

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Research

When learning English, vocabulary is the most important factor. It serves as the foundation for learning the four fundamental language skills of writing, speaking, listening and reading. Without sufficient vocabulary, students will find it difficult to understand texts, formulate coherent concepts, and participate in meaningful discussions. According to Hatch and Brown (1995:1), “vocabulary is the foundation for building language, which plays a fundamental role in communication.” The statement states that the clear foundation of language and communication is English. According to Nugroho, Nurkamto, and Sulistyowati (2012), word comprehension gives students the ability to communicate ideas and understand various linguistic skills. A strong vocabulary not only improves reading and writing skills, but also listening comprehension and speaking skills, which are crucial for academic success and real-world interactions (Ur, 1998).

However, learning English is a challenge for many students in vocational high schools (SMK). The lack of practical and specialized skills in the professional curriculum often limits the time and motivation available to learn English vocabulary. Many students have difficulties in word usage, spelling correctly, and understanding word usage. According to Nugroho, Nurkamto, and Sulistyowati (2012), these difficulties are further exacerbated by overly long teaching methods, lack of exposure to English, and lack of interesting learning materials. Students in vocational schools such as SMK Telkom 2 Medan are required to understand general and specialized terms related to their future careers, so word comprehension becomes increasingly important.

Innovative and engaging approaches are needed to solve this problem. Flashcards are an effective way to optimize vocabulary learning. Flashcards provide an interactive and visual method of vocabulary learning, thus making learning more interesting for students. According to Cross (1992:119), flashcards are “simple pictures on a piece of card or paper, which are probably the most frequently used visual aid in language teaching.” By combining words, pictures and colors, flashcards can help children improve their memory and strengthen the connection between words. This method accommodates different learning styles and is a flexible tool for different classroom learning (Haycraft, 1978).

Studies have shown that flashcards in vocabulary lessons can significantly increase student motivation and retention of new words. Nugroho, Nurkamto and Sulistyowati (2012) found that the use of flashcards led to a dramatic increase in student vocabulary scores, from an average score of 45.70 on the pre-test to 80.13 on the post-test. Similarly, Widiastuti (2014) found that the use of flashcards for vocabulary learning increased student interest and participation, with test scores increasing from 56.5 to 83.7. In classroom action research, Atmaja and Sonia (2020) also found an improvement in language proficiency, with scores

increasing from 79.5 to 87.5 in two cycles. Based on these results, it is clear that flashcards are a valuable tool for improving vocabulary acquisition - especially for students who are less motivated or rarely come into contact with the English language.

This research relates to SMK Telkom 2 Medan, a vocational school that prepares students for a career in technology and communications. In this institution, English plays an important role for the students and their future career aspirations. However, initial observations have shown that many students at SMK Telkom 2 Medan struggle to master their vocabulary, which affects their overall performance in English. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the flashcard method in improving students' vocabulary and thus their language proficiency and academic performance. To increase the accessibility, interest and effectiveness of vocabulary learning, teachers can incorporate flashcards into vocabulary training.

Furthermore, the inclusion of flashcards in vocabulary teaching offers a promising response to the challenges that vocational students face when learning English vocabulary. Not only do flashcards facilitate memorization: they also contribute to active participation and engagement in the learning process. This is consistent with the findings of Schmitt and McCarty (1997), who found that visual aids such as flashcards can significantly improve vocabulary memorization and recall. Educators can create a more conducive and effective environment that supports vocabulary acquisition and contributes to students' academic and professional success by utilizing the benefits of this methodology.

In conclusion, the flashcard method is a dynamic and effective approach to vocabulary teaching that is tailored to the specific needs of vocational students at SMK Telkom 2 Medan. This method enables teachers to expand students' vocabulary and thus provide them with the necessary language skills for their future careers. The aim of this study is to explore the effectiveness of flashcards in vocabulary learning and thus contribute to more comprehensive language education.

## **1.2 Research Problems**

- Can flashcards improve students' vocabulary acquisition?
- How significant is the vocabulary improvement after using flashcards?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

- To measure the effectiveness of flashcards in improving students' vocabulary mastery.
- To compare students' vocabulary learning outcomes before and after using flashcards.

## **1.4 Hypothesis**

- $H_0$  (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant difference in vocabulary mastery between students taught with and without flashcards.

- H<sub>1</sub> (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant difference in vocabulary mastery between students taught with and without flashcards.

### **1.5 Limitation of the Research**

This study only looks at how flashcards can help students become more proficient with vocabulary. Only 25 students in class eleventh majoring in culinary at SMK Telkom 2 Medan during the academic year 2025 were the subject of the study. As a result, the findings of this study cannot be applied to students with various characteristics from other departments, levels, or schools. Additionally, while the primary goal of this study was to assess how well flashcards work to improve vocabulary acquisition, it did not go into great detail on other language skills like grammar, speaking, listening, or reading.

### **1.6 Research Benefits**

This research is expected to offer benefits for many people, especially in the context of English language learning, specifically vocabulary mastery.

- For teachers: The results of this study can encourage teachers to be more creative in designing interactive and enjoyable learning experiences. It also provides insights into effective vocabulary teaching strategies using flashcards.
- For students: This study offers an alternative method for vocabulary learning that is more engaging and fun. Flashcards may help students retain vocabulary more effectively and develop more confidence in using English.
- For Future Researchers: This research serves as a reference for future studies that aim to explore visual learning media or enhance vocabulary instruction in similar educational settings.