INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER I

1.1 Background of the Study

As noted by Zhang et al. (2024), vocabulary plays a fundamental and predictive role in second-language acquisition, serving as a core element of language proficiency. Kovalenko, Y. (2024). highlight that mastering vocabulary is a foundational component of English learning, as it enables access to all four major language skills. Vocabulary refers to the collection of words introduced to learners during instructional activities, supporting the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. Thus, it is widely acknowledged as a critical aspect of language education (Liu & Zhao, 2023).A growing body of research supports the integration of games in language classrooms as a way to create dynamic and engaging learning environments. Game-based learning can also stimulate higher-order thinking skills, such as problem-solving and reasoning—both of which are beneficial for vocabulary development (Chuang, T.-Y., S.-K. Tsai, and Y.-H. Lu. 2025). Among the many available gamified strategies, puzzle word games stand out as an enjoyable yet effective tool. These games prompt learners to locate words, match terms with definitions, or solve vocabulary-based challenges that encourage active participation. Putra (2023) assert that vocabulary mastery positively impacts learners' overall performance, particularly in reading and speaking tasks.Despite these advancements, junior high school students in Indonesia continue to encounter difficulties in acquiring English vocabulary. One of the primary issues is cognitive overload, which occurs when students are exposed to too many unfamiliar words at once, particularly in lessons lacking structure or variety. Suryani et al. (2025) observed that such conditions result in high mental strain and hinder long-term retention. Consistent with this view, Zhou and Wu (2024) argue that vocabulary learning improves when instruction is carefully structured and adjusted to students' cognitive levels. In the absence of varied learning stimuli, including visual, auditory, and physical activities, students often find it difficult to relate new

vocabulary to meaningful contexts. Fatimah, S (2025) found that incorporating multimodal elements increases student engagement and enhances memory retention. Additionally, Nation, I. S. P. (2022) emphasize that learning in collaborative and socially interactive environments, such as group tasks or scaffolded instruction, significantly supports vocabulary development. When these elements are missing, vocabulary lessons can become monotonous, leading to disengagement and subpar learning results. In response to these challenges, educators are increasingly turning to technological innovations to enrich the learning process. One prominent approach is gamification, which involves applying game design elements—like rewards, points, or competition—into educational contexts to enhance motivation Laksana, S. D., Saputro, A. D., Ariyanto, A., & Lestari, D. A. (2024). Puzzle word games, in particular, offer learners a playful yet purposeful way to practice vocabulary, blending engagement with meaningful reinforcement Setyawati, A. (2024). Among these games, word search puzzles are especially favored for their simplicity and adaptability. These activities require learners to locate specific words concealed within a grid, where letters may be arranged horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. The task demands close attention, visual scanning, and careful analysis, all of which contribute to improved concentration and vocabulary retention.This study focuses on the use of puzzle word games as a vocabulary teaching strategy for junior high school students in Indonesia. While previous research has mostly centered on elementary learners or generalized gamified approaches, there is limited evidence on how such games affect older learners in the Indonesian context. By filling this gap, the present research seeks to provide insight into how puzzle-based activities can be used to support vocabulary instruction for students at the junior high school level.

1.2 Scope and Limitation

The scope of this research is limited to the use of puzzle word games in teaching English vocabulary to junior high school students. It does not investigate other language skills such as grammar, pronunciation, or writing. The study is also confined to a single school and uses qualitative methods to collect insights from

both students and teachers. Limitations include a relatively small sample size, the potential for subjective bias in self-reported data, and the contextual nature of findings that may not be easily generalized to other educational settings.

`1.3 Literature Review

In recent years, the use of word games has become increasingly popular in English vocabulary instruction due to their engaging and student-centered nature. These games are not only designed to enhance retention but also to promote active learning and classroom participation. Among the variety of games available, puzzle word games are particularly noted for their potential to combine enjoyment with learning, especially in teaching vocabulary at the junior high school level. Marlina, M. (2024). conducted a qualitative study exploring student perceptions of word games in vocabulary learning. The results showed that students responded positively to the use of puzzle-based activities, reporting increased motivation, engagement, and confidence. The interactive format of the games helped reduce learning anxiety and made the acquisition of new vocabulary feel less burdensome. Moreover, students viewed these games as a refreshing alternative to traditional memorization techniques, which they often found monotonous and ineffective. Despite these benefits, the study also revealed that the effectiveness of word puzzle games largely depends on how teachers implement them in the classroom. When used consistently and in alignment with learning objectives, puzzle games can become powerful tools to reinforce vocabulary. However, without proper integration and variation, their novelty may quickly wear off. This study builds on the work Marlina, M. (2024). by shifting focus not only to students' experiences but also to how teachers perceive and apply these games in real teaching contexts. By exploring both perspectives, this research aims to offer a deeper understanding of the practical and pedagogical value of word puzzle games in vocabulary instruction within junior high school classrooms.

1.4 Research of Problem

1. How are puzzle word games used as a gamification tool in the classroom to teach English vocabulary?
2. What are the students' perceptions of using puzzle word games in learning vocabulary?
3. What are the teachers' perceptions of using puzzle word games in learning vocabulary?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

1. To describe the implementation of puzzle word games in teaching English vocabulary.
2. To explore students' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of puzzle word games.
3. To explore teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of puzzle word games.

1.6 The Advantage of the Study

1. For teachers: the findings are expected to provide valuable insights into how puzzle word games can be integrated effectively into the classroom to enhance both vocabulary mastery and student engagement. By understanding students' responses and learning outcomes, educators can adapt their teaching strategies to create more interactive, student-centered learning environments that foster motivation and active participation.
2. For students: the use of puzzle word games may lead to a more enjoyable and less stressful vocabulary learning experience. These games can help reduce boredom commonly associated with rote memorization while encouraging critical thinking and word recognition skills. As students

become more involved and motivated through playful learning, their vocabulary acquisition is likely to improve in both depth and retention.