

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of The Problem

In the current digital era, information and communication technology (ICT) has become an essential part of the education world. Technology-based learning innovations not only assist teachers in delivering materials but also provide students with a more engaging learning experience (Hidayati, 2016). One of the most important aspects of English language learning is vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary is a fundamental component that supports other language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Ariyani et al., 2025). Without adequate vocabulary mastery, students will find it difficult to understand texts, construct sentences, or communicate effectively. However, in reality, many junior high school students still struggle to master vocabulary due to monotonous and less interactive learning methods, such as memorizing word lists or completing worksheets passively.

In Indonesia, English language learning has been an important part of the curriculum since the junior high school level. However, various studies have shown that many Indonesian students still experience difficulties in mastering vocabulary effectively (Ikhsan et al., 2023). This is caused by conventional teaching methods, such as memorizing word lists without context or repetitive drills. In the current Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning) era, teachers are expected to be more creative in selecting media and

learning strategies that can foster students' interest. One approach that can be utilized is the use of game-based learning, such as the Word Search Puzzle, which combines elements of entertainment with the language learning process (Abidah et al., 2023).

The issue of vocabulary mastery has become important and interesting because this skill serves as the foundation of all language abilities. Many students struggle to understand texts, write sentences, and communicate effectively due to their limited vocabulary. Teachers often use conventional methods such as rote memorization of word lists, which tend to be boring and lack contextual relevance for the digital generation. Therefore, innovation in learning that is more interactive and aligned with the characteristics of today's students is needed. One potential media to use is the Word Search Puzzle, a word-finding game that presents vocabulary in a visual and interactive format. This Game combines elements of game-based learning with the learning process, allowing students to learn vocabulary in a more enjoyable, contextual, and non-monotonous way. Thus, this research becomes interesting as it focuses on the effectiveness of using a lightweight, easily accessible digital media that suits the characteristics of the current generation of students.

Based on the results of observations conducted at SMP 25 Kota Bengkulu on Monday, September 22, 2025, it was found that English language teaching and learning activities at the school were still largely conducted using conventional methods. Teachers

tended to employ traditional approaches, such as lecturing, writing exercises, and translation assignments, without utilizing engaging or technology-based learning media. As a result, the teaching and learning process tended to be monotonous and did not actively involve students in the learning process. Furthermore, based on interviews with the English teacher, it was revealed that limited school facilities constituted one of the main obstacles to the implementation of innovative learning practices. The school had only a limited number of computers and projectors, which made it difficult for teachers to regularly apply interactive digital learning media, including game-based puzzles such as *Word Search*. In addition, the researcher found that the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMP 25 Kota Bengkulu was still relatively low, as indicated by students' scores that were below the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM). Based on classroom observations, most students experienced difficulties in remembering and understanding the meanings of new vocabulary. This condition was likely caused by the limited variation in teaching methods used by the teacher and the infrequent use of game-based learning activities that could enhance students' motivation and learning enthusiasm.

Various previous studies have proven that the use of game media such as *Word Search* has a positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery. For example, the research conducted by (Goumas et al., 2020) titled "*Wordsearch, an Educational Game*

*in Language Learning.*” This study used a qualitative approach involving 11 students aged 12–15 years who played the game several times. The results showed that Wordsearch is easy to use, is able to increase students' learning motivation, and makes the vocabulary learning process more enjoyable. In addition, this game has the potential to help students remember vocabulary in the long term because it combines visual elements, interaction, and repetition. The students also showed high intrinsic motivation and tried to improve their own performance each time they played. Next, the research conducted by (Rokhmah et al., 2020) entitled *“Word Search Game as a Valuable Technique in Enhancing Students’ English Vocabulary Mastery”* Through this game, students can learn new vocabulary in an enjoyable way, thereby increasing their motivation and engagement in the learning process. The word search activity helps students remember the spelling and meaning of words more strongly through indirect repetition. In addition, the Word Search Game creates an interactive learning atmosphere and reduces students' boredom and anxiety when learning English. The research results show that the use of the Word Search Game has a positive impact on improving students' vocabulary mastery, so this method is feasible to be used as a supporting learning strategy combined with other teaching methods. In addition, the study by (Vu et al., 2021) entitled *“Using Word Games to Improve Vocabulary Retention in Middle School EFL Classes”* used a quasi-experimental design with a mixed

methods approach in two 7th-grade classes, namely an experimental group and a control group, over eight weeks. The results showed that students who learned with word games achieved a much higher increase in vocabulary scores compared to the control group. In addition, the questionnaire and interview results indicated that students felt the learning became more enjoyable, not boring, and helped them remember vocabulary for longer. From those previous studies the researcher wants to study a similar one, namely using a digital-based word search game on students' vocabulary mastery.

Technology-based games that can be accessed online also provide a more interactive learning experience and enhance students' ability to utilize digital technology as part of the learning process (Yadav & Oyelere, 2021). Conversely, the English learning process at SMP 25 Bengkulu has not yet incorporated games or fully utilized the available facilities and infrastructure as learning media. The teaching methods at SMP 25 Bengkulu still focus on traditional approaches such as lectures, memorization, and group discussions, which make students feel bored and less motivated. Moreover, research focusing on digital game-based learning innovations in public schools, particularly at the eighth-grade level of SMP 25, remains very limited. Therefore, this study utilizes the Word Search Puzzle as a simple yet engaging learning media to improve students' vocabulary mastery.

Finally, based on the phenomena above, the researcher is interested in using the Word Search Puzzle as a learning media to examine its influence on the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMP 25 Bengkulu City. Therefore, the researcher intends to conduct a study entitled **“The Influence of Using Word Search Puzzle on The Vocabulary Mastery of Eighth Grade Students at SMP 25 Bengkulu City”**.

#### **B. Identification of The Problem**

Based on the background of the problem above, several issues can be identified as follows:

1. The English vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMP 25 Bengkulu City is still low.
2. The teaching methods used by teachers are still conventional.
3. Lack of utilization of technology-based learning media at SMP 25 Bengkulu City.
4. Limited facilities and infrastructure at SMP 25 Bengkulu City.

#### **C. Limitation of The Research**

To focus this research, the researcher limits the scope of the study to the Influence of Using Word Search Puzzle on the Vocabulary Mastery of Eighth-Grade Students at SMP 25 Bengkulu City.

#### **D. Research Question**

Based on the explanation above, the researcher formulates the research problem as follows: “Is there a significant Influence of The Implementation of The Word Search Puzzle on The

Vocabulary Mastery of Eighth-Grade Students at SMP 25 Bengkulu City?”.

#### **E. Research Objective**

Based on the Research Question above, this study aims to determine whether there is a significant difference between students who are taught using the Word Search Puzzle and those who are not taught using the Word Search Puzzle in terms of the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students.

#### **F. Significance of The Study**

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits:

1. Theoretical Benefits, The results of this study are expected to enrich theoretical insights in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in vocabulary mastery and technology-based learning. This research contributes to the understanding of how digital game-based learning, especially through the Word Search Puzzle, can enhance students' vocabulary mastery in a fun and interactive way.
2. Practical Benefits
  - a. For Teachers, This study is expected to provide input for English teachers in selecting and developing innovative learning media that suit the characteristics of students in the digital era. Through the use of the Word Search Puzzle, teachers can create a more interactive, engaging, and participatory learning environment, thereby increasing

students' motivation in learning vocabulary. The results of this study can also serve as a reference for teachers in implementing effective and enjoyable technology-based vocabulary learning.

- b. For Students, The use of the Word Search Puzzle can help students improve their vocabulary mastery in a more enjoyable and less monotonous way. Through a game-based approach, students can learn more actively, independently, and contextually. In addition, this Game can also be used independently outside the classroom to reinforce their vocabulary understanding without the pressure of traditional memorization-based learning.
- c. For Schools, This research is expected to serve as a reference for the school—particularly SMP 25 Bengkulu City to further encourage the integration of digital learning media in the teaching and learning process. The findings of this study also highlight the importance of providing technological facilities and teacher training to ensure that digital learning can be implemented optimally.
- d. For Future Researchers, The results of this study can serve as a scientific reference for further research in the same field, especially in the context of using technology and digital games in English learning. Future researchers may explore other digital game or combine Word Search with different

learning strategies to examine their effects on other language skills such as reading, writing, or speaking.

## **G. Definition of Key Terms**

The following definitions are provided to ensure that readers share a common understanding or perception of several terms used in this study. This also aims to avoid any misunderstanding between the reader and the researcher. The terms are explained as follows:

1. **Word Search Puzzle:** A Game-Based Learning media that presents a collection of letters arranged in a box or table, where students are required to find and highlight hidden words according to a provided word list. This game aims to train students' recognition, understanding, and mastery of English vocabulary in an enjoyable and interactive way (Isnaeni et al., 2023).
2. **Vocabulary Mastery:** Students' ability to recognize, understand, and use English words appropriately in communicative contexts, both spoken and written. Vocabulary is an essential component of language skills because it serves as the foundation for understanding texts, speaking, writing, and listening (Ariyani, 2025)
3. **Game-Based Learning Media:** A Learning media that integrates elements of entertainment and interactivity from games into the learning process to enhance students' motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. In this study, the media refers to the

Word Search Puzzle used to help students learn vocabulary in a more enjoyable and meaningful way (Abidah et al., 2023)

