

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Education, technology, research, and worldwide communication are some of the most important areas of modern global civilization where English is spoken. As a medium of international communication, English is the principal language that is required for mastery on a global scale (Chairina, 2019, as referenced in Sari et al., 2024). The development of communication technologies has made English an essential tool for promoting direct interaction between people of different cultural backgrounds (Sri Handayani, 2016). In this regard, English is vital in many spheres of life when dealing with global concerns. International transportation, television, sports, music, and digital communication all heavily utilize English, further solidifying its position as a dominant language in worldwide contacts (Balla, 2016).

According to Balla (2016), English has developed into a lingua franca, bringing together speakers of other languages. A lingua franca is defined as a community language that allows speakers of different languages to understand and use one another (Y Agustin, 2011). As a result, millions of students in a variety of countries are studying English for many reasons, including academics, careers, and social involvement.

English is often considered a foreign language in Indonesia. However, it holds a significant and noteworthy position in Indonesia and in the daily lives of our people. The impact on the teaching of Indonesian as a foreign language is striking. From elementary school all the way up to university, pupils study English (B Waduwu, 2016). This means that English is important in many fields, including education, and is not limited to only being a language for communication. Education, economics, the media, and the professional realm are just a few of the many areas where English is widely used (Alrajafi, 2021).

No matter if it's a first, second, or foreign language, the most important part of learning a new language is expanding one's vocabulary (JS Decarrico, 2001). It is well-known that expanding one's vocabulary is the first and most important step in mastering a language.

A collection of terms is what the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language calls a vocabulary. Vocabulary research, according to Pohan et al. (2022), includes words and their definitions; words are mostly used for communication; and they can be both spoken and written. Pohan et al. (2022) cites Dowdowski (1982:1454), who states that a language's vocabulary includes all of its terms. All words used by readers, writers, and listeners are part of vocabulary.

Vocabulary is an essential element of the knowledge required for learners to attain proficiency in a language. An individual's linguistic proficiency is affected by their vocabulary breadth, both in spoken and written forms (ASP Sari, SR Pandiangan, 2021). Vocabulary knowledge is the bedrock of second language acquisition and an essential component of communicative competence, according to Alqahtani (2015). Consequently, schools should prioritize vocabulary development as the primary goal of English language instruction, particularly at the junior high school level while pupils are still in the foundational phase of language acquisition.

Although vocabulary mastery is essential for learning English, numerous junior high school students continue to face challenges in properly acquiring English vocabulary. The considerable effect of students failing to master their learning objectives is attributable to their restricted vocabulary, stemming from their reluctance to seek knowledge and their indolence in consulting dictionaries, despite the acknowledged efficacy of dictionary use in enhancing vocabulary (Syafawani, 2023). Utami and Zuhdi (2020: 1) assert that students frequently perceive learning English as challenging due to its absence in daily speech, leading to the belief that English is difficult. As cited in (Syafawani, 2023).

Students in the ninth grade at SMP Negeri 16 Medan have a hard time with English vocabulary. Based on initial observations and conversations with the school's subject teachers, it appears that the majority of students struggle with and have little proficiency in English. The significance of new terminology and how to use it correctly in context were frequently challenges for students. When pupils' results for language acquisition are below the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MPS), it's clear that something is wrong. The issue of inadequate vocabulary acquisition among students at SMP Negeri 16 Medan calls for a fresh approach to education that aligns with the traits of contemporary learners, especially in the realm of digital learning.

Even ninth graders at SMP Negeri 16 Medan expressed worry about their English vocabulary. Based on initial observations and conversations with English teachers at the school, it seems that the majority of students have inadequate English comprehension skills. It can be difficult for students to grasp the significance of new terminology and know how to use it correctly in different situations. Students' failure to meet the required learning outcomes in language classes is demonstrated by their scores that routinely fall short of the Minimum Passing Score (MPS). A well-designed digital learning environment, according to Wiseman, Kennedy, and Lodge (2016), can increase student engagement through the provision of engaging, interesting, and suitably difficult learning activities.

Researchers have discovered that digital learning strategies are used in various ways to improve transmission efficiency and expand application, which is great news for students and teachers alike. The general public owns and uses mobile phones and other handheld gadgets on a regular basis, and these technologies are growing rapidly. In the digital age, technology is expected to be used as a tool for learning (Lin et al., 2017; Taufiq Nur Azis, 2019).

Based on their research, Vesselinov and Grego (2012) conclude that Duolingo is a great tool for improving one's language abilities, particularly one's vocabulary, through

independent study with the use of technology. According to their research, using Duolingo regularly can greatly enhance language proficiency. The app's interactive exercises, gradual challenges, and rapid feedback make learning fun and motivating.

1.2 The Assumptions

Incorporating game components into educational settings can enhance the learning environment, fostering greater student engagement and curiosity, hence facilitating enjoyable and motivating learning experiences, as noted by Kurniawan (2022) and cited by Sulmayanti et al. (2025).

According to Kurniawan (2022), as referenced by Sulmayanti et al. (2025), enjoyable approaches enhance motivation. This study posits that vocabulary mastery is a crucial element of English competence, significantly aiding pupils in efficiently utilizing the language. "An individual's proficiency in an extensive vocabulary enables them to comprehend and utilize sufficient terminology to interpret what they read and hear, as well as to articulate and compose well for clear communication with others. Ratna Susanti, 2002. The paired sample t-test is anticipated to effectively evaluate whether Duolingo significantly improves the English vocabulary proficiency of ninth-grade students at Negeri 16 Medan Middle School.

1.3. Problem Identification

1. Ninth-grade pupils at SMP Negeri 16 Medan exhibit inadequate grasp of English vocabulary.
2. Students sometimes forget recently acquired terminology as well as terms from prior classes.
3. Limited language proficiency adversely impacts pupils' understanding and communicative abilities.
4. The employed pedagogical strategies have inadequately stimulated student motivation and heightened their interest.

5. English training at that institution still lacks the incorporation of digital learning tools, such as Duolingo.
6. Limited research has been undertaken regarding the utilization of Duolingo to enhance the vocabulary of middle school students, especially in public educational institutions.

1.4 Research Question

1. Is there a significant effect of using The Impact of the Duolingo App on Ninth-Grade Students' Ability to Master English Vocabulary at SMP Negeri 16 Medan?
2. How do students respond to Do you use the Duolingo app to learn English vocabulary?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the efficacy of utilizing the Duolingo application.
2. To assess the impact of Duolingo on students' vocabulary proficiency.
3. To ascertain students' reactions to the utilization of Duolingo.

1.6 Scope of The Research

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the Duolingo program in improving the English vocabulary competency of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 16 Medan during the 2024/2025 academic year.” This study investigates the influence of game-based digital learning on students' ability to recall, grasp, and recognize vocabulary. This study employs a quantitative methodology and adopts a quasi-experimental design. Employing a solitary cohort of students as the experimental group. Data were gathered through vocabulary exams (pre-test and post-test) and questionnaires to analyze students' responses and learning motivation. The findings of this study are expected to aid educators and institutions in the adoption of mobile-based digital learning media.