

# CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

In recent years, English has become increasingly important as a global language used in education, technology, and international communication. As a result, mastering English is no longer considered an additional skill but a fundamental competence, particularly for young learners who are preparing to face globalization and academic challenges in the future.

English is a global language that serves as a international communication, education, business, and technology. This makes understanding English a crucial ability for individuals in the age of globalization, which requires cross-cultural mobility and contact. English is not simply a communication tool; it is also a strategic means of accessing the world's most up-to-date knowledge and science (Krikpatrick,2021). In line with this, the Council of Europe (2020), through the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), stresses mastery of foreign languages, particularly English, as a critical competency in enabling the success of education and cross-country work.

Many scholars emphasize that vocabulary mastery plays a central role in English language learning because it supports the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students often experience difficulties in understanding texts, expressing ideas, and participating actively in classroom communication.

Nation (2020) highlights that having a good grasp of vocabulary is essential for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to understand texts

and communicate effectively in English. One reason students struggle with vocabulary is because they often use traditional learning methods that focus mainly on memorization, which can make learning less engaging and lead to boredom (Li & Wang, 2023). This issue is further supported by Fitriyani and Sari (2021), that monotone learning media also hinder students' vocabulary acquisition. These factors contribute to less than ideal results in overall English language learning. Advancements in technology and modern language learning theories offer alternative approaches through the use of interactive and enjoyable learning tools. Richards and Reppen (2021) and Tomlinson (2023) stress the value of using visual media and learning methods that put the student at the center of the learning experience to enhance language learning effectiveness. Learning materials that are both interesting and easy to access, such as flashcards, can help students practice and recall vocabulary in a more varied and enjoyable way (Nation & Webb, 2021). Recent studies by Lestari et al. (2002), Rahman and Pratama (2023) show that using flashcards systematically can greatly improve students' vocabulary skills. Flashcards support multi sensory learning, which involves using sight, sound, and physical interaction to help students remember vocabulary more effectively and make the learning process less boring (Schmitt, 2020). This approach is in line with cognitive learning theory, which highlights the importance of repetition and reinforcement in building long-term memory (Baddeley, 2020).

However, in many elementary school contexts, students still face challenges in learning English vocabulary due to limited exposure to interactive learning media and the frequent use of conventional teaching methods that focus

mainly on memorization. These conditions often reduce students' motivation and engagement during English lessons.

Having a good grasp of vocabulary is essential for developing overall English language skills. In English language learning, students need to master four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Brown, 2020). Richards and Renandya (2021) point out that these four skills are connected and support each other. A strong vocabulary helps students understand reading materials and conversations better, and also makes it easier for them to express their thoughts both verbally and in writing. Without enough vocabulary knowledge, it will be hard for students to develop these skills to their full potential. Listening is one of the earliest skills to be developed because students must be able to understand spoken English before they can respond or communicate effectively (Field, 2022). Vocabulary mastery plays a key role in helping students understand the meaning of what they hear. Speaking is a productive skill that requires students to not only know vocabulary but also be able to pronounce and use it in everyday communication. states that consistent speaking practice can improve students' fluency and confidence in using English (Brown, 2020). Reading is a receptive skill that relies heavily on a strong vocabulary so that students can understand texts properly and think about them critically (Nation, 2020). Sari and Wulandari (2024) mention that low vocabulary knowledge is a major challenge for students' reading comprehension in elementary schools. Writing, on the other hand, requires sufficient vocabulary skills so that students can express their ideas clearly and in an organized way. According to Richards and Reppen (2021), the development of writing skills

needs to be supported by exercises that use a variety of contexts and vocabulary. In today's English language learning environment, the development of the four skills should be done together by using innovative learning tools and engaging teaching methods. The use of media like flashcards, audio-visual materials, and interactive learning apps has been shown to improve students' motivation and learning results (Rahman & Pratama, 2023; Tomlinson, 2023).

To address these challenges, teachers are encouraged to use creative and meaningful learning media that can support students' understanding and retention of new vocabulary. One instructional medium that has gained attention in recent years is flashcards, which combine visual images and written words to facilitate vocabulary learning.

To support the mastery of vocabulary and English language skills thoroughly, the selection of appropriate learning media plays an important role. Learning media functions as a tool that can facilitate interaction between teachers and students in the process of delivering material in a more interesting and effective way (Arsyad, 2021). Heinich et al. (2020), learning media is any form and channel used to convey learning messages in order to stimulate students' attention, interest, understanding, and motivation to learn. In the context of English language learning, the use of media is essential to help students understand abstract vocabulary through visualization, audio, and interactive experiences. Some recent studies have shown that primary school students tend to understand and remember English vocabulary more easily when it is presented in visual or audio-visual form compared to conventional lecture methods (Rahman & Pratama, 2023; Yulia & Ramadhani, 2022). This is supported by

Paivio's (2021) dual coding cognitive learning theory, which states that information presented in verbal and visual form simultaneously will be more easily processed and stored in long-term memory. In practice, various learning media can be used to teach vocabulary, such as pictures, videos, songs, educational games, and flashcards. Flashcards in particular have been widely used in vocabulary learning due to their ability to present information in a simple, interesting and easily repeatable manner. According to Nation and Webb (2021), flashcards are very effective in strengthening vocabulary memory through repeated practice and spaced repetition. In addition, learning media that are suitable for the characteristics of early childhood students such as flashcards also enhances student engagement in learning and motivation. Slavin (2020) asserts that elementary school students are at the concrete operational stage, where they learn more easily through real objects and visualization. Flashcards that are attractively designed with striking images and colors are in accordance with the needs of children's cognitive development. Fitriyani and Sari (2021); Lestari et al. (2022) show that the use of flashcards in vocabulary learning significantly improved students' memory, expanded vocabulary, and created a fun learning atmosphere. Thus, the utilization of learning media such as flashcards not only helps vocabulary mastery but also supports the development of other language skills holistically.

In addition, using visual tools like flash cards aligns with cognitive learning theory, which suggests that students find it easier to understand information when it is presented in a clear and visual manner. According to Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2011), simple and focused learning tools, such

as flash cards, can lower the mental effort required to learn, allowing students to grasp information more effectively. Because of this, flash cards are considered a suitable method, especially for teaching vocabulary, which involves quickly remembering and recognizing word meanings. Flash cards are a type of visual tool designed to help students master concepts quickly and in an engaging way. In the context of learning English, particularly when it comes to vocabulary, flash cards are highly effective because they present information in a concise yet meaningful format, combining text with images.

Flashcards enable students to engage in repeated practice, which is essential for memorizing and understanding new vocabulary, as noted by Schmitt (2020). The process of repeating information along with visual imagery makes it easier for the brain to retain information in long-term memory. This is especially important when learning vocabulary, as it requires a strong grasp of both the form and meaning of words. Nunan (2019) also highlights that using learning tools like flashcards can create an enjoyable and stress-free environment, which encourages students to feel more at ease and confident when using new vocabulary in real-life situations. Flashcards are versatile, as they can be used alone or with others in various formats such as games, quizzes, or traditional exercises. Additionally, Suyanto (2019) points out that flashcards are particularly effective for beginner learners and young children because they align with their developmental preferences for images, colors, and simple physical activities. As a result, flashcards not only support students' intellectual development but also contribute to their emotional and physical engagement in language learning. Based on these expert insights, it is clear that flashcards are a straightforward yet highly effective

tool for helping students recognize, understand, and use English vocabulary more effectively and in a more enjoyable way.

Based on preliminary observations during the researcher's teaching internship, students showed greater enthusiasm and participation when flashcards were introduced in vocabulary lessons. Therefore, this study focuses on investigating students' and teachers' responses toward the use of flashcards in teaching English vocabulary at elementary schools in Kupang.

During the researcher teaching internship at public school (known as PPL) conducted in an elementary school, the researcher observed several issues related to English language learning. Many students showed low learning motivation and limited engagement, especially when the teaching process is relied heavily on conventional, teacher-centered methods. Such an approach tended to make the lessons less engaging, resulting in passive participation and slow development of students' vocabulary mastery.

During the time of the internship, the researcher was not only involved (as an observer) but also had the opportunity to teach English directly. In several sessions, the researcher implemented flashcards as a supplementary medium for vocabulary learning. Interestingly, the use of flashcards generated a noticeably positive response from students. They appeared more enthusiastic, active, and curious when interacting with the vocabulary presented. However, the researcher was still uncertain whether this increased enthusiasm truly supported vocabulary improvement or whether it was merely a temporary reaction to the introduction of a new and visually appealing learning tool.

This uncertainty from the preliminary data in the internship encouraged

the researcher to explore the effectiveness of flashcards more deeply, particularly in the context of young learners. To obtain stronger and more comprehensive empirical evidence, the researcher expanded the scope of the study by involving three different elementary schools, namely SD Advent Kupang, SD Fatufeto 1, and SDI Nunbaun Delha. Through examining the use of flashcards across multiple school settings, the researcher aims to gain a clearer understanding of whether flashcards can genuinely enhance students' learning interest and English vocabulary mastery in elementary school contexts.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

1. What are students' responses towards the use of flashcards in learning English vocabulary?
2. What are teachers' responses to the use of flashcards in learning English vocabulary?

## **1.3 Aim(s) of Study**

1. To find out students' responses to the use of flashcards in learning English vocabulary.
2. To find out teachers' responses to the use of flashcards in English vocabulary learning.

## **1.4 Significance of Study**

### **1.4.1 Implication**

The use of flash card media in English language learning has

important effects on how students learn vocabulary. This method not only helps improve students' cognitive learning results but also impacts emotions and physic impacts. Students tend to be more involved, active, and willing to take part in the learning process when using flash cards.

Visual learning in vocabulary acquisition can help students remember and understand the meanings of words better, especially when the words are presented in interesting and repeated situations, as mentioned by Nation (2020).

In real classroom settings, Smith and Miller (2020) suggest that flash cards increase student participation through visual and physical activities, making them suitable for different types of learners. Johnson (2018) also notes that interactive methods like flashcards can boost students' motivation and involvement in learning, particularly in subjects that require memorization, like vocabulary. Therefore, using flash card media implies the need to create English learning experiences that include interactive visual tools. This makes vocabulary learning more effective, enjoyable, and easier to remember for learners of all ages and backgrounds.

#### **1.4.2 Application**

The results of this study can be applied by various parties involved in the educational process, especially in English language learning at school.

1. For Teacher

Flashcards allow teachers to deliver material in a more interesting, interactive and visual way, thus helping students understand and remember vocabulary more easily. In addition, teachers can also develop a variety of

learning activities such as vocabulary games, question and answer, or group activities based on flash cards.

## 2. For Students

Flashcards encourage independent or group learning media. With attractive visualization and simple format, flash cards make it easier for students to recognize, memorize, and use vocabulary in the right context. Flash cards can also increase students' motivation to learn because they are fun and not boring.

## 3. For the School

Schools can support the use of creative learning media such as flash cards as part of innovation in improving the quality of English learning. The school can also facilitate teacher training in making and using flash cards, and encourage the procurement of visual learning media as part of the development of learning tools. Thus, schools can create a more effective and enjoyable learning environment for students.