

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Vocabulary plays a central role in language learning, especially for young learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings (Minalla, 2024). Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students are unable to understand or communicate effectively in English (Naderiheshi, 2022). Vocabulary size directly influences learners' abilities in reading comprehension, listening, speaking, and writing (Wero et al., 2021). Thus, vocabulary mastery serves as a foundational component for developing communicative competence and overall language proficiency. For elementary school students, building a solid vocabulary base is essential because it supports the acquisition of more advanced language skills in later stages of learning (Wei, 2021).

In the Indonesian context, especially at the elementary level, students generally have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. As a result, classroom instruction becomes their primary, and often only, source of English input. At Sultan Iskandar Muda Elementary School, fourth-grade students are expected to acquire basic English vocabulary as outlined in the school's curriculum. However, initial classroom observations indicate that many students face challenges in remembering new words, following instructions, and using vocabulary in real-life or classroom-based tasks. These difficulties may be attributed to the dominant use of traditional teaching methods that emphasize memorization, repetition, and translation. While these methods may assist short-term recall, they often fail to promote deep understanding or long-term retention (Ali Mansoor et al., 2023).

Moreover, external factors such as the dominant use of Bahasa Indonesia or local dialects, the scarcity of authentic English materials, and the lack of opportunities to practice English outside the classroom further hinder students' vocabulary acquisition. In many cases, learners memorize words simply to pass tests but struggle to apply them communicatively in everyday situations (Chankob & Hdouch, 2024). Effective vocabulary learning should go beyond rote learning; it requires repeated exposure, meaningful usage, and connection to learners' own experiences and interests (Li et al., 2022). Therefore, alternative and more interactive teaching strategies are needed to address these challenges and foster meaningful vocabulary learning.

One such strategy is the use of language games, which are increasingly recognized as effective tools to enhance vocabulary acquisition among young EFL learners. For instance, Word Association is a simple yet engaging game that helps students connect new vocabulary to familiar concepts. In this game, the teacher introduces a keyword such as "food" (makanan), and students respond with related words like "rice" (nasi), "bread" (roti), "drink" (minum), "delicious" (enak), or "hungry" (lapar). Students earn points for correct responses, and the game can continue with new keywords, ensuring the activity remains dynamic and enjoyable.

Research supports the effectiveness of language games in vocabulary learning. Bai (2024) found that such games foster a motivating and low-anxiety classroom environment, boost student participation, and promote meaningful repetition of vocabulary. Furthermore, language games align well with the four-strand model of vocabulary instruction, which emphasizes a balanced approach between meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused study, and

fluency development (Gantari, 2024). By integrating games into the learning process, students can encounter words in context, improve memory retention, and develop greater confidence in using English vocabulary actively.

Considering these issues and potentials, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled "The Use of Language Games Techniques in Enhancing English Vocabulary Mastery of Fourth-Grade Elementary School Students at Sultan Iskandar Muda." This research aims to explore how language games can serve as an effective method to improve students' vocabulary acquisition in a fun, interactive, and pedagogically sound manner. Vocabulary refers to the body of words that a person knows and uses in a particular language. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), especially for young learners, vocabulary plays a crucial role in the overall process of language acquisition (Minalla, 2024). Without a sufficient vocabulary, students struggle to understand spoken or written texts and face difficulties in expressing their ideas effectively (Naderiheshi, 2022). Vocabulary knowledge significantly influences the four core language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing (Wero et al., 2021).

1.2 Research Problem

The research is guided by the following research questions:

1. How effective are language games techniques in enhancing the English vocabulary mastery of fourth- grade students at Sultan Iskandar Muda Elementary School?
2. What types of language games are most effective in improving vocabulary retention and usage among fourth-grade students?
3. How do language games influence students' motivation and participation in vocabulary learning activities?

1.3 Objective Of The Research

The main objective of this research is to:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of language games techniques in enhancing the English vocabulary mastery of fourth-grade students at Sultan Iskandar Muda Elementary School.
2. Identify which types of language games are most effective in improving vocabulary retention and usage among fourth-grade students.
3. Analyze how language games influence students' motivation and participation in vocabulary learning activities.

1.4 Significance Of The Research

This research is expected to provide several significant contributions:

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of vocabulary acquisition strategies by providing evidence on the effectiveness of language games in enhancing young EFL learners' vocabulary mastery, particularly in the Indonesian elementary school context. It enriches the existing literature and supports the development of theories related to interactive and communicative language teaching methods.

2. Academic Significance

The findings of this research serve as a valuable reference for future academic studies, especially for researchers and students interested in language learning, EFL teaching methods, and vocabulary development. It offers empirical data that can be used for comparative studies, further research, or academic discussions on effective pedagogical approaches.

3. Practical Significance

Practically, this research provides useful insights for English teachers and school administrators, helping them design and implement engaging language games that enhance students' vocabulary learning. It also supports curriculum improvements and classroom practices that aim to increase students' motivation, participation, and language proficiency.