

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

In a global society, mastery of English has become an urgent necessity given its role as a tool for international communication and a key to accessing information, education, and broader employment opportunities. English is considered the “world’s lingua franca,” widely used for various purposes, including in the fields of education and professional settings (Fromkin 1990, in Yasa & Sudirman, 2023). To master English effectively, there are four main skills that students need to master: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Amaniasih & Arsita, 2023). However, mastery of these skills will not be optimal without adequate vocabulary as a linguistic foundation (Wati & Oka, 2021). Therefore, English vocabulary mastery is a crucial element that requires attention, particularly in educational settings with a diverse student need.

This need has become increasingly crucial in the context of inclusive education, where students have highly diverse backgrounds and learning needs. In accordance with the principles of inclusive education, every student, including those with disabilities and students with special needs, is entitled to equal learning opportunities and the right to actively participate in the same classroom environment (Padmadewi et al., 2024). One of the key pillars in the global implementation of inclusive education is the 2007 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), particularly Article 4, which emphasizes the state’s obligation to provide an inclusive education system at all levels (Wiarsih &

Aziez, 2021). This commitment is reinforced nationally through Ministry of Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009, which affirms the right of students with special needs to receive a quality education in regular schools (Lisyawati et al., 2023).

However, the implementation of inclusive education in classroom practice faces various complex challenges, primarily due to the diversity of students' learning needs within a single classroom. Students with special needs, including those with Down syndrome, autism, slow learners, and ADHD, each have different characteristics, requiring tailored instructional approaches. This situation requires teachers to play a central role in bridging inclusive policies with actual classroom practices. Teachers must not only comprehend the unique needs of each student but also formulate learning strategies and choose suitable teaching resources to guarantee an equitable and significant learning experience (Zinafis, 2023). In this regard, teachers' strategies are a critical factor in ensuring that inclusive education responds to the unique learning needs of every student.

In the context of inclusive education, teaching strategies refer to the deliberate and systematic instructional decisions teachers make to accommodate the diverse needs of their students. Effective teaching strategies in inclusive classrooms encompass not only the selection of appropriate learning materials but also the methods of presenting content, designing learning activities, and guiding students through the learning process. These strategies need to be flexible and adaptive, especially when teaching basic skills such as English vocabulary, which forms the foundation for language development. The effectiveness of these strategies is largely determined by the extent to which teachers are able to align their

instructional choices with the principles of differentiated instruction and students' individual characteristics.

One of the most commonly used tools in vocabulary learning is the flashcard, a visual aid in the form of cards that combine images and text to optimize visual perception during the learning process (Stefani & Samsiyah, 2021). The use of flashcards has a positive impact on conceptual understanding, as it helps students recognize and classify specific objects or situations. Additionally, flashcards support language development, particularly articulation and the acquisition of new vocabulary, through repeated visual and verbal exposure (Nyoman Adi Putra et al., 2018). The flexibility of flashcards allows teachers to adjust various aspects, such as size, color, number of vocabulary words, and level of visual complexity, according to the characteristics and needs of students, including those with special needs (Adella & Lestari, 2024).

The ability to customize flashcards to meet the individual needs of students aligns with the principle of differentiated instruction, which emphasizes the importance of adapting content, processes, products, and the learning environment to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson et al., 2014). In an inclusive context, this approach is key to ensuring student access and participation. Multisensory learning tools such as flashcards allow vocabulary to be taught through the simultaneous engagement of various senses, which supports students' understanding and memory. This aligns with learning theories that state that repetition and reinforcement through various senses play a crucial role in the learning process, particularly for students with special needs (Ummah & Rahman, 2024).

The principles of differentiated instruction also naturally align with the Montessori method, which serves as the specific educational framework in this study. The Montessori approach emphasizes responsible freedom in learning activities, where students are encouraged to become independent and develop social skills using concrete, multisensory materials to build a deep understanding (Laksmi et al., 2021). As a model of inclusive education, the Montessori method is known for its emphasis on experiential learning and the creation of a learning environment that allows students to explore materials independently according to their individual developmental levels and learning styles (Azhari et al., 2024). Fundamentally, Montessori is a form of personalized learning, where each child is given the space to learn according to their pace and interests (Mavrič, 2020), making it highly relevant in the context of inclusive education.

The Montessori principle of freedom of choice, which facilitates learning based on interests and abilities, naturally aligns with the flexible and adaptive nature of flashcards. Flashcards support this principle by facilitating independent exploration. Additionally, flashcards are a holistic medium that can stimulate cognitive, language, and motor development simultaneously. When designed as a multisensory tool, flashcards can engage various senses and enhance the learning experience (Rusliana, 2024). The connection between Montessori principles and the use of flashcards confirms the potential of flashcards as an effective tool for creating inclusive and meaningful learning experiences centered on the individual needs of students, particularly students with special needs.

Given the alignment between Montessori principles and the use of flashcards, it is important to review previous studies that discuss the use of flashcards in the

context of inclusive education. Previous studies have generally focused on the effectiveness of flashcards in special education schools (SLB) or conventional inclusive schools. For example, the study by Stefani & Samsiyah (2021) at SDN Summersari 01 showed that the use of flashcards can help children with special needs recognize nouns, although it requires intensive guidance. Nursalim & Mari (2022) investigated the impact of flashcards on children with special needs at the Sorong State Special Education School (SLB Negeri Sorong) and found a significant increase in vocabulary scores. Tyas (2022) at SMALB also concluded that the use of flashcards effectively improves vocabulary mastery among students with special needs. However, these studies were conducted in special education schools or regular inclusive schools using conventional approaches, and none specifically explored teachers' strategies in using flashcards within a Montessori-based inclusive school setting, particularly in Buleleng, Bali.

Singaraja Montessori School is one of the inclusive schools in Buleleng, Bali, that combines the Montessori approach with individualized educational services for students with special needs. The school serves students with diverse needs, including those with Down syndrome, slow learners, autism, and ADHD, who learn alongside regular students in the same classroom. The school also maintains ongoing collaboration with external therapists to ensure consistency between school-based learning and therapy-based learning, thereby providing holistic support for students with special needs.

This finding aligns with the results of preliminary observations conducted at Singaraja Montessori School, specifically in the Octopus Class, which implements a mixed-grade system combining grades 1 through 3 with an individualised

approach. The observations showed significant variation in how students responded to vocabulary instruction. Students with Down syndrome showed a positive response to visual learning, while slow learners required repetition to understanding. Students with autism responded better to flashcards with consistent and clear visual structures, whereas students with ADHD had difficulty maintaining focus and required shorter. Preliminary interviews with teachers also showed that flashcards have been an integral part of the Montessori language area since the school's founding and that teachers use two types of flashcards, hard copy and soft copy/digital, tailored to each student's specific needs.

The Octopus class was selected as the research setting because it represents a class that implements the Montessori approach with a clearly inclusive composition, thereby providing a rich context for exploring teachers' strategies and challenges. However, studies specifically exploring teachers' strategies for teaching English vocabulary in Montessori-based inclusive classrooms remain very limited. Although visual and concrete learning approaches are relevant in this setting, there is a lack of in-depth research exploring how teachers implement English vocabulary learning strategies using flashcards that align with Montessori principles and the learning characteristics of students with special needs. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring teachers' strategies in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary in the inclusive classroom at Singaraja Montessori School, specifically in the Octopus Class. The focus of this study is not on measuring the effectiveness of the medium, but rather on exploring the strategies teachers use to adapt the use of flashcards to the unique needs of students in a Montessori-based inclusive environment, as well as identifying the challenges they face.

1.2 Problem Identification

1. Based on the research background, the problems that can be identified are as follows:
2. Mastery of English vocabulary is a fundamental component of language skills, but students with special needs in inclusive classrooms have diverse learning characteristics, requiring different learning strategies compared to regular students.
3. Although inclusive education has been implemented, teachers still face challenges in designing and implementing vocabulary learning strategies that can accommodate the needs of students with diverse backgrounds and characteristics, such as Down syndrome, autism, slow learners, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
4. Teachers need a deep understanding of flashcard usage strategies that are in line with Montessori principles and the individual needs of students with special needs, but there are not many guidelines available in the context of Montessori-based inclusive classrooms.
5. Most previous studies have emphasized the effectiveness of using flashcards in improving students' vocabulary mastery, especially in special schools or conventional learning, without exploring how teachers design and implement flashcard strategies in the Montessori approach.
6. There are still limited studies that specifically examine teacher strategies and the challenges faced in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary in Montessori-based inclusive classrooms, particularly at Singaraja Montessori School, Buleleng, Bali.

1.3 Limitations of the Research

Limitations were imposed on the research to keep the scope focused and optimize the results obtained. This study was limited to examining teachers' strategies in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary to regular students and students with special needs, using the Montessori approach. The main focus of this study is to explore how these strategies are applied by teachers in supporting the learning process for regular students and students with special needs. In addition, this study also discusses the challenges faced by teachers in using flashcards to meet diverse learning needs in inclusive classrooms. Specifically, this study only focuses on the Octopus Class, which consists of students in grades 1 to 3 of elementary school. The focus of this study is also directed at four students with special needs, namely students with Down syndrome, autism, slow learner, and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). This study does not discuss the effectiveness of using flashcards quantitatively, nor does it compare them with other learning media or approaches.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the teachers' strategies in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary to both regular students and students with special needs in the inclusive classroom at Singaraja Montessori School especially Octopus class?
2. What challenges do teachers face in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary in the inclusive classroom at Singaraja Montessori School

especially Octopus class, particularly in meeting the needs of regular students and students with special needs?

1.5 Research Objective

1. To explore the teachers' strategies in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary to both regular students and students with special needs within the Montessori approach.
2. To identify the challenges faced by teachers in using flashcards to teach English vocabulary in inclusive classrooms, particularly in addressing the learning needs of regular students and students with special needs.

1.6 Significance of Research

1. Theoretical Significance

This research is expected to provide additional knowledge in the field of English language learning, especially on how to teach vocabulary to students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. This study also enriches the understanding of the use of visual media such as flashcards combined with the multisensory approach and Montessori principles. In addition, this research helps to strengthen the theory that interesting, simple, and appropriate media can make the vocabulary learning process more effective and enjoyable.

2. Practical Significance

- a. For teachers: This research is expected to be a reference for teachers in designing and implementing effective English vocabulary learning

strategies using flashcards in inclusive classrooms. This research provides insights into how flashcards can be adapted to suit the individual needs of learners, especially those with special needs, and in line with Montessori learning principles.

- b. For students: The results of this study are expected to increase students' motivation and participation in learning English vocabulary, especially through fun and interactive media such as flashcards. For learners with special needs, this research highlights learning strategies that are multisensory, structured, and tailored to their individual learning pace and preferences.
- c. For researchers: This study is expected to enrich researchers' understanding of inclusive pedagogy, the Montessori approach, and media-based vocabulary learning. In addition, the results of this study can also serve as a foundation for further research related to the development and adaptation of visual learning media, especially flashcards, to support diverse learning needs in an inclusive education environment.