thai traditional games, and the dependent variable (Y), which is the students' vocabulary mastery. Regarding these variables, several research questions could be formed, as follows:

1. How is the students' vocabulary mastery before the implementation of modified Indonesian-Thai traditional games?
2. How is the students' vocabulary mastery after the implementation of modified Indonesian-Thai traditional games?
3. How effective is the use of Indonesian-Thai traditional games on students' vocabulary mastery?

C. Research purposes

This study proposed to examine the students' vocabulary mastery before the implementation of Indonesian-Thai traditional games in Thai classrooms, the students' vocabulary mastery after the use of Indonesian-Thai traditional games in Thai classrooms, and the effect of the use of Indonesian-Thai traditional games on students' vocabulary mastery.

D. Research significance

This research highlights the potential of adapting traditional games as innovative tools for English teaching, combining cultural exchange with effective pedagogy. Therefore, there are two significances of this study.

First, theoretically, the findings of this study contribute to the TEYL field and provide some insights into the implementation of game-based learning in cross-cultural settings. This research also provides some insight or inspiration in teaching and learning, especially for teachers. Teachers can vary the activities in the classroom by doing doable and suitable Indonesian-Thai traditional games, in particular.

Second, practically, this study, which utilizes the implementation of modified Indonesian-Thai traditional games, potentially can improve students' vocabulary scores. The implementation of traditional games also maintains students' focus and engagement in the learning.

E. Research Scope

The scope of this study was only limited to the implementation of modified Indonesian-Thai traditional games in teaching vocabulary in Thai classrooms within the context of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). It focused on the effect of these games on students' vocabulary mastery. The study was conducted on a specific group of elementary students in second grade by comparing the results of students' vocabulary mastery before and after the implementation of Indonesian-Thai traditional games. The vocabulary topics focused on in this study were vocabulary of foods, places, days of the week, things around the school, animals, colors, and professions. In order to make the vocabulary learning more contextual, grammar was also applied in the learning, which was focused on pronouns, prepositions, and simple present tense. This study did not encompass other aspects of English language learning, such as grammar, speaking skills, writing skills, etc.

F. Conceptual framework

Language acquisition among young learners is influenced by a range of internal and external factors (Andari, 2023). Internal factors such as age, cognitive development, learning styles, motivation, and learning methods significantly affect how young learners acquire vocabulary. External factors, including instructional techniques, exposure to resources, and cultural relevance, further shape the learning process.

In teaching vocabulary, Nunan (2011) underscores that it should be contextual and engaging, recommending that vocabulary be taught within meaningful situations rather than in isolation. Interactive tasks such as games and collaborative learning enhance retention by allowing learners to actively engage with the content. Furthermore, Nunan advocates for multisensory teaching strategies—incorporating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements—to cater to varied learning preferences and maximize learner engagement. This engagement is crucial in young learners' vocabulary learning, as they catch the vocabulary faster when they are engaged with the learning (Christ & Wang, 2010). Although young learners have an ability to remember the vocabulary even when they are not engaged, making them engaged in the learning can raise the odds for them to acquire vocabulary faster.

Similarly, Scott & Ytreberg (1990) highlight the benefits of integrating physical activity, rhyme, and interaction in teaching young learners, aligning with traditional games' potential to sustain engagement and focus. These principles align well with game-based learning (GBL), which fosters motivation, engagement, and meaningful interaction in student-centered learning environments (Ghazal & Singh, 2016; Miller et al., 2021).

Game-based learning holds an opportunity to fit with the needs of young learners, as mentioned by Nunan (2011). In particular, Indonesian-Thai traditional games, such as *Oray-orayan* and *Gobak sodor* from Indonesia and *Ree ree khao sarn* and *Ti cab* from Thailand, offer a unique opportunity to blend cultural relevance with effective pedagogy. In game-based learning, according to Miller et al. (2021), the games are transformed to fit in learning requirements. In this study,

the games were modified in terms of their songs and procedures so the games are aligned with the learning objectives.

The framework posited that incorporating vocabulary into game-based activities provides learners with an interactive and multisensory language-learning experience that enhances retention and enjoyment. This framework integrates instruments, such as the Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (ROWPVT) by Brownell & Martin (2010), which assesses vocabulary acquisition through visual prompts that students label or describe.

This conceptual framework demonstrated that modified traditional games can have an impact on young learners' vocabulary mastery. By fostering motivation, engagement, and meaningful interactions, students are expected to show significant improvement in vocabulary mastery, as indicated by higher post-test scores compared to pre-test results. Grounded in the theories of Nunan (2011), Brownell & Martin (2010), and Scott and Ytreberg (1990), this approach represents an innovative and theoretically sound method for teaching vocabulary to young learners. The framework of the study could be viewed as follows:

Input	Process	Output
Learners' vocabulary mastery before treatment	The implementation of modified Indonesian-Thai traditional games	Learners' vocabulary mastery improved

Figure 1. 1 Conceptual Framework

G. Hypotheses

This study focused on two variables tested to show the relationship between them. The two variables are the independent variable (X) and the dependent variable (Y). In this study, the use of Indonesian-Thai traditional games is the X, and students' vocabulary mastery is the Y. Therefore, the hypotheses of this study could be written as follows:

1. H0 (null hypothesis): There is no effect of implementing modified Indonesian-Thai traditional games on English vocabulary mastery in Thai elementary students.

2. Ha (alternate hypothesis): There is an effect of implementing modified Indonesian-Thai traditional games on English vocabulary mastery in Thai elementary students.

H. Previous studies

Several studies have explored the role of games and interactive tools in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, providing a solid foundation for the current research. Hidayati (2020) conducted a qualitative study focusing on the modification of Indonesian traditional games, such as *Kotak Pos, ABC Lima Dasar,* and *Engklek*, to improve English vocabulary among kindergarten and elementary school students. The research employed a descriptive approach, integrating literature review and observations to propose these games as effective educational tools. Hidayati highlighted that vocabulary, as a cornerstone of language acquisition, can be effectively taught through these culturally relevant games. The study concluded that such games create an engaging, repetitive, and meaningful learning experience, ultimately facilitating better vocabulary retention.

A study conducted by Authar et al. (2021) explored the effectiveness of the traditional Indonesian game *Engklek* in improving English vocabulary mastery among elementary-aged children in Kalijaten Village, Sidoarjo. The researchers employed a mixed-method design, primarily using observation to collect qualitative

and quantitative data. The study involved 10 participants aged 7 to 12 years. Over a ten-day period, children engaged in the modified *Engklek* game, where vocabulary flashcards were placed in each game square. As the children played, they were required to answer the vocabulary questions on the flashcards before proceeding in the game. Materials used included chalk for drawing the game board, "gaco" (markers), laminated flashcards, and vocabulary lists. The results showed that 80% of the children improved their English vocabulary mastery, with 50% reaching a good level, 30% at a standard level, and only 20% showing limited improvement. This study demonstrates how incorporating physical and playful traditional games into language learning can enhance children's engagement and retention.

Another relevant study was conducted by Wahyuni et al. (2021), who examined the effectiveness of a local traditional game called *Kabente* in enhancing the vocabulary mastery of grade VII students at SMP Negeri 1 Siompu Barat, Southeast Sulawesi. Using a pre-experimental design with one group pre-test and post-test, the study involved 25 students selected through cluster random sampling. The researchers implemented the *Kabente* game over four sessions, integrating English vocabulary tasks into the gameplay. Students had to perform physical movements and strategic interactions as they competed in teams to "capture" each other's base, all while responding to vocabulary prompts. The data were collected using a 30-item multiple-choice vocabulary test administered before and after the intervention. The results showed a significant improvement: the mean pre-test score was 36.36 (low), which increased to 80.04 (high) in the post-test. A t-test confirmed that the difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the *Kabente* game effectively enhanced students' vocabulary mastery.

Ningsih et al. (2022) conducted a pre-experimental study to examine the effectiveness of the traditional Konjo game *Ak Bombo-Bombo* in improving English vocabulary mastery among sixth-grade students of SDN 115 Tana Toa, South Sulawesi. The sample consisted of 20 students selected through total sampling, all of whom were familiar with the game and had low initial vocabulary proficiency. The researchers applied a one-group pre-test and post-test design, using vocabulary-based tests to assess learning outcomes. The intervention included eight 90-minute

sessions where students learned 100 English words (nouns, verbs, and adjectives) and then applied them in the gameplay. During the game, participants took turns acting as the "Bombo," who, while blindfolded and guided by cultural rules, had to guess the identity of peers while integrating vocabulary recall tasks such as explaining or identifying English words. The results showed a measurable improvement in vocabulary scores, with mean post-test scores (M = 3.10) higher than pre-test scores (M = 3.05). A paired t-test confirmed a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05), validating the use of *Ak Bombo-Bombo* as an engaging and culturally embedded method for vocabulary development.

Sa'adah et al. (2024) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the effectiveness of the traditional Indonesian game *Engklek* in improving English vocabulary mastery among sixth-grade students at SDN Mlaten, Mojokerto. The researchers used a one-group pretest-posttest design and selected participants from classes 6A and 6B through simple random sampling. Class 6B was used for the tryout session, while class 6A received the actual intervention. The intervention lasted five days and involved multiple sessions incorporating *Engklek* into vocabulary instruction. The pretest and posttest were used to assess vocabulary mastery, with the results analyzed using a paired samples t-test. Findings showed a significant increase in student performance: the average pretest score was 56.73, while the posttest average rose to 82.65. Statistical analysis confirmed that this improvement was significant (p = 0.000 < 0.05), indicating the effectiveness of *Engklek* as a learning tool. The study concluded that integrating traditional games into language instruction creates a fun, engaging, and interactive environment that enhances vocabulary retention and student motivation.

A study by Octaviani et al. (2019) investigated the effectiveness of the *Board Race Game* in improving English vocabulary mastery among fifth-grade students at Uttayan Suksa Krabi School, Thailand. Conducted as a collaborative classroom action research project, the study involved 39 students and spanned two action cycles from December 2018 to March 2019. Data were collected through observation, pre-tests, post-tests, and documentation. The researchers found a significant and consistent increase in vocabulary scores across each cycle: the pre-

test average was 55.3, post-test I rose to 68.6, and post-test II reached 85.6. The study concluded that implementing interactive and competitive games like the Board Race could effectively improve vocabulary learning by increasing students' enthusiasm, memorization, and contextual understanding. While this study illustrates the potential of game-based learning in Thai classrooms, it focused on imported or generalized game types. Thus, it highlights a research gap for the current study, which seeks to explore the use of modified traditional games rooted in both Indonesian and Thai cultures.

Collectively, these studies underscore the positive impact of implementing traditional games on vocabulary acquisition. Despite variations in methodology, participants, and tools, the consistent findings support the rationale for integrating Indonesian-Thai traditional games as a culturally and pedagogically effective strategy in the present research. The limited number of studies focused on the implementation of traditional games, especially in the Thai context, leaves a gap that this study addressed. Thus, it underlines the urgency of conducting the study in the mentioned context.