

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

1.1 Background

English plays an important role in the modern world. In numerous disciplines, including education, business, technology, and communication, English serves as the primary medium of instruction. So a fluent command of English is important in making globalization possible. However, just like how bricks are an essential part of building a house, vocabulary is one of the most critical elements in learning English. According to Hornby (2000), vocabulary is a set of words used in a particular language. Vocabulary is the set of words familiar to a language, person, or group.

Because of its important role in communication and comprehension, the word “vocabulary” is often the main focus in language learning. Vocabulary falls into two main categories: productive vocabulary, which includes words that can be used in writing or conversation, and receptive vocabulary, which includes words that are understood (Miralpeix & Muñoz, 2018). Good vocabulary knowledge influences language acquisition and speaking, reading, writing and listening skills. Education is reliant on vocabulary learning since students’ overall academic ability is determined by their vocabulary.

A rich vocabulary allows students to communicate more effectively and understand more complex texts. However, many students, especially at the junior high school level, have difficulty in mastering vocabulary. This study focuses on second grade students at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan, which is one of the junior high schools in Indonesia.

Based on the preliminary data, 12 (48%) out of 25 students from second grade smp nasrani 5 medan could not complete the task to create free text essay in English on title “independence day”. This shows that almost half of the students have inadequate vocabulary skills and became the subject of this study. This indicates a significant problem in vocabulary acquisition among these students. This failure reflects the challenges in education as well as the potential stunting of their language development. This study seeks to identify the factors that influence students' vocabulary skills as it relates to their low academic performance. Several studies have identified factors that influence students' low vocabulary acquisition. The factors can be divided into two main categories: internal and external.

Internal factors relate to students' individual characteristics, such as learning motivation, interest, self-confidence, cognitive and consistency in learning. One of them is the lack of learning motivation. Many students are not motivated to develop their vocabulary, which can have an impact on productivity in learning (Karlina & Kusnarti, 2024). Previous studies have shown that intrinsic motivation plays an important role in students' academic achievement, including in vocabulary acquisition (Psyridou et al., 2018). Research by Jannah and Syafryadin (2022) shows that students often face boredom in English lessons, which contributes to low motivation and desire to learn. In his book *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, Nation (2013) explains that synonyms and spelling-pronunciation mismatches are major challenges in vocabulary learning. This can cause confusion and difficulty in remembering new words, especially for foreign language learners.

As well as the lack of learning consistency affects students' inability to master vocabulary. Research by Moch. Imam Machfudi and Anissa'ul Afidah (2022) revealed that students have difficulty in remembering and understanding English vocabulary. One of the causes is the lack of consistent study habits and low interest in learning English.

External factors include the learning environment, teaching methods, and availability of learning resources. The methods need to be updated and adjusted to ensure students are actively involved in the learning process. The learning environment also contributes to students' vocabulary skills. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often have limited access to language-rich out-of-school learning, such as books, interactive media and language experiences (Zaitun et al., 2021). This shows that students' social and cultural environment plays a significant role in their vocabulary development.

According to research, game apps can positively contribute to the motivation of students and improve vocabulary achievement in language learning (Li, 2021). To overcome the problem of students' low vocabulary skills, there are several solutions that can be applied. The implementation of interactive and fun learning strategies such as the use of educational games and application-based technology can increase students' interest in vocabulary learning (Cadime et al., 2018).

Secondly, teachers need training and development of their teaching skills. A skilled teacher applying a range of learning methods creates a more lively

and inclusive learning environment making students more willing to participate. Similarly, parents can contribute to vocabulary learning efforts at home by bringing in reading materials in English or linking children to activities that incorporate English.

There are several studies relevant to this topic. For example, Zaitun et al. found a correlation between vocabulary acquisition and students' speaking ability at the junior high school level, indicating that students with a wider vocabulary have better speaking ability (Zaitun et al., 2021). In another study, Li showed that the use of a game-based vocabulary learning application had a positive impact on students' motivation and vocabulary achievement. The conclusion of this study is in line with the finding that factors such as instructional methods and motivation have a direct influence on students' vocabulary achievement (Li, 2021).

Different from previous studies, this research specifically focuses on the difficulties faced by second-grade students at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan in mastering vocabulary. While previous studies have examined the general impact of instructional methods and motivation on vocabulary mastery, this study aims to explore the internal and external factors affecting students' vocabulary mastery. Additionally, this research incorporates classroom observations, student questionnaires, and interviews to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the challenges students face and the potential solutions that can be applied.

1.2 Research Problems

Based on the above background, this research will focus on the main questions:

1. What are the factors affecting students' inability in vocabulary mastery?
2. What is the main factor affecting students' inability in vocabulary mastery?
3. How do teacher impact the students' inability in vocabulary mastery?

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the factors contributing to students' difficulties in mastering vocabulary.
2. To determine the most significant factor affecting students' vocabulary mastery.
3. To find out how teachers impact the students' inability in vocabulary mastery.

1.4 Scope Of The Reseach

This research focuses on the difficulties faced by second-grade students at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan in mastering vocabulary. The study aims to identify both internal and external factors affecting students' vocabulary acquisition. Internal factors include students' motivation, interest, and self-confidence, while external factors involve the learning environment, teaching methods, and access to learning resources

The study involves 12 students as research subjects, with data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. This research does not aim to generalize findings to all students but rather to provide an in-depth understanding of the specific challenges encountered by students at SMP Nasrani 5 Medan.

1.5 Significance of the Research

This study is expected to provide valuable insights for various stakeholders:

1. For Students – The findings will help students recognize the factors affecting their vocabulary mastery and provide strategies to improve their learning process.
2. For Teachers – The research will assist teachers in understanding students' difficulties and adapting their teaching methods to enhance vocabulary learning effectively.
3. For Schools – The results can serve as a reference for schools in improving language learning programs and providing better support for students struggling with vocabulary acquisition.
4. For Future Researchers – This study can serve as a foundation for future research on vocabulary learning difficulties, particularly in similar educational contexts.