

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This first chapter presents the introduction of the study, beginning with the background that highlights the importance of speaking fluency in English and the difficulties faced by eighth-grade students of SMP Swasta Swadaya Tarus, such as limited vocabulary, low confidence, and conventional teacher-centered speaking activities, problems that reflect the broader condition of English proficiency in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). Building on these issues, the chapter introduces the Word Wall game as an innovative, game-based medium believed to help students enrich their vocabulary and build confidence in speaking. It then formulates the research questions and objectives, which focus on describing students' perceptions of the Word Wall game, the benefits it offers, and the challenges students encounter in using it for speaking practice. Finally, the chapter outlines the significance of the study, both theoretically, in enriching the literature on game-based learning media in EFL contexts with limited English exposure, and practically, in providing benefits for English teachers, students, SMP Swasta Swadaya Tarus, and future researchers. Overall, this chapter provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the purpose, scope, and importance of using the Word Wall game to enhance students' speaking fluency at SMP Swasta Swadaya Tarus.

1.1. Background

Speaking is one of the most important skills in learning English, as it reflects a learner's ability to communicate ideas directly and confidently.

However, in many junior high schools in Indonesia, speaking remains the most difficult skill for students to master, largely because classroom practice still emphasizes grammar and passive vocabulary memorization rather than active oral production (Sari & Putri, 2023). This condition is closely related to teaching approaches that are still teacher-centered, giving students limited opportunities to practice speaking meaningfully in class (Pratiwi, 2024).

This challenge is even more pronounced in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), where English proficiency remains one of the lowest in the country. Recent Tes Kemampuan Akademik (TKA) results showed that the average English score of NTT students was only 19.71, far below Bahasa Indonesia (47.78) and Mathematics (31.73), prompting the provincial government to issue a Governor Regulation on Community Study Hours to address the province's academic performance. A separate assessment involving 250 students in Sabu Raijua and Sumba Timur regencies similarly found that most students were still at a beginner level in English, capable of recognizing basic vocabulary but struggling to develop it into full sentences or conversation, with only about 0.5% reaching a high-intermediate level. The Governor of NTT himself has acknowledged that weak vocabulary and grammar are the region's core problems in English mastery, alongside limited learning facilities and uneven access to quality instruction across the province.

This problem was also observed by the researcher during teaching practicum (PPL) at SMP Swasta Swadaya Tarus. Based on direct classroom observation, most eighth-grade students showed a limited English vocabulary, which made it difficult for them to construct even simple spoken

sentences. Many students also appeared reluctant and lacked confidence when asked to speak English in front of the class, often staying silent or answering only in Bahasa Indonesia or the local language to avoid making mistakes. In addition, speaking activities in the classroom were still dominated by textbook-based exercises such as reading dialogues aloud, with few interactive or communicative activities that encouraged students to produce spontaneous spoken English. As a result, students' speaking fluency remained low despite having received English instruction for several years a pattern consistent with the low proficiency levels reported across NTT more broadly.

These conditions indicate the need for a more interactive and engaging learning medium that can help students enrich their vocabulary and build confidence in speaking. Word Wall, particularly through the Wordwall.net platform, offers such an alternative through game-based activities like matching tasks, quizzes, and random-card games that allow students to interact with vocabulary in a more enjoyable and low-pressure way. By making vocabulary practice more engaging, Word Wall is expected to encourage students to speak more actively and with greater confidence. Although Word Wall has been used in several schools, including for listening and critical-thinking activities in other schools in Kupang, its use to support speaking practice and particularly students' perceptions of it has not yet been studied at SMP Swasta Swadaya Tarus. Therefore, based on the problems observed during PPL at this school and the broader condition of English proficiency in NTT, this study aims to investigate the perceptions of eighth-

grade students of SMP Swasta Swadaya Tarus toward the use of the Word Wall game in learning speaking.

1.2. Research Question

Based on the background of this study, the following research question was formulated:

1. What are the perceptions of eighth-grade students of SMP Swasta Swadaya Tarus on the use of Word Wall Game in learning vocabulary for speaking?

1.3. Aim of Study

Based on the research question above, the aim of this study is to identify and analyze the perceptions of eighth-grade students of SMP Swasta Swadaya Tarus toward the use of Word Wall Game in learning speaking vocabulary.

1.4. Significance of Study

This study contributes to the field of English language teaching by providing insights into students' perceptions of the use of Word Wall Game in speaking activities. The findings help teachers understand how students respond to game-based learning, particularly in terms of motivation, engagement, and confidence in speaking. Furthermore, this study enriches the body of literature on game-based learning and student-centered approaches in EFL classrooms.

1.5. Implication

The results of this study imply that the Word Wall Game was positively perceived by students as an engaging and interactive learning

strategy. The findings indicate that the use of game-based learning can increase students motivation, participation, and confidence in speaking activities. These findings are consistent with the principles of Game-Based Learning, which emphasize that interactive and enjoyable learning activities can enhance students engagement and motivation in the learning process. Furthermore, the findings support the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which highlight the importance of active participation, interaction, and meaningful communication in language learning. The positive perceptions expressed by the students also align with the view that students perceptions are shaped by their learning experiences, level of engagement, and comfort during classroom activities. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to adopt similar strategies to create a more supportive, interactive, and student-centered learning environment.

1.5.1. Application

The findings of this study suggest that Word Wall activities can be applied in speaking lessons to promote interactive vocabulary use and reduce students speaking anxiety. Teachers can implement this strategy by designing simple and engaging activities, encouraging group interaction, and providing opportunities for students to actively use English. At a broader level, the results support the integration of game-based learning into the English curriculum, promote teacher innovation, and offer a practical and low-cost approach to improving English language teaching.