CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Currently, learning English is one of the mandatory subjects in the country, especially in Indonesia. English lessons are part of the curriculum in various countries where most of the population does not use English as a daily or foreign language (Wilde et al., 2020). English subjects are now starting to be prepared from elementary school and even kindergarten levels. That is, of course, very important to prepare a mature and fluent mindset and initial preparation for moving towards a higher level of education. Learning English should be started at the age of children because children will find it easier to absorb learning about the language than adults (Suryana et al., 2021). Getting children used to listening or speaking English vocabulary in everyday life will make it easier for children to remember the language as well. According to Ahmed (2015)Learning English can open up great opportunities for life in the future. As an international and unifying language, English becomes a gateway to the wider outside world. Thus, to achieve such a goal, a basic introduction to learning English is essential.

In learning English, the most basic language skill that must be mastered is vocabulary. According to Afzal (2019) and Pratasik (2022) vocabulary is the most essential thing in language skills because when people have limited vocabulary, communication will become increasingly difficult, and someone may not be able to communicate if they do not know the vocabulary. Vocabulary will always be the most essential part, along with pronunciation and grammar in learning English (Pan et al., 2011). In addition, based on Anggarista &

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Wahyudin (2022), vocabulary and grammar are important for students if they want to have competent communication skills. In the world of education, learning English vocabulary should start in elementary school (Suhardiana, 2017). Vocabulary can improve students' reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills. By mastering vocabulary, students are able to access more profound and more relevant knowledge, integrate new vocabulary information with existing knowledge, and gain better understanding (Moody et al., 2018). Understanding vocabulary makes it easier for students to receive information and think critically according to its true meaning, which will make it easier for students to learn and improve achievement.

However, the reality is that most elementary school students do not master basic vocabulary, so when they enter junior high school, students have difficulty participating in learning English at a higher level. Another difficulty that students experience when learning vocabulary is related to pronunciation and spelling because in English, writing and pronunciation are sometimes different (Ningrum, 2015). According to Okkan et al., (2020) students with a lack of vocabulary will have an impact on students' discomfort and lack of confidence in the learning process. Students will be afraid to ask questions, answer oral questions, and discuss because they are unsure of their knowledge due to limited vocabulary mastery. Apart from that, mastery of grammar will not be possible if students do not have extensive knowledge of vocabulary (Woodson et al., 2023). Therefore, getting used to listening to English vocabulary is very necessary for students to support the learning process.

English vocabulary learning in schools will continue to develop over time, and the teaching system has also changed over the decades. Zhonggen (2018) stated that the traditional method of learning vocabulary face-to-face, using a book, and students sitting around the teacher who must take notes about vocabulary is considered good for stimulating students' memories. According to Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020), most students are more comfortable to learn using traditional methods rather than using technology or online. That is because many of them do not have sufficient knowledge of using technology and have limited tools for learning with technology. However, as time goes by, ways of learning English vocabulary are increasingly developing, but traditional learning methods are not directly abandoned. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world of education, the existence of technology has begun to be noticed. Modernization has begun to emerge, especially in the educational aspect, which has been made easier with the help of the Internet. During the endemic era, education began to shift to blended learning, especially in English vocabulary, with the aim of creating innovations and developing the learning environment so that it is more effective for learning and also adds to students' learning experience (Klimova & Polakova, 2020). Students learning motivation will also increase when teachers can create learning innovations by using learning support media and learning strategies that are not monotonous.

In the current era, to support English language learning the role of technology is needed. Technology is more than computers, and technology is a form of globalization that can connect knowledge and improve learning abilities (Rintaningrum, 2023). According to Kazemi (2014), technology is developing

rapidly and has become a professional way of learning in today's life. Technology makes our lives easier, especially in the educational aspect. However, the biggest challenge is in mastering and understanding technological developments because mistakes in using technology also have a big impact, such as limited knowledge about technology, data theft, fraud, etc. Technology can help provide facilities for learning vocabulary because it can access various websites and applications, which makes it easier for teachers to develop their creative ideas in teaching. Therefore, the role of technology in the teaching and learning process is very important to obtain significant student learning outcomes (Ahmadi, 2018). According to Ajisoko (2020), learning English vocabulary needs to be combined with technology that will increase students' learning abilities and motivation. In line with Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020), through technology, a new dimension is introduced in learning that does not burden or pressure students with long texts like the traditional method but creates learning that stimulates critical learning and encourages students to dare to be directly involved in the learning process.

Nowadays, there are many technology-based facilities for learning English, especially vocabulary, that attract attention. The most familiar technology used by students apart from laptops or computers is mobile phones or smartphones. As time goes by, various kinds of tools to support students' learning of vocabulary are increasingly developing, including the availability of mobile applications, which are now increasingly popular (Rezaei et al., 2014). Smartphones provide various technological features that can be upgraded over time and contain applications that can become vocabulary-learning

media/mobile applications. The impact provided by the mobile application is considered to be able to develop student's learning abilities, especially in mastering vocabulary (Rong, 2022). Learning with technology-based facilities for students is also able to support learning in the classroom. The reason is that today's children or teenagers are good friends with gadgets so that they can increase motivation and arouse interest and involvement in the learning process, such as giving assignments that combine technological resources with group presentation activities so that they can simultaneously hone students' social and oral skills (Haleem et al., 2022).

According to Pratasik (2022), there are many ways that young people can learn English vocabulary, one of which is using a game and quiz-based learning application, namely Duolingo. In the same line with Ajisoko (2020), Duolingo is considered as a new learning media to facilitate access to teaching and learning for teachers and students, which can be easily installed on the App Store/Play Store on all types of smartphones. The learning targets with the Duolingo application are alphabetic, phonological awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This target is supported by the principles or five pillars which are the learning method using the Duolingo application, including learn by doing, learn in a personalized way, focus on what matters, stay motivated and feel the delight (Freeman et al., 2023). According to Tiara et al., (2021), features that can support learning in Duolingo include leaderboards, feedback with error correction, multiple choice, essay, voice recording, playback, and so on. Duolingo has various kinds of language learning ranging from Arabic, Spanish, French, and English. The features provided by

the Duolingo application are also considered innovative and fun because learning is game-based, and some challenges must be done, thereby increasing students' learning motivation (Irawan et al., 2020). A phenomenon that often occurs in the classroom when learning English vocabulary is feeling bored and loss of motivation when just listening to the teacher's explanation and reading long writings in books (Apoko et al., 2023). Duolingo can be an alternative for exploring new ways of learning in creating learning experiences that further increase learning motivation and vocabulary comprehension.

From preliminary observation at SMP N 1 Melaya, Duolingo was used by the teacher as a vocabulary learning media, where the activities carried out could improve cognitive abilities in understanding the material and affective, social, and emotional abilities in managing attitudes and emotions related to group learning. According to students' opinions, Duolingo was a challenging learning application because it contained targets that must be met every day and contained reminders if students missed their daily targets, students always set aside at least 5 minutes per day to learn English. Several studies related to the implementation of technology, especially the Duolingo application that can create new learning experiences in four basic English skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The first study conducted by Syafrizal et al., (2022) used a quantitative method. The result shows that Duolingo could help students improve their speaking ability with speaking exercises available on Duolingo. Students admit that they have problems hearing new words whose pronunciation is unclear. However, the Duolingo application helps introduce new vocabulary with clear audio, and you can choose to pronounce it slowly or

quickly. Jiang et al., (2020) and Jiang et al., (2024) stated that Duolingo could help Spanish, French, and Japanese students with listening proficiency. The study from Sari & Octaviani, (2022) is in line with a study by Tuong, (2024) stated that Duolingo has an impact on students' listening comprehension. To improve listening comprehension and proficiency, Duolingo can help with listening exercises that are connected to practicing translation questions and ordering sentences according to the audio being played. This is said to be effectively used to help students with listening exercises which can improve students' ability to recognize, understand and use new vocabulary. As one form of success in implementing, which then influences studies related to students' perception which can strengthen the statement that Duolingo is suitable for use as learning media. The study by Apoko et al., (2023) using mix method, and study by Klimova and Polakova (2020) used a quantitative method have similar learning outcomes that refer to positive responses of students' perceptions and provide results that students feel learning English vocabulary is more attractive, practical, and beneficial if supported by technology. On the other hand, a study conducted by Ajisoko, (2020) shows that Duolingo is an attractive media for learning and increases students' motivation. Hidayati et al., (2019) with a mixed method have similar results regarding Duolingo a mobile application that provides flexibility in access from time to time and students feel motivated and enjoy when learning with Duolingo. In the same line, Irawan et al., (2020) stated that the Duolingo application plays a role in motivating students' learning. These three studies have the similar result, proving that Duolingo can be a good learning media for increasing students' motivation especially in vocabulary

learning. All the studies related to the implementation of Duolingo in learning English produce a conclusion that leads in the same direction. These findings imply that Duolingo is a promising application for improving English learning in vocabulary or other basic language skills.

Therefore, from preliminary observation in several schools at Melaya Village, only SMP N 1 Melaya used Duolingo for learning vocabulary. SMP N 1 Melaya implemented an Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), which included learning that integrates technology. This curriculum reform is focused on improving the quality of education, creativity, critical thinking, and developing skills (Ningsih, 2024). Using the Duolingo application as a vocabulary learning media for students is in line with the goals and integrity of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, the phenomenon related to students who still had a lack of vocabulary and opinions about the teacher who still used traditional methods of learning that were boring and did not attract attention as well still often appears. The teacher must creatively manage classroom learning activities to be well received by students and create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere by using Duolingo as a learning media to hone students' vocabulary skills and learning motivation. The teacher got used to using it for individual or group activities where the results or scores will be monitored periodically. Students as the users also felt how the learning took place with the Duolingo application, which could be enjoyed and provide new learning experiences. The students have the right to provide opinions and judgment of the application. Moreover, students' opinions are important in seeing and knowing the process of implementing Duolingo by the teacher.

However, based on the previous studies above, there has been limited research on how the teacher uses the Duolingo mobile application in the classroom learning process, using qualitative research, especially at the junior high school level. The current research focused on how the teacher implements the Duolingo application for vocabulary learning in 8th grade and explores the 8th grade students' opinions at SMP N 1 Melaya regarding using the Duolingo application in vocabulary learning. This research will have benefits in influencing the use of technology in vocabulary learning in the classroom so that it can produce a generation that is sensitive to technology and able to improve their learning abilities.

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1.2 Problem Identification

Based on the background research above, there are several problem identifications:

1. Students at SMP N 1 Melaya lack English vocabulary, which can hinder learning basic language skills. Students assume limited time to learning and the density of non-academic activities, lack of learning media, lack of teacher supervision sometimes make them neglectful in learning English.

2. The traditional way of learning English does not motivate students to learn English vocabulary because it is considered boring and less interesting.

3. Lack of learning facilities and limited student gadgets that support gamification-based learning applications. Not all students have smartphones that support learning applications due to version and storage limitations.

From the problem identification above, it can be concluded that the learning vocabulary of junior high school students must be improved to help their basic language skills (speaking, writing, listening, and reading). Using modern learning media based on technology and gamification such as the Duolingo application can improve students' vocabulary skills and make learning more exciting and attractive in line with current developments and how students learn today. However, another challenge is that the teacher must provide technology-based learning tools that are able to access the Duolingo application for students who have limited learning technology facilities and limited gadgets that support the application.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

The limitation of this research focuses on investigating how the teacher uses the Duolingo application in the classroom for learning vocabulary, as well as exploring students' opinions regarding the use of Duolingo as an English vocabulary learning media in 8th level junior high school, especially at SMP N 1 Melaya, located at Melaya Village, Jembrana Regency, Bali. The school was chosen as the research location because it has implemented the use of the Duolingo application as an English learning media with a teacher who is competent in using technology and understands the features of the application.

1.4 Research Questions

There are two problem statements, they are followed as:

1. How does the teacher implement the Duolingo application in learning English vocabulary in 8th grade Junior High School 1 Melaya?

2. What are students' opinions on using the Duolingo application in 8th grade Junior High School 1 Melaya?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research question above, this research is conducted to fulfil the objectives of the research, which were formulated as follows:

1. To describe how the teacher implements the Duolingo Application for learning English vocabulary in 8th grade Junior High School 1 Melaya.

2. To explore students' opinions on using the Duolingo application in 8th grade Junior High School 1 Melaya.

1.6 Significance of the Study

1.6.1   Theoretical Significance

Through this research, it is hoped that can influence the use of technology in education, especially in learning English vocabulary with the Duolingo application. This research also supports the gamification theory which can be used to vary the learning process and make it more interesting and aesthetic.

1.6.2   Practical Significance

1.   For Teachers

With this research, it is hoped that teachers will learn about modern game-based learning media called Duolingo, which can be used for more interesting and fun vocabulary learning. They should also know how to use the Duolingo application is one of the technologies with

gamification techniques that can change the traditional English vocabulary learning system to a modern one.

2. **For Students**

From this research, students will know that Duolingo can be a learning media that helps them learn English vocabulary modernly because it is game-based and has various features that further motivate students' learning.

3. **For Schools**

The results of this research can reflect greater use of technology in learning in accordance with the development of learning media and a school that is technologically literate and able to facilitate students' development of learning effectiveness through learning applications, such as using the Duolingo application to support the learning process and facilitate students' interactive learning of vocabulary.

4. **For Other Researchers**

This research can be used by other researchers as a reference and provider of additional information for future research that is in line with the topic of this research.