

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the basic components that support the research, including the rationale behind conducting this research, the relevance of previous research and theory, the identification of key issues, the scope and limitations, the research questions, the research objectives, the significance of the research, and the operational definitions.

1.1 Background of Study

English is one of the compulsory subjects in the junior high school, where students are expected to develop their English skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, the success of mastering these language skills depends largely on students' vocabulary knowledge. Li and Hafner (2022) mentions that the vocabulary serves as the foundation that supports all aspects of English language development. Without adequate vocabulary, students may struggle to comprehend texts, respond to spoken language, express ideas in writing, or engage in meaningful communication. Despite its importance, vocabulary is not taught as a separate subject in junior high school, which often leads to limited emphasis on vocabulary enrichment during English instruction.

The results of a preliminary observation and evaluation conducted by English teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Monta revealed that most eighth-grade students were still experiencing difficulties in learning English. The school has

a total of five eighth-grade classes with approximately 150 students. The English evaluation showed that around 135 students (90%) scored below the Minimum Competency Standard (KKM), which is set at 75. The average score only reached 65, with individual scores ranging from 50 to 80. Although English at the junior high school level is taught by combining the four English skills, the teachers observed that one of the main reasons for students' poor performance was their limited vocabulary mastery. Many students had difficulties understanding English texts, following classroom instructions, and using words appropriately in speaking or writing tasks. This condition aligns with Nation's (2001) view that vocabulary is central to language use, and without enough vocabulary knowledge, effective communication cannot occur, regardless of students' grammatical competence.

Furthermore, vocabulary mastery is essential and requires appropriate strategies and media, especially when teaching junior high school students. Susanto (2017) mentions that teaching English vocabulary to younger learners differs from teaching adults and must involve engaging, varied, and up-to-date methods. It aligns with Arafah and Ahmad (2020) which emphasize that vocabulary learning should be supported through fun and meaningful activities to enhance retention and motivation. Implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which promotes student-centered, innovative, and contextual learning, strengthens the need for interactive approaches in vocabulary learning. Vocabulary in this curriculum is not memorizing but understanding word meanings in real-life contexts and applying them through active learning. This

curriculum encourages teaching and learning to utilize digital tools, collaborative learning, and visual media to create meaningful learning experiences (Latifa & Ratih, 2023).

To meet these demands, teachers must utilize instructional media that can engage students actively in learning vocabulary as part of integrated English skills. One of the digital tools may support this learning activities is Wordwall. Wordwall provides various interactive features such as matching games, group-sort, flashcards, quizzes, speaking cards, and image-word associations that help students internalize vocabulary through repetition and vocabulary reinforcement (Çil, 2021). Some previous studies had shown that Wordwall effectively increases students' motivation, participation, and vocabulary understanding (Rahman et al., 2023; Widyaningsih et al., 2023; Kahar & Baa, 2021). It compared to other interactive platforms such as Quizizz and Kahoot, which focus primarily on multiple-choice quizzes and competitive formats, Wordwall offers a wider variety of activity types better suited for vocabulary development. Both Quizizz and Kahoot more suitable for reviewing general content or checking comprehension through gamified assessments, but they are more limited in supporting contextual vocabulary learning (Susanti & Putra, 2022). In contrast, Wordwall allows teachers to present vocabulary with visual aids, arrange words into categories, complete sentences, and practice spelling in a more varied and more student-centered. Additionally, Wordwall activities can be delivered online and offline, providing flexibility for classrooms with different levels of digital access. Those reason makes it a more inclusive and

pedagogically appropriate tool for vocabulary development, especially in secondary schools.

Considering the students' low performance and the need for innovative learning tools aligned with the *Merdeka* Curriculum, it is essential to conduct research that integrates effective instructional media into vocabulary learning. Therefore, this current research investigates using Wordwall-based English learning materials and their effect on students' vocabulary mastery and English learning engagement at the eighth-grade level of SMP Negeri 1 Monta. The result of this study is expected to contribute to the improvement of English teaching practices by providing teachers with effective strategies to enrich vocabulary and enhance students' engagement in learning English.

1.2 Problem Identification

The current study is supported by earlier research that has identified similar issues in English language learning, particularly in vocabulary mastery. Previous studies have consistently reported that students struggle with limited vocabulary knowledge and face difficulties in memorizing and understanding English words (Rahman et al., 2023; Widyaningsih et al., 2023; Kahar & Baa, 2021; Çil, 2021). These challenges significantly affect their reading comprehension, writing performance, and overall communication skills. In addition, several studies have highlighted that students' low engagement in English learning is often linked to a lack of interactive and low student-centered learning strategies (Hidayaty et al., 2022; Noftariani, 2022). These findings align with the conditions observed

in eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Monta, where most students get English scores below the minimum competency. It may be affected by the lack of vocabulary mastery. Based on the informal interview with the English teacher, vocabulary is not taught as a standalone component but is integrated across various language skills. This integrated approach often leads to limited direct instruction or reinforcement of vocabulary learning. As a result, students may be exposed to new words but lack sufficient practice and contextual understanding to retain and use them effectively, where students exhibit low vocabulary mastery and fewer students engaged in learning activities.

However, while previous research has provided valuable insights into vocabulary learning challenges and the effectiveness of digital tools such as Wordwall, most studies have primarily focused on vocabulary outcomes alone, with limited exploration into how such tools influence students' engagement in the learning process. This presents a research gap, especially within the context of junior high schools implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which emphasizes active participation and student-centered learning. Therefore, this study aims not only to examine the impact of Wordwall on vocabulary mastery but also to investigate its role in enhancing students' learning engagement with the consideration of four dimensions of learning engagement, which remain underexplored in the existing literature.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

This study specifically focused on exploring how the use of Wordwall affects students' in supporting vocabulary learning and their engagement during English learning activities. The research was conducted at the secondary level, specifically among eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Monta.

1.4 Research Questions

Considering the background and problem identification, this study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1. Does the use of Wordwall have a simultaneous effect on students' vocabulary mastery and learning engagement in English among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Monta?
2. Does the use of Wordwall significantly affect students' vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Monta?
3. Does the use of Wordwall significantly affect towards students' engagement in learning English vocabulary among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Monta?

1.5 Research Objectives

In line with the research questions outlined earlier, this study aims to achieve the following objectives.

1. To analyse the simultaneous effect of the Wordwall website on students' vocabulary mastery and their engagement in learning English among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Monta.
2. To analyse the effect of the Wordwall website on students' vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Monta.
3. To analyse the effect of the Wordwall website on students' engagement in learning English vocabulary among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Monta.

1.6 Significance of Study

This research offers significant benefits in multiple ways. From a theoretical perspective, it offers new insights and adds to the existing literature on the educational field, especially in English language teaching. Practically, it provides potential benefits for teachers, students, and future researchers involved in language education.

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

The writer expects to contribute to the advancement of science in education. This study also aims to contribute significantly to teaching English, especially in the context of vocabulary among eighth-grade students at the secondary level. This study contains information about the effects of the Wordwall, which can be used to teach and add more vocabulary. It can also help teachers, students, or other researchers understand how to use the Wordwall in learning English.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

The contributions of this study are expected to be beneficial for several parties:

a. For the Students

This research holds particular significance for junior high school students, as it may assist them in enhancing their vocabulary mastery through more engaging and interactive learning methods. In addition, Wordwall encourages students to take more initiative in their learning, helping them become more student-centered in learning and motivated in acquiring English. It also allows students to repeatedly practice vocabulary in an interactive way, which may increase retention and long-term understanding.

b. For the Teachers

As a potential solution, this study offers a new approach for teachers to implement Wordwall to enhance vocabulary learning in an innovative atmosphere. Teachers may apply Wordwall as an alternative medium to teach English vocabulary more effectively while fostering greater student engagement in the English learning process.

c. For Other Researchers

The researcher suggests that further researchers can conduct similar research but with a different approach, such as longitudinal research, which can help determine whether Wordwall has a significant influence in the long term or not. It can also be used as a reference for researching other new interactive educational media.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

To ensure a clear understanding of the present study and prevent any potential misinterpretation, key terms are provided and classified into conceptual and operational definitions.

1.7.1 Conceptual Definition

a. Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary mastery refers to a learner's ability to accurately understand, use, and recognize words across the four language skills, and can be assessed through key components such as word form, meaning, and use (Brown, 201; Taslim et al., 2019;).

b. Engagement

Ismail and Groccia (2018) define engagement as the extent to which students are actively involved in and participate in educational activities. It refers to the students being responsible for their learning and actively participating in group work, individual assignments, class discussions, and other interactive activities (Barkley, 2009). Students' learning engagement in vocabulary mastery through Wordwall can be assessed across four key dimensions: emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social engagement (Wang et al., 2016).

1.7.2 Operational Definition

a. Vocabulary Mastery

In this study, Vocabulary Mastery refers to eighth-grade students' at SMP Negeri 1 Monta ability to understand, recognize, and use English vocabulary appropriately across the four English language skills. It is assessed through vocabulary tests by considering the aspect of vocabulary (see **Appendix 2**).

b. Engagement

Engagement in this study refers to the engagement in learning English vocabulary using Wordwall of eighth-grade students of SMPN 1 Monta which is measured in terms of emotional engagement, behavioural engagement, cognitive engagement, and social engagement (See **Appendix 4**)

1.8 Research Assumptions

Based on previous studies, the Wordwall positively affects students' in enhancing vocabulary mastery (Arafah & Ahmad, 2020). Therefore, students who study with textbooks are less participation to learn vocabulary than students who use the Wordwall website (Haq et al., 2021). Considering these findings, the researcher posits that incorporating Wordwall into instruction may enhance students' vocabulary proficiency and foster greater engagement in English language learning.

1.9 Publication Plan

The researcher intends to publish the article in *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia (Japendi)*. This journal focuses on publishing scholarly articles related to education, including language teaching and learning at various levels. The journal accommodates multiple topics, including language teaching and learning across different educational levels. It also accepts studies that examine language components such as the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and sub-skills (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation). It also allows research on integrating technology in education, particularly in the context of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), making it a suitable and relevant platform for disseminating this study.

