

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

English is the leading global language with over 1.5 billion total speakers, driven largely by its status as a second language (Ethnologue, 2025). In the contemporary era, English has cemented its position as the dominant international language, serving as a pivotal bridge connecting communities across the globe. As the fastest growing language in the modern world, English transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries, providing a common medium of communication for both native and non-native speakers (Rao, 2019).

Beyond its utility in social life, English plays an irreplaceable role in the international context as the primary tool that facilitates global collaboration and mutual understanding regardless of one's background (Xhemaili, 2022). However, this global urgency encounters a unique dynamic in Indonesia. Here English is regarded as a foreign language (EFL) rarely used in daily interactions and positioned as the first foreign language after Bahasa Indonesia and local languages, it remains instrumental in the national education system, being taught from elementary school to postsecondary levels (Rahmah & Qamariah, 2023).

Despite its importance, current regulations under Permendikbudristek No. 12 of 2024 stipulate that English remains an elective subject in elementary schools until it becomes compulsory in the 2027/2028 academic year. This transition is crucial in preventing Indonesia from lagging behind globally (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, 2024).

This is particularly important for elementary school children, as learning a foreign language at a young age was more beneficial for

language development because their brains were still highly adaptable and were capable of developing linguistic skills and cognitive abilities (Sekar Pramesty et al, 2022). According to Supriyanti, (2018). English is categorized as a local content subject, meaning that English is an elective subject. Some elementary schools only offer this subject to students in grades three through six (Rahmah & Qamariah, 2023). However, the presence of English in the elementary curriculum and the proven benefits of early language learning (Maili, 2018).

Many students especially in rural areas struggle to understand English not because they lack ability, but because their learning environment did not sufficiently support their motivation to learn (Lamb, 2012). When students were surrounded by peers who are not interested in English, teachers who are unable to create engaging lessons, or families who did not encourage learning, they often lost their enthusiasm for learning (Damayanti & Sadikin, 2023; Nasution et al., 2023). As a result, this lack of motivation made it difficult for them to focus, practice regularly, and fully understand English (Hidayah et al., 2025).

In addressing these infrastructure and motivation challenges, it is important to recognize the fundamental role of vocabulary in English proficiency, especially in a multilingual context such as Indonesia where English is taught as a foreign language (Susanto, 2017). As stated by Adaby (2025), vocabulary was an essential component that influenced all aspects of language skills, both productive and receptive. Without good vocabulary mastery, young learners found it difficult to understand language structures and communicate effectively, especially if English is not their first language. In the Indonesian context, where students often lacked exposure to authentic English environments, teachers must prioritize engaging and contextually relevant vocabulary development activities (Fauzi, 2022).

Children tended to lose interest quickly when exposed to monotonous or overly theoretical learning approaches. Therefore, it is very

important to create a fun and engaging classroom atmosphere that not only reduces boredom but also increases student engagement in the subject matter (Irianto & Timang, 2024). One effective way to achieve this is by integrating games into learning activities. Games could be a fun and innovative tool for introducing new concepts, including English vocabulary, and reinforcing their understanding through more active interaction (Aprilia et al., 2025). In this way, students not only learned, but also felt motivated to continue learning because they feel emotionally and socially involved in the process (Hanifah & Muhid, 2025).

Teaching English to young learners requires highly skilled and dedicated teaching, techniques and strategies were needed in order to make learning more fun and interesting (Fauzi, 2022; Nurnazarovna, 2020). As for the term innovation, it had become an essential part of education in order to engage young students to be active during lessons. This was one of the most innovative teaching approaches in elementary schools. Teachers could use various interactive activities and games through this method in language classes today (Misirova, 2022).

In rural areas such as Sunyalangu, English instruction faces various obstacles. Based on pre-observations at MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu, fourth grade students exhibited low enthusiasm and a lack of vocabulary mastery, often became distracted during lessons. This was largely due to limited facilities and a rural environment with minimal exposure to English (Mariyam et al., 2025). This situation aligns with the findings of Shan & Abdul Aziz, (2022) who stated that rural English teaching is frequently hindered by low motivation and limited resources because students often find the language irrelevant to their daily lives.

Furthermore, Anggela et.al (2024), found that insufficient infrastructure and facilities, such as the absence of language laboratories and stable internet access, were major difficulties in teaching English in rural schools, which directly affected the learning process. Based on the initial data from student pre-test scores indicated a critical gap in their

language fundamentals. The results show that most students do not reach the passing grade of 65, with some scores even reaching 20 with the average of 58.75.

Based on secondary data obtained from the research project titled *Analysis of Strategies and Challenges in English Teaching in Rural Area*, specifically through interviews with the English teacher at MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu, the average student at the school demonstrates low motivation in learning English, especially in rural areas. The teacher mentioned that students often complete their English homework at school due to a lack of parental support at home. In addition, teaching English presents a significant challenge because many students at MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu perceive the language as unimportant.

‘Obviously, this is a big challenge because the students feel that the language is not important. Especially if, for example, there is homework to be done at home. Parents are not supportive and do not have a good command of the language. Of course, motivation is already lacking. Except for some children who ask for extra lessons in English outside of school hours. There are cases like that, where parents are supportive. Those children are motivated to learn. But for those who lack motivation, they think, “Why do I need to learn English” like that’

This research was important because vocabulary is a basic element in English language learning, and good vocabulary mastery would facilitate students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills (Adaby, 2025). In rural areas such as Sunyalangu, where access to English learning resources is limited, innovative learning media such as the use of memory-based games could be an effective solution. Memory-based games, such as memory cards or games that match pictures with words, can increase student motivation because they involve fun and interactive elements. This is supported by research by Aswandi (2020), who found that the use of games in learning can increase students' skill and help them to decrease stress during the learning process.

This study investigated the used of memory-based games in improving both English vocabulary and motivation among young learners

in a rural Indonesian primary school setting (Sukenasa et al, 2020). This approach aimed to bridge the gap in English proficiency by leveraging interactive and enjoyable learning experiences, thereby fostering a more positive attitude towards language learning (Armelia et al, 2021)

The focus on memory-based games was particularly relevant given their potential to enhance cognitive retention and engagement in young learners, especially when traditional methods prove ineffective (Iwan Fauzi, 2022). This intervention sought to demonstrate how strategically implemented game-based learning can significantly impact vocabulary retention and cultivate a more enthusiastic learning environment among students in challenging educational contexts (Chai & Yunus, 2021)

The study was conducted at MI Maarif NU Sunyalangu, a rural school where English exposure is minimal, aiming to provide actionable insights for educators facing similar constraints. Several previous studies have confirmed the efficacy of memory-based games in EFL vocabulary instruction, yet significant gaps persist. Hajar (2017), demonstrated Kim's Game's superiority over translation for SMP seventh-graders' vocabulary mastery, with high-motivation students outperforming others, though no technique-motivation interaction emerged. Similarly, Honboonherm (2023), reported significant vocabulary gains via online memory strategies among Thai secondary students, alongside positive attitudes. Manullang et.al (2018), showed crossword puzzles boosting eighth-grade scores through classroom action research, while Faiz & Holman (2022), found whispering games elevating motivation-linked vocabulary.

However, these studies were mostly conducted at the secondary level, employed single types of games, and neglected the interaction between motivation and game-based learning in elementary school contexts. This study addressed these voids by deploying diverse memory-based games (matching, kim's, crossword) to enhance both vocabulary mastery and motivation among MI Maarif Sunyalangu elementary

students, offering novel, culturally attuned evidence for scalable rural area EFL pedagogy.

By conducting a more localized study, the researcher aimed to uncover nuanced challenges, such as fear, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties. This research sought to contribute a contextualized perspective to the existing body of knowledge, offering insights that can be beneficial for English language educators facing similar challenges in different EFL settings.

To address the identified gap and specific focus on improving vocabulary and motivation of fourth grade students at MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu, Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach was chosen because it is appropriate for the elementary school context, where the researcher (teacher) could directly implement improvement actions and reflected on the results in a cyclical manner. CAR enabled the identification of actual problems and the development of practical solutions, as stated by Kemmis et.al, (2014) that CAR aimed to improve learning practices through a cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Thus, this study was expected to provide practical contributions to teachers in rural areas to improve the quality of English learning, particularly students' vocabulary mastery.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the research backgrounds, the researcher formulates the problem:

- 1.2.1 Can the memory-based games improve the vocabulary mastery at the fourth grade students at MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu?
- 1.2.2 Can the memory-based games improve the students' motivation?

1.3 Purposes of the Research

Based on the problem finding, the primary purposes of this research are:

- 1.3.1 To improve vocabulary mastery 'among the fourth grade students at MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu through memory-based games.

1.3.2 To improve students' motivation through memory-based games at the fourth grade students at MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu

1.4 Significance of the Research

The significance of this research on "Improving Students' Motivation and Vocabulary through Memory-Based Games in MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu" for teachers, students, and researcher are follows:

1.4.1 Teachers

This research is expected to help English teachers, especially in rural elementary schools, develop more creative and interactive teaching methods using games to enhance students' vocabulary mastery and motivation. By demonstrating the efficacy of game-based strategies, the thesis provides practical, adaptable frameworks that teachers can replicate, fostering creativity through gamification while addressing motivational barriers like boredom or low self-efficacy. Ultimately, it promotes inclusive education by empowering educators in resource-limited areas to create engaging, student-centered classrooms that build linguistic skills and lifelong learning habits

1.4.2 Students

The implementation of memory-based games can make the English learning process more enjoyable, thus increasing students' motivation and helping them to remember new words more effectively. By providing evidence-based insights and adaptable examples, this thesis empowers educators to shift from conventional teaching methods to dynamic, student-centered strategies, which ultimately promote equitable access to engaging English language education in underserved areas.

1.4.3 Researcher

This study may serve as a reference or model for conducting similar classroom action research using game-based strategies in improving language learning outcomes. By documenting a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting on game-based interventions, the thesis provides a replicable framework that educators can adapt to their

own contexts, emphasizing repeated improvements based on real-time feedback from students and teachers. For instance, it outlines steps like selecting age-appropriate games, integrating them into lesson plans, assessing outcomes through simple metrics (e.g, vocabulary tests and motivation surveys), and refining approaches to address challenges like varying student engagement levels.

1.5 Scope of the Research

The scope of this research on "Improving Students' Vocabulary and Motivation through Memory-Based Games in MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu" was as follows:

- 1.5.1 This research focused on the implementation of memory-based games as learning media to foster the vocabulary and motivation of 4th - grade students at MI Ma'arif NU Sunyalangu.
- 1.5.2 The investigation was limited to a particular English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, which was explicitly outlined, and did not include a comprehensive worldwide review of all EFL environments, but was instead limited to the selected site.
- 1.5.3 The research included young learners and teachers from the chosen setting, where the participant count and detailed demographic details were established as part of the study's planning process.
- 1.5.4 The investigation took place within a defined period, with data gathering and examination confined to that duration. The lasting impacts of using memory-based games were regarded as outside the study's direct focus.
- 1.5.5 The research primarily concentrated on vocabulary mastery, while also addressing how it interacts with other language competencies (such as listening, reading, and writing) in relation to the study's objectives.
- 1.5.6 The investigation established a well-defined structure for implementing Classroom Action Research, maintaining the study's focus, organization, and applicability to the particular educational problem being explored