

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

Vocabulary refers to a set of words, or more broadly, it is a list of terms used to communicate with others, convey feelings, opinions and criticisms. Mastery of vocabulary is very important in learning English, because vocabulary is a basic component of language. Barcroft (2004) states that vocabulary was initially less important than grammar. The main idea was that without grammar, little information could be communicated. Without vocabulary, no communication can take place. Zhang (2012) argues that vocabulary has a more important meaning than grammar, as individuals usually rely on vocabulary and minimize the use of grammar, especially in situations where fast and precise message delivery is crucial, such as in telegrams, emergencies, or highly emotional moments. Therefore, a rich vocabulary will facilitate effective communication, making it easier to express emotions or interact with native speakers. According to Megawati (2017:107), language acquisition depends on vocabulary, Students really need to master vocabulary because it will be used in various aspects of life and education, This theory is supported by Sariakin, S., & Aini, R. M. (2024) Vocabulary is the total number of words known and used by a person in their language activities, Vocabulary is a collection of words and meanings used to communicate with others as a meaningful part of language. Vocabulary is an important subject for students to speak, read, write, and listen.

To learn English vocabulary effectively, one must also understand its meaning. A strong grasp of vocabulary is essential for developing meaningful language comprehension. Given how important vocabulary is and how difficult it is to develop, English teachers have provided students with interesting exercises that are expected to help students improve their vocabulary. Good vocabulary mastery will be very useful to improve students' ability to use English both at school and in the community. Vocabulary is an important factor in all language teaching, students must continue to learn words as they learn structures when they practice the target language (Ermawati et al., 2021). Therefore, vocabulary is the key to considering the next elements of English in learning it. Vocabulary exists in every human being and is an important factor in a language. Without vocabulary, it would be difficult to understand the meaning of that language. According to Sariakin, S., & Faizah, C. (2023), vocabulary is the total number of words in a language, which also includes the words that a person owns, knows, and uses in speaking, listening, reading, or writing. Achieving fluency in English requires mastery of vocabulary. With an extensive vocabulary, one can improve their language skills. Vocabulary mastery involves the ability to acquire and use many words, which allows us to understand the meaning of words in context. It also helps prevent misunderstandings when interpreting written or spoken texts.

Words representing objects (nouns) and words representing actions (verbs) are essential components of speech across languages, A noun is “a word used as the name of a living being or lifeless thing” (Curme, 1935 : 1) as cited in Huddleston (1984 : 90). Therefore, nouns generally can be the names of person such as Frans and Grace; the names of things such as cars, and books; the names of places such as cities

and countries; the names of animals such as cats and dogs; the names of activities such as running and swimming; the names of days and months such as Friday and August; the names of the families such as brothers and sisters; the names of subjects such as English and Math

Vocabulary is important to students. It is more important than grammar for communication purposes, particularly in the early stages when students are motivated to learn basic words that they need to get by in the language. Also, as the lexical system is open, there is always something new to learn when students have done grammar. So, more advanced students are motivated to add their vocabulary stock, to understand nuances of meaning, to become more proficient in their own choice of words and expressions. In the process of acquiring a second language, the mastery of vocabulary emerges as a fundamental and indispensable skill. This notion is supported by Yawiloeng (2020). Nobody can learn a language without acquiring vocabulary first and highlighting the importance of vocabulary in language learning. It is universally acknowledged that one cannot effectively learn a language without initially acquiring a substantial vocabulary foundation. Moreover, (Afzal, 2019) emphasizes that vocabulary acquisition and mastery are important as English proficiency depends on the vocabulary knowledge acquired by second and foreign students as well as native speakers.

In addition, vocabulary plays a central role not only in understanding language but also in improving fluency and accuracy. When students have a rich vocabulary, they can speak with more confidence and write more clearly. They are also better able to understand texts, participate in discussions, and complete academic assignments. Furthermore, the more words learners know, the more they can learn, as

vocabulary knowledge facilitates further vocabulary acquisition. This concept, often referred to as the “Matthew Effect” in vocabulary learning, explains why learners with a broader vocabulary base tend to progress faster than those with a limited vocabulary. Therefore, vocabulary development is a continuous and cumulative process that significantly contributes to overall language proficiency.

Therefore, language teachers are encouraged to integrate vocabulary development into every aspect of language teaching. Rather than treating vocabulary as a separate component, it should be integrated through reading, listening, speaking, and writing activities in meaningful and engaging ways. Through continuous exposure and active use of new words, students are more likely to remember and use them correctly in various contexts. Therefore, vocabulary learning should not be neglected or underestimated in English language classes, especially for second language learners who rely heavily on vocabulary knowledge to understand the language and use it effectively.

With the above problems, it found some students' problems in mastering English. The lack of vocabulary in students is the first problem found. Having a limited vocabulary leads to a limited number of conversations. A large number of vocabulary mastery by students makes it easier for students to understanding language and communication. Secondly, students find it difficult to choose the right words to express their ideas or thoughts in English. Most students think English is a complex subject to learn, and that makes them passive in class. The meaning of the words that they hear, read, and write is unknown to them. Moreover, they have a fear of big mistakes when learning English. Salam et al., (2020) argue that language learners must investigate learning methodologies. Students can better their learning

process if they apply learning strategies. Bai (2018) attempted to determine the general character of the individuals' vocabulary learning processes at the met-cognitive, cognitive, and social affective levels.

Gamification is a design that is done by utilizing the elements contained in the game. Elements that are generally found in a game are points, leaderboards, badges, and so on. However, game elements that are popularly used are points, badges, levels, and leaderboards (Dicheva, et al, 2015). Based on the results of research conducted by Dicheva (2015), these game elements can motivate student learning. Gamification appears to be an emerging trend in many sectors, including business, organizational management, in-service training, health, social policy, and education. The term refers to the “use of game mechanics in non-gaming contexts” (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011) or, rather, to “the phenomenon of creating gameful experiences” (Koivisto & Hamari, 2014).

Gamification is adopted in different contexts and for a variety of purposes. Gamification is defined as the "application of game-based strategies, aesthetics, and game thinking to engage people, stimulate action, enhance learning, and solve problems" (Kapp, 2012). According to (Cheng & Su, 2012) mentioned that game base learning methode can bring competition, motivation and relaxed or stress-free atmosphere in language learning environment, so students can learn and retain target vocabulary more quickly.

Gamebased learning can make learners become the center of learning process easier, more interisting and effective. The impact of games in learning to motivation students and makes fun in learning vocabulary. Games is activity whose purpose fun and pleasure (Homby, the important of vocabulary in language learning and how to

be taught, 1995). Learning vocabulary through gamification can increase student learning motivation and make vocabulary learning not boring. Gamification is also make process more interesting, which can give learning experience, and the use of games in the classroom is very beneficial for students (Barab, Gresalfi, & Arinci, 2009). According to Aini, R. M., Syahputra, M., & Maulizan, M. (2025), the application of gamification in learning not only focuses on meeting the individual needs of students but also incorporates game elements that can enhance students' interest and enthusiasm in the learning process. Therefore, the implementation of gamification is expected to help students more easily gain understanding or expand their vocabulary through gamified learning.

This research is important to provide insight to readers, especially educators, as a reference in developing learning models that can be applied in the classroom. This is because the elements in gamification can create a more interesting and challenging learning atmosphere for students. In addition, students tend to prefer learning that is interactive and has a connection with the element of play, so the application of gamification-based learning models in the classroom has the potential to increase student attractiveness and involvement in the learning process.

Based on observations conducted by researchers at SMAN 13 Banda Aceh in collaboration with English teacher Mrs. Fauziah, S.Pd.I, it was found that many students, especially those in grade X, experienced considerable difficulty in mastering English vocabulary. These difficulties are caused by several factors, such as limited vocabulary mastery, lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, and low student motivation to interact with new vocabulary. As a result, students'

overall English vocabulary mastery was found to be far from optimal, affecting their ability to understand texts, express ideas, and participate in class discussions.

During initial observations, researchers noted that students often hesitated when asked to translate, define, or use English words in context. Most students relied heavily on the teacher's explanations and showed minimal initiative to explore or remember new vocabulary independently. Classroom interactions were generally one-way, with the teacher delivering the material and students passively receiving it. There was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm, and students appeared disengaged, especially during activities focused on vocabulary. In some cases, limited vocabulary, students appeared bored or distracted, indicating a lack of vocabulary and interest in learning English vocabulary.

Additionally, traditional teaching methods dominated the learning process, such as lectures, note-taking, and mechanical memorization. While these methods may be useful in certain contexts, they do not sufficiently stimulate students' interest or provide opportunities for them to practice vocabulary in a meaningful and interactive manner. The absence of engaging, student-centered learning strategies contributes to limitations in students' retention and use of vocabulary.

These findings highlight the urgent need to implement innovative teaching strategies that can actively engage students in the learning process and create a more engaging classroom environment. One promising approach is to integrate learning strategies that not only support vocabulary development but also enhance student motivation and participation. For example, creating a fun, interactive, and game-like learning environment can encourage students to be more engaged and enthusiastic about learning new vocabulary. These strategies are expected to help students build

their vocabulary more effectively, which in turn will improve their overall performance in English language learning.

In this case, gamification strategy is one of the methods that can be used in learning to improve students' vocabulary mastery. Gamification is able to make students learn fun so that they are not bored with learning every vocabulary in English, gamification strategy also uses level-based learning, prizes, and leaderboards in its learning. By applying gamification strategy to English vocabulary learning in schools, it can improve students' vocabulary mastery.

There are also several previous studies related to the effectiveness of gamification strategy to improve students' vocabulary. First, Research conducted by Adrefiza (2023) with the title "Using Gamification in the English Classroom: Impact on Motivation and Learning Outcomes" used an experimental design with two groups: an experimental group that received gamification-based learning and a control group that used conventional methods. The results showed that the implementation of gamification in English learning significantly increased students' engagement and motivation in learning. This improvement can be seen from the experimental group's average pre-test score of 55.24, which increased to 82.76 in the post-test. Meanwhile, the control group only experienced a small increase from 56.10 to 67.34, indicating that gamification is more effective than conventional methods in improving student learning outcomes.

Second a study conducted by Reftyawati (2023) entitled "Utilizing Gamification Strategies to Improve Learning Outcomes and Students' Engagement" examined the impact of gamification strategies on learning outcomes and student engagement. This study used a quasi-experimental method with pre-test and post-

test, involving 60 high school students. The results showed that the implementation of gamification was able to improve students' concept understanding and encourage them to be more active in learning. The average score of students' pre-test before the implementation of gamification was 50.45, which increased significantly to 85.32 in the post-test. These results prove that gamification strategies are effective in improving student learning outcomes compared to traditional methods.

Third, Research conducted by Ariani & Afrita (2024) with the title “The Influence of Digital-Based Gamification on Student Engagement and Language Literacy Skills: A Study at Madrasah Tsanawiyah” examined the influence of digital-based gamification on student engagement and language literacy skills. This study used qualitative methods with observations and interviews with students at the junior high school level. The results showed that students who learned using gamification had higher learning motivation and better understanding of the material compared to conventional learning methods. Based on the test results, the students' pre-test score before the application of gamification was 48.92, while the post-test score increased to 81.75, indicating a significant improvement in students' literacy skills after using gamification in learning.

Several previous studies have proven the effectiveness of using gamification in English learning, but there is very little research on gamification strategies to improve vocabulary skills. Therefore, this study is different from the three previous studies in that the aim of the previous studies was to improve language and motivation students'. On that based, this research wants to fill the gap in previous research where this research is conducted to find out the extent of English learning by using gamification strategies so that it can improve students' vocabulary with the

title “The effectiveness of gamification strategy to improve students' vocabulary in reading.”

1.2 Research Question

1. Based on the background of this research, the researcher formulated the research question as follow: is the use of gamification strategy effective to improve students' vocabulary?
2. How is student's response in learning vocabulary using gamification strategy?

1.3 Aim of research

In accordance with the research problem that leads to question mentioned before, thus the aim of this research is: to find out and analyze if the use of gamification strategy is effective to improve students' vocabulary.

1.4 Hypothesis of study

Hypothesis of study in this research are:

Null Hypothesis (Ho): The use of gamification strategies is not effective to improve students' vocabulary mastery.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): The use of gamification strategies is effective to improve students' vocabulary mastery.

1.5 Significance of the study

This research is expected to contribute to English teachers about learning by using gamification strategies, so that they can use this strategy that can develop

students' vocabulary mastery in English. Teachers will get information whether gamification learning strategy is useful or not.

1. For Students

Students can benefit from a more fun and dynamic learning process, allowing them to retain vocabulary more effectively. The gamification strategy can also boost their confidence and interest in learning English, therefore encouraging better long-term language acquisition.

2. For Educational Institutions

This research provides insights that can help schools and educational institutions implement more modern and student centered teaching methods. This will support the integration of technology and interactive approaches into the curriculum to improve students' language learning outcomes.

3. For Future Researchers

This study can serve as a reference for future research exploring innovative methods in language learning, particularly in vocabulary Mastery. It also paves the way for further investigation into the broader impact of gamification on other aspects of language learning, such as grammar or speaking skills.

1.6 The scope of the research

This research focuses on investigating the effectiveness of gamification strategy in improving students' vocabulary mastery. This study is conducted at SMAN 13 Banda Aceh, involving 10th grade students of SMAN 13 Banda Aceh as research subjects.

1.7 The definition off key terms

1. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a skill that is needed in learning English, the amount of vocabulary affects the skills of each skill in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Vocabulary mastery is also not limited to learning at school, vocabulary mastery can also be obtained outside of learning hours.

2. Gamification

Gamification is the application of game elements, mechanics and design principles in a non-game context to increase user engagement and motivation, in education gamification refers to the incorporation of game-like features such as points, badges, leaderboards, levels and challenges into the learning process to make it more interactive and engaging.