

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Descriptive texts are necessary in junior high school English, therefore reading comprehension is crucial. Critical thinking, linking concepts, and deriving logical conclusions from written materials requires reading comprehension (Farizi & Supeno, 2025). Reading comprehension involves interpreting, understanding, and evaluating written texts to make sense. This process requires vocabulary, language structure, reading skills, and the reader's expertise to comprehend the text (Pratiwi et al., 2025). Reading comprehension also requires understanding the content of the text being read and connecting it to give it meaning. In the reading process, comprehension needs to be built gradually, from word recognition to understanding more complex parts of the text with support from text structure (Ostojić, 2023). As a result, reading involves more than just being able to read texts; it also involves comprehending the text's content and evaluating it critically. The reader, the text, and the reading activity are the three interconnected components of reading, all of which are impacted by the sociocultural context and have an impact on how the text is interpreted (Butterfuss et al., 2020). Basic English abilities in junior high school require pupils to recognize a text's core ideas, specific facts, and overall organization.

Descriptive text is introduced in junior high. To help readers understand a person, animal, thing, or place, descriptive text describes it in detail (Purnamasari et al., 2021). This sort of language vividly describes facts to help readers visualize it. Identification and description are the two primary components of descriptive writings. The topic is introduced in the identification section, and its characteristics are described in the description section (Fitriani et al., 2019). Although it is crucial in the curriculum, preliminary observations during English learning in the classroom showed that junior high school pupils' reading comprehension skills are still very low, especially in descriptive texts. Students struggle to identify the main idea, uncover details, and understand language in the text. Also, students' reading motivation is low. This can be seen from the lack of active participation of students, minimal responses to teachers' questions, and the tendency of students to wait for explanations without trying to understand the text independently. Teacher-centered learning is one of the factors that influence this condition and the effectiveness of this method is more evident among students with lower cognitive abilities, while the results are less optimal for students with higher cognitive abilities (Nuraeni and Sitti Aisyah (2022). Teachers spend more time explaining the material and translating texts, while students act as recipients of information. As a result, students become passive and less involved in the critical thinking process needed to fully understand the content of the text Salaoru, (2020).

This situation presents challenges for teachers in creating more engaging and interactive learning experiences that can increase student motivation and understanding of descriptive texts. In response to these issues, more creative and engaging learning approaches and media are needed to increase student participation and understanding in reading activities.

Learning media are tools and techniques used to improve the effectiveness of learning activities. Learning media play an important role and are a key element in supporting the achievement of learning objectives effectively and efficiently. Learning media formed from a combination of technologies offer a variety of creative and dynamic learning innovations, challenging students to understand the material in an interesting and in-depth manner (Belva et al., 2024). As a form of digital technology utilization, Duolingo is a language learning application that integrates gamification, adaptive exercises, and instant feedback. Its learning design aims to increase interest in learning and make it easier for students to

learn and continuously enrich their English vocabulary (Dinasti et al., 2025). Duolingo has also developed its most popular courses and aligned them with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), an international standard used to classify the proficiency levels of language learners. The CEFR serves as a reference in curriculum development by emphasizing communicative language competence, so that learners are guided to be able to use the language practically and for everyday communication needs (Jiang et al., 2020).

Previous research have demonstrated that mobile-based learning apps, particularly Duolingo, improve students' English language skills. This application has been proven to improve vocabulary mastery, grammar comprehension, and learning motivation, as reflected in research results that report an increase in academic performance after its implementation. The integration of Duolingo into the learning process not only supports the development of linguistic aspects but also encourages student engagement and consistency in learning through an interactive and technology-based approach. A study conducted by Fitriani and Mokodompit (2024) confirms that the use of Duolingo encourages a more dynamic learning process through interactive exercises, vocabulary reinforcement, and direct feedback. These findings are reinforced by Liunokas (2024), who states that learning to read through Duolingo helps students understand the meaning of words and sentence structure gradually through repeated and independent practice. Meanwhile, Ajisoko (2022) reports a significant increase in reading scores after the application's implementation, accompanied by an increase in student motivation and learning engagement. In general, the results of these studies indicate that Duolingo functions not only as a language learning tool, but also as a means of supporting active engagement and independent learning.

Many studies have examined Duolingo's effects on vocabulary and grammar, but few have examined its effects on reading comprehension, especially in descriptive texts at the junior high school level. Most studies have focused on language abilities in general or higher education without focusing on specific texts. There is also limited evidence on how Duolingo affects middle schoolers' descriptive text comprehension. Therefore, additional targeted study is needed to assess Duolingo's usefulness in teaching middle schoolers to read descriptive texts to provide more precise and contextual empirical evidence.

The Effect of Duolingo on Junior High School Students' Descriptive Text Comprehension is the study's title. This study examines how the Duolingo app affects junior high school students' descriptive text comprehension and how digital learning media improves reading comprehension. This research is needed because there are few studies on using Duolingo to teach junior high school students to read descriptive texts. This research is intended to advance digital technology-based English learning and help teachers choose the best digital learning material.

1.2 The Problem of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the research problems are formulated as follows:

1. Is there a significant effect of using the Duolingo application on junior high school students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts?
2. To what extent does the use of Duolingo improve students' ability to understand descriptive texts?

1.3 Research Objectives

In line with the research problems above, the objectives of this study are:

1. To determine whether there is a significant effect of using the Duolingo application on junior high school students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts.
2. To find out the extent to which the use of Duolingo improves students' ability to understand descriptive texts.

1.4 Scope of the Study

To avoid broad discussion, this study is limited to the following aspects:

1. This research focuses only on reading comprehension skills.
2. The type of text analyzed in this study is descriptive text.
3. The learning media used in this study is the Duolingo application.
4. The subjects of the study are junior high school students.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study is expected to:

- a. Contribute to the development of English language teaching theories, particularly in the area of digital-assisted learning and reading comprehension.
- b. Provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of Duolingo in improving students' comprehension of descriptive texts.
- c. Enrich the literature on technology-based learning media in English education, especially at the junior high school level.

2. Practical Significance

1. For Teachers

This study can provide alternative digital learning mediato improve students' reading comprehension and increase classroom engagement.

2. For Students

The use of Duolingo may help students improve their reading comprehension skills in an interactive and motivating way.

3. For Schools

The findings of this research can serve as a reference for integrating digital applications into English teaching practices.

4. For Future Researchers

This study can be used as a reference for further research related to mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and reading comprehension.