

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. It addresses the research background, research questions, research purposes, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, research hypotheses, and previous studies.

A. Research Background

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of English language learning because it serves as the foundation for mastering other language skills, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students with an adequate vocabulary will more easily understand texts and convey ideas accurately. Nation (2001) states that vocabulary learning is not only related to mastering word meanings, but also the ability to use words appropriately in context. This opinion aligns with Brown (2000), who emphasized that vocabulary encompasses aspects of form, meaning, and word use in communication.

Despite its significance, learning vocabulary can be difficult for students, particularly in an English as a Foreign Language classroom like Indonesia. Vocabulary lists, translation, memorization, and textbook-based activities are examples of traditional learning techniques that are sometimes regarded as dull and uninteresting. According to Prensky (2001) Today's students are "digital natives" who are more driven to study through interactive exercises, gaming environments, and technology. Learning motivation declines when teaching strategies are not in line with students' traits, which leads to poor vocabulary retention and trouble recalling words in relevant contexts (Nation, 2001).

In the Indonesian context, vocabulary mastery remains a struggle for most secondary school students. Indonesia's national curriculum framework requires students to develop competence in understanding and producing texts across educational phases. In English language learning, adequate vocabulary knowledge is therefore necessary to support students' comprehension and production of different text types. The curriculum framework established through Permendikbudristek No. 12 of 2024 was subsequently amended by

Permendikdasmen No. 13 of 2025, which is relevant to the 2026/2027 academic context of the present study (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2025). The 2018 PISA study found that Indonesian pupils' reading literacy skills were significantly below the OECD average, and EF Education First (2023) placed Indonesia in the "low proficiency" group. These findings show a vocabulary gap that affects low English proficiency, prompting the need for teachers to seek more effective and engaging learning techniques.

In English learning at the junior high school level, vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role, particularly in understanding descriptive texts. Descriptive texts require students to recognize and use specific vocabulary, such as nouns, adjectives, and verbs, to clearly describe people, animals, or places. However, in reality, many students still struggle to understand and use appropriate vocabulary in descriptive texts. These difficulties impact students' low ability to comprehend the text's content and construct accurate descriptions.

Students' low vocabulary skills in descriptive texts are not only influenced by students' individual abilities but also by the classroom learning process, particularly the dominant use of conventional learning media. In this context, conventional learning refers to vocabulary instruction that primarily relies on teacher-centered explanation, textbooks, vocabulary lists, translation, memorization, and repetitive exercises, with relatively limited opportunities for interactive or technology-supported practice. Recent research indicates that conventional vocabulary instruction commonly involves practices such as rote memorization and repetitive review, whereas more interactive approaches provide learners with greater opportunities to engage actively with vocabulary (Ayana et al., 2024). Vocabulary learning is often conducted through teacher-centered explanations and textbook-based activities, with limited integration of technology-based learning media. As a result, students have fewer opportunities to experience interactive and contextual vocabulary learning. Considering that today's students are closely connected to digital technology, learning activities that do not utilize technology tend to reduce students' motivation and engagement.

The limited use of technology-based learning media is a dominant problem in vocabulary learning. The lack of interactive digital media causes students to easily become bored, less active in learning, and have difficulty remembering and using the vocabulary they have learned. This condition impacts students' low vocabulary mastery, particularly vocabulary related to understanding descriptive texts. Students also have limited opportunities to practice vocabulary repeatedly and receive direct feedback. Therefore, the use of interactive digital learning media, such as Wayground, is needed to support vocabulary learning in a more engaging and interactive way.

Several previous studies have shown that the use of gamification-based learning media, such as Quizizz, can improve students' vocabulary mastery through interactive and enjoyable learning. These studies generally used a pretest–posttest design and demonstrated improved vocabulary learning outcomes after using interactive digital media. However, most studies focused on the use of Quizizz before its rebranding as Wayground and have not specifically examined vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts in junior high school students. In addition, since the platform has recently been rebranded as Wayground, limited studies have explored the use of Wayground in vocabulary learning contexts. Therefore, there is a need for further research to investigate the effectiveness of Wayground, particularly in improving students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts.

As technology progresses, a variety of interactive digital learning resources are increasingly supporting modern learning processes. The concept of gamification, which is the use of game design elements—such as points, leaderboards, awards, and instant feedback—into educational activities to boost student engagement and motivation, is generally strongly associated with the use of these media. Gamification-based applications help learners understand new terms, promote student autonomy, and offer significant chances for repeated practice when it comes to vocabulary development (Panmei & Waluyo, 2023).

Wayground, formerly known as Quizizz, is an AI-powered learning platform that combines a variety of materials for teaching, practice, and assessment. Its interactive, game-based activities (gamification) can increase student engagement and provide immediate feedback. More broadly, research on gamification in EFL and ESL instruction indicates that it has a generally good impact on language learning outcomes, student attitudes, and emotional involvement, however the findings vary depending on instructional design and learning setting (Chan & Lo, 2024; Wayground, 2025).

Furthermore, Wayground has developed into a holistic learning platform that unifies exams, evaluations, and instructional content into a unified ecosystem. With the use of transparent achievement data, educators may now create student-centered learning experiences that allow students to autonomously track their progress (Dorssom, 2025). As a result, Wayground is a versatile digital platform that prioritizes interaction and quantifiable learning results rather than only a quiz app.

Ultimately, Wayground functions as an all-inclusive digital learning platform that synchronizes gamification with methodical evaluation to support effective vocabulary development. It gives students the conditions they need for motivated, repeated practice by providing interactive tests, captivating graphics, and instant feedback. However, such interactive media have not been successfully applied in real-world contexts despite these possible advantages.

Based on initial observations at SMP Al-Kamil Islamic Boarding School, vocabulary learning, particularly in descriptive texts, has not yet been optimally utilized in interactive digital learning media. Students still experience difficulties understanding and using appropriate vocabulary, and the use of Wayground as a learning medium has never been systematically implemented at the school. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the differences in students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts before and after using Wayground as an interactive digital learning medium for class VIII students of SMP Al-Kamil Islamic Boarding School.

B. Research Questions

Based on the research background, the researcher formulates the research problem through the following questions:

1. What were the students' vocabulary mastery scores in descriptive texts before and after using Wayground as an interactive digital learning medium?
2. Is there any significant difference between students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts before and after using Wayground as an interactive digital medium?

C. Research Purposes

In line with the research questions, the research purposes of this study are:

1. To describe students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts before and after using Wayground as an interactive digital learning medium.
2. To determine whether there is a significant difference between students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts before and after using Wayground as an interactive digital medium.

D. Research Significance

Theoretically, this research contributes to the field of English language learning, particularly in vocabulary instruction through the use of gamification-based digital media. This study provides empirical evidence on the use of Wayground in improving students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive text at the junior high school level. The findings of this research are expected to enrich existing literature related to interactive digital learning media and support theories that emphasize learner engagement, motivation, and technology integration in vocabulary learning.

Practically, this research gives significance to the following:

1. For an English teacher

This research provides teachers with practical insights into the use of Wayground as an interactive digital learning medium in teaching vocabulary, particularly vocabulary related to descriptive text. Teachers may use Wayground as an alternative tool for vocabulary practice,

formative assessment, and material reinforcement. In addition, Wayground allows teachers to obtain students' vocabulary mastery automatically, which helps teachers monitor students' learning progress more efficiently.

2. For Students

Through the use of Wayground, students can experience a more engaging, interactive, and enjoyable learning environment. The gamification features may increase students' motivation, reduce boredom, and help students practice vocabulary repeatedly. As a result, students are expected to improve their vocabulary mastery in descriptive text, which can support their overall English language learning.

3. For Schools

This research can serve as a reference for schools in implementing technology-based learning media to support English instruction. The findings may encourage schools to integrate digital learning platforms in line with technological developments and educational innovation, particularly in improving students' vocabulary learning outcomes.

4. For Future Researchers

This research may be used as a reference for future researchers who are interested in investigating the use of digital and gamification-based learning media in English language learning. Furthermore, future studies may expand this research by exploring different language skills, learning contexts, or research designs, such as experimental or longitudinal studies.

E. Research Scope

This study focuses on the effect of using Wayground (formerly Quizizz) as an interactive digital learning medium on students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts. This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental, one-group pretest-posttest design.

The subjects were eighth-grade students at SMP Al-Kamil Islamic Boarding School in the 2026/2027 academic year. This study focused on English vocabulary learning related to descriptive texts, specifically vocabulary in the form of nouns, adjectives, and simple verbs frequently used in descriptive texts.

This study only examined changes in students' vocabulary mastery before and after implementing Wayground as a learning medium. It did not delve into other aspects of English language skills, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, nor did it examine affective factors such as students' motivation or learning attitudes.

With these limitations, the results of this study are expected to provide a more focused picture of the effect of using Wayground on students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts in the context of English learning at the junior high school level.

F. Conceptual Framework

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of English language learning and serves as the foundation for developing other language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In this study, vocabulary mastery is conceptually grounded in the framework proposed by Nation (2001), which defines vocabulary knowledge through three essential dimensions: form, meaning, and use. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge plays a central role in language comprehension and production because learners require sufficient vocabulary to understand input and express meaning effectively. Without adequate vocabulary, learners may struggle to process texts and participate in communication activities. This view is supported by Richards & Renandya (2002), who state that vocabulary is a core element of language proficiency and a major contributor to successful language use. Therefore, vocabulary is considered a core element in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts.

Vocabulary mastery refers not only to knowing the meanings of words but also to understanding how words are used appropriately in different contexts. Nation (2001) explains that vocabulary mastery includes knowledge of word form, meaning, and use. This concept highlights that mastering vocabulary requires a deeper understanding beyond simple memorization. Thus, this study focuses on Nation's (2001) theory as the primary lens, specifically emphasizing the dimension of "form" to evaluate how students recognize and apply nouns,

adjectives, and simple verbs. This idea is supported by Brown (2007), who emphasizes that effective vocabulary mastery enables learners to select and use words accurately in communication. In addition, Thornbury (2002) states that vocabulary mastery involves knowing how words function in real communicative situations, including grammatical patterns and collocations. Learners with strong vocabulary mastery are more capable of comprehending texts and producing meaningful language, while limited vocabulary mastery often results in low learning outcomes.

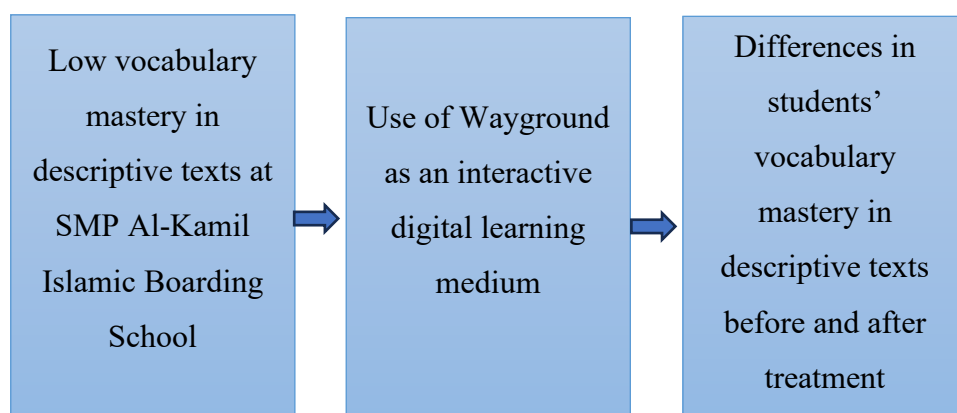
Vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in understanding descriptive texts, as comprehension of text meaning depends largely on learners' vocabulary knowledge. According to Nation (2001), Learners need sufficient vocabulary coverage to comprehend written texts effectively, since limited vocabulary knowledge can hinder text understanding. In addition, Grabe & Stoller (2011) explain that vocabulary knowledge is a key component of text comprehension because it allows readers to recognize key words, interpret meaning accurately, and connect ideas within a text. In the context of descriptive texts, students are required to understand and use specific vocabulary, such as nouns, adjectives, and simple verbs, to identify detailed information and construct clear descriptions. By applying Nation's (2001) framework, this study focuses on these specific word classes to measure the students' mastery of word forms within the descriptive genre. When students have limited vocabulary mastery, they often experience difficulties in understanding descriptive texts, which results in difficulties in understanding specific text genres, including descriptive texts.

In junior high school English learning, descriptive text is one of the text genres that students are required to understand and produce. According to Anderson & Anderson (2003), descriptive texts aim to describe a particular person, place, or thing by using specific details and language features. These texts typically involve the use of nouns, adjectives, and simple verbs to create clear and vivid descriptions. This explanation is supported by Gerot & Wignell (1994), who explain that descriptive texts focus on describing characteristics,

qualities, and features of objects using specific vocabulary and grammatical patterns. Therefore, understanding descriptive texts requires students to recognize and interpret vocabulary accurately in order to comprehend the content of the text.

To address vocabulary learning difficulties, interactive digital learning media are needed to create an engaging learning environment. Prensky (2001) states that students in the digital era are more responsive to technology-based learning activities, particularly those that involve interaction and engagement. Wayground, as a gamification-based digital learning platform, integrates interactive quizzes, visual elements, competition, and immediate feedback. The instructional application of gamification can be explored using Self-Determination Theory, which claims that learners' motivation is increased when their psychological demands for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are addressed (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the context of Wayground, interactive exercises and progress feedback might help learners feel competent, but using points, rankings, and awards does not always result in intrinsic motivation. From a behaviorist perspective, Skinner (1957) explains that reinforcement in the form of immediate feedback and scores can enhance learning motivation. This idea is supported by Dörnyei (2001), who argues that motivation plays a crucial role in language learning success. Furthermore, Wayground's integration of imagery and text aligns with Mayer's (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which suggests that learning becomes more effective when verbal and visual information are combined.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, particularly Nation's (2001) framework on word form and the motivational principles of gamification, the use of Wayground as an interactive digital learning medium is expected to support vocabulary learning by providing repeated practice and immediate feedback. As a result, this conceptual framework assumes that implementing Wayground in vocabulary learning will lead to differences in students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts before and after the use of the medium among eighth-grade students at SMP Al-Kamil Islamic Boarding School.



G. Research Hypothesis

A hypothesis is a provisional answer to a research question that is formulated based on relevant theories and needs to be tested through data analysis.

This study involves two variables, namely independent variable and dependent variable:

1. Independent Variable (X): The use of Wayground as an interactive digital learning medium.
2. Dependent Variable (Y): Students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive.

Therefore, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

1. Null hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant difference between students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive text before and after using Wayground as an interactive digital learning medium at SMP Al-Kamil Islamic Boarding School.
2. Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): There is a significant difference between students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive text before and after using Wayground as an interactive digital learning medium at SMP Al-Kamil Islamic Boarding School.

H. Previous Studies

Several recent studies have examined the use of gamification-based digital learning media, particularly Quizizz, in improving students' vocabulary learning outcomes. Recent studies suggest that gamification-based digital

platforms such as Quizizz can support vocabulary learning through interactive and technology-enhanced learning activities, although the reported outcomes vary across different learning contexts and research designs. These studies commonly employ quantitative approaches, such as pretest–posttest designs, to measure changes in students’ vocabulary performance after the implementation of gamified learning media.

However, despite the growing number of studies on Quizizz, most previous research still refers to the platform before its rebranding as Wayground and has not specifically focused on students’ vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts at the junior high school level. Differences in research contexts, educational levels, and instructional focus also indicate the existence of a research gap. Therefore, this section reviews relevant previous studies to highlight their findings and explain their relevance to the present research.

First, Efendi et al. (2025) conducted a quantitative quasi-experimental study to examine the effectiveness of the Quizizz application in enhancing students’ vocabulary mastery based on their learning styles at the elementary school level.. The participants consisted of fifty fifth-grade students who were divided into an experimental group and a control group. Data were collected through vocabulary pre-tests and post-tests as well as a learning style questionnaire. The findings showed that students who learned vocabulary using Quizizz achieved significantly higher vocabulary mastery than those who were taught using conventional methods. Although this study demonstrated the effectiveness of Quizizz in improving vocabulary learning outcomes, it focused on elementary school students and did not specifically examine vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts at the junior high school level, which provides an opportunity for further research.

Second, a study by Nabila, Muliati, and Talib (2023) conducted a quantitative study using a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design to examine the effectiveness of the Quizizz application in improving students’ vocabulary learning outcomes. The participants of the study were 30 seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Campalagian. Vocabulary pre-tests and post-

tests were used as research instruments to measure students' vocabulary mastery before and after the treatment. The findings showed a significant difference between students' vocabulary mastery in the pre-test and post-test, with the post-test mean score being higher than the pre-test mean score (Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.001 < 0.05). This result indicates that students achieved higher vocabulary mastery scores after the implementation of Quizizz as a gamification-based digital learning medium. However, this study focused on general vocabulary learning at the junior high school level and did not specifically examine vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts, which provides an opportunity for further research (Nabila et al., 2023)

Third, Cindy, Prawati, and Masyhur (2025) conducted a quantitative pre-experimental study using a one-group pre-test and post-test design to examine the effect of Quizizz on students' vocabulary learning outcomes at SMKN 1 Pekanbaru. The study involved 37 eleventh-grade students who received four instructional sessions integrating Quizizz as a gamification-based learning tool. Vocabulary tests administered before and after the treatment showed a significant increase in students' vocabulary mastery, with the mean score rising from 65.56 to 87.41 ($t = -14.317$, $p < .001$). Although the findings indicate that Quizizz positively affects vocabulary learning, the study focused on narrative text vocabulary at the senior high school level and did not specifically examine vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts at the junior high school level, which supports the need for further research (Cindy et al., 2025)

In addition to studies that focus on vocabulary learning using Quizizz, recent research has also examined the use of Wayground as a digital learning platform in other areas of English language learning.

Fourth, Azizah, Setiaji, and Susanto (2025) conducted a quasi-experimental mixed-method study to examine the use of Wayground (formerly Quizizz) in English language learning at SMA Negeri 1 Pecangaan, Jepara. The study involved 70 eleventh-grade students divided into experimental and control groups, with data collected through pre-tests and post-tests, motivation questionnaires, and student perception surveys. The results showed that both

instructional approaches led to significant improvement in students' grammar mastery, with the experimental group achieving a higher mean gain score than the control group, although the difference was not statistically significant. In addition, students reported positive perceptions of Wayground, particularly in terms of increased engagement, enjoyment, and immediate feedback. Although this study focused on grammar mastery rather than vocabulary, it provides empirical evidence that Wayground can support English language learning and serves as a relevant reference for further studies on vocabulary learning using the Wayground platform (Azizah et al., 2025).

Fifth, another relevant international study was conducted by Panmei and Waluyo (2023), who examined the pedagogical use of gamification in English vocabulary learning at the higher education level. The study employed a quasi-experimental design involving experimental and control groups to explore the effect of using Quizizz as a gamified learning tool in vocabulary training. The findings showed that although there was no significant difference in overall vocabulary mastery between the two groups, students in the experimental group achieved significantly higher scores in several weekly vocabulary tests. In addition, the results indicated positive student perceptions toward the use of gamification in facilitating vocabulary practice and supporting learner autonomy. This study suggests that gamification-based applications such as Quizizz can support vocabulary learning through interactive practice, although their effectiveness may depend on learning context and instructional design. However, the study focused on university students and general vocabulary learning, not specifically on vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts at the junior high school level, which highlights a gap that the present study aims to address (Panmei & Waluyo, 2023).

Although previous studies have shown that gamification-based platforms can support vocabulary learning across various educational levels, most of the existing studies examined Quizizz rather than Wayground and focused on general vocabulary learning, narrative texts, or other language skills. In addition, limited research has specifically examined vocabulary mastery in

descriptive texts at the junior high school level. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by examining students' vocabulary mastery in descriptive texts before and after using Wayground as an interactive digital learning medium.

