

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Since vocabulary is the foundation of all four language skills-speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Therefore, mastering vocabulary is crucial in learning English because it enables learners to understand written and spoken input and to express their ideas effectively. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students often experience difficulties in comprehending texts and producing meaningful communication. As a result, vocabulary development plays a central role in English language learning, particularly for junior high school students who are still building their basic linguistic competence (Dwi Prastiwi & Lestari, 2025). Vocabulary is not merely a list of words to be memorized, but an essential component of second language acquisition. Wesche and Paribakht emphasize that vocabulary acquisition is fundamental to language learning, whether in a first, second, or foreign language context. Learners with limited vocabulary knowledge tend to struggle not only in understanding input but also in producing meaningful output in communication.

However, in the learning process, many students still face difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. These difficulties also manifest in pronunciation, where learners often mispronounce English words because certain sounds are not present in their native language, and they have limited exposure and practice. According to Maiza (2020), Students frequently replace unfamiliar English sounds with those from their mother tongue, reflecting limited vocabulary mastery and phonological understanding. These mispronunciations further

hinder effective communication in EFL contexts. Additionally, vocabulary learning is often influenced by students' motivation and participation, which may affect their engagement and vocabulary retention (Alfiah et al., 2024). According to Nurfadilah et al. (2025), traditional teaching techniques like rote memorization and translation are frequently viewed as tedious and ineffective in fostering long-term vocabulary retention. Moreover, teachers need to adopt more engaging, interactive approaches to help students improve their vocabulary acquisition through meaningful, enjoyable learning experiences.

In response to this issue, digital gamified learning tools have gained popularity in recent years. One effective platform is Wordwall, which enables teachers to create interactive games, such as quizzes, word matching exercises, and puzzles, that promote student participation and motivation. (Alfiah et al., 2024). Studies have shown that the use of Wordwall can significantly improve vocabulary learning outcomes, increase engagement, and foster competition among learners. (Almuafa & Alqurashi, 2025; Dwi Prastiwi & Lestari, 2025).

Previous studies also highlight similar findings. For instance, the findings of Sakkir et al (2023) It was found that using the Wordwall digital game significantly enhanced the vocabulary skills of EFL learners and boosted their class participation. Similarly, Alfiah et al (2024) found that WordWall successfully raised secondary students' motivation and involvement in vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, Syarifah & Fediyanto (2025) showed how incorporating Word Wall into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training enhanced students' learning results and helped them retain vocabulary.

These findings confirm that gamified learning platforms can provide meaningful and enjoyable learning environments that enhance

students' vocabulary acquisition. However, Implementation in resource-limited schools still faces challenges such as access to technology and teacher readiness. Recent meta-analyses indicate that vocabulary mastery is closely associated with success in all four language skills in the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language); not only does the quantity of vocabulary matter, but also its depth and the ability to use it effectively.

Nevertheless, many Indonesian junior high school learners still encounter difficulties in acquiring new vocabulary, especially in terms of retention and active usage. This issue is particularly pronounced in schools like Junior High School 15 in Bengkulu City, where traditional methods dominate due to limited resources. For example, a systematic literature review by Dwi Prastiwi & Lestari (2025) found that Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners by increasing motivation, engagement, and retention.

In line with technological advancement and 21st-century learning demands, interactive and gamified learning media are increasingly applied in English vocabulary teaching. Some studies in the Indonesian context show that digital media based on the Wordwall effect actively stimulate student interest and motivation in vocabulary learning. (Ilahiyati et al., 2023; Sakkir et al., 2023). However, there are still issues with implementation in schools with low resources, like teacher preparedness and restricted access to technology.

Despite these promising findings, research focusing on the effectiveness of Wordwall among seventh-grade students in Bengkulu City remains limited. Few researchers have implemented Wordwall effectively in improving students' vocabulary across different

educational levels or regional contexts; most of them have focused on students' motivation or perception, rather than measurable learning outcomes like vocabulary acquisition. (Almuafa & Alqurashi, 2025). Moreover, these studies were primarily conducted outside Indonesia or at various educational levels, including elementary and tertiary education. This disparity emphasizes the necessity of conducting specialized research to address particular issues in junior high schools in Indonesia.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how Wordwall Application affects students' vocabulary mastery (a quasy experiment at State Junior High School Negeri 15, Bengkulu City). By shedding light on how gamified platforms can improve vocabulary learning in Indonesian EFL classrooms, the study's findings should advance both theoretical and practical facets of teaching English.

B. Identification of the Problems

Based on the background of the research, the problems that are identified include:

1. Difficulty remembering, using English vocabulary, and communicating.
2. Dominance of traditional teaching methods and limited resources.

C. Limitations of The Research

This study is restricted to examining the impact of the WordWall program on the vocabulary mastery of the seventh-grade students at Junior High School 15, Bengkulu City, based on the identification of the aforementioned issues. Furthermore, the study focuses on the Match Up feature as the instructional medium used to enhance assessing students' vocabulary mastery.

D. Research Question

The following research question is developed based on the background data and issues found in this study: Does using the Wordwall application significantly affect seventh-grade students' vocabulary mastery at Junior High School 15, Bengkulu City?

E. The Objectives of The Research

Based on the research question, this study aims to determine whether there is a significant difference in vocabulary mastery between seventh-grade students taught using the Wordwall application and those taught without the Wordwall application at Junior High School 15, Bengkulu City.

F. Significance of the Study

It is anticipated that this study will help schools understand the advantages of incorporating technology into instruction and encourage the efficient use of technology to enhance learning activities. The potential significance is as follows: the use of Wordwall in this research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical advantages, especially when teaching English to junior high school students.

1. Theoretical Benefits

The findings will contribute to the existing literature on vocabulary mastery in young learners by demonstrating the role of visual aids, such as Wordwall, in enhancing English vocabulary. This can strengthen theories on second language mastery in educational settings, especially by adding real-world evidence from Indonesian junior high schools. It may also inspire further studies on innovative teaching tools in resource-limited schools. For instance, integrating gamified platforms aligns with contemporary SLA theories, as supported by recent studies like Wang & Tahir (2020), who found that digital gamification improves cognitive engagement in EFL vocabulary learning.

2. Practical Benefits

- a. For Teachers: Educators at State Junior High School 15 and similar schools in Bengkulu City can adopt this method as a low-cost, easy-to-implement strategy to make lessons more interactive and effective, potentially improving overall English curriculum outcomes.
- b. For students: The use of Wordwall learning can improve their English vocabulary skills, boosting confidence and engagement in language classes, which is crucial for junior high learners facing vocabulary challenges.
- c. For schools: In addition to encouraging the efficient use of educational technology to help the teaching and learning process, this study is anticipated to give schools insight into the advantages of incorporating the Wordwall application into vocabulary instruction.

d. Other Researchers: It is anticipated that the results of this study will add to the body of knowledge already available on technology-assisted vocabulary learning and be a helpful resource for future researchers investigating the use of Wordwall or other game-based learning programs in English language instruction.

The overall goal of this study is to provide useful information that will help improve English instruction in Indonesian primary schools.

G. Definition of Key Terms

The variables of this study are specified as follows to prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations:

1. Wordwall: is an educational platform that provides interactive game-based activities designed to support language and vocabulary learning through various multimodal game features. The platform offers multiple interactive game formats, such as matching, crossword puzzles, anagrams, and quizzes, that enable learners to practice and strengthen vocabulary in engaging and dynamic ways (Ilahiyati et al., 2023).
2. Game on education: To increase student motivation and improve academic results, gamification in education refers to the incorporation of game-design aspects into educational environments. This strategy includes features such as sequential layers, challenges, and incentives. thereby cultivating immersive and participatory learning environments that promote cognitive engagement and knowledge assimilation (Santillán et al., 2023; Dichev et al., 2020).
3. Vocabulary mastery: The process of incorporating new words into a learner's mental lexicon, an abstract, implicit, and underlying mental

representation of language, is referred to as vocabulary mastery. Receptive knowledge, or the capacity to comprehend words met through reading or listening, and productive knowledge, or the capacity to actively produce words in speaking or writing, are the two main components of this process. Receptive knowledge represents an early, conscious, and passive stage of learning, while productive knowledge is a more advanced, automatic, and fluent stage of lexical mastery (Aguilar García, 2024).

4. Students of Junior High School are early adolescents undergoing a critical development, and an academically demanding school environment that shapes their motivation, social behavior, and learning outcomes (Eccles & Roeser, 2004).

