

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Background*

English is widely recognized as an international language used in many aspects of life, including education, technology, business, and global communication (Crystal, 2003). In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and becomes one of the important subjects at school. Students are expected to master the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Brown, 2004). Among these skills, Speaking is considered one of the most essential because it enables students to express ideas, opinions, and information effectively (Nunan, 2003).

In speaking, one important aspect that students need to master is pronunciation. Pronunciation refers to the ability to produce sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation correctly so that messages can be clearly understood (Gilakjani, 2016). Good pronunciation helps students communicate effectively and increases their confidence in speaking English. On the other hand, poor pronunciation may lead to misunderstanding in communication (Kelly, 2000).

However, learning pronunciation remains a challenge for many Indonesian students. This problem occurs because English pronunciation patterns are significantly different from those of the Indonesian language. English has different sound systems, word stress, and intonation patterns, which often create difficulties for students (Harmer, 2007). As a result, students frequently make

mistakes in pronouncing words, sentences, and dialogues in English (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

Based on preliminary observation conducted at SMA Negeri 12 Kupang, grade XI students still experience difficulties in pronunciation. Some students are unable to place word stress correctly, have difficulty pronouncing sentences with proper intonation, and are not yet able to perform dialogues fluently and clearly. In addition, the lack of pronunciation practice outside the classroom and limited learning media make students less motivated to improve their speaking ability.

To address these challenges, the use of technology in English language learning may provide an effective solution. Nowadays, digital technology offers various language-learning applications that allow students to learn independently and interactively (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). One application that can be utilized is Duolingo. Duolingo is a language-learning application that provides interactive activities, including listening practice, pronunciation exercises, repetition tasks, and immediate feedback on learners' pronunciation performance (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012). This application enables students to practice English flexibly anytime and anywhere through digital devices.

Several previous studies have shown that technology-based learning media can improve students' English achievement, including speaking skills and vocabulary mastery (Stockwell, 2010). However, most studies focus on speaking skills in general or vocabulary development, while studies specifically investigating the improvement of pronunciation through the use of Duolingo particularly in terms of word stress, sentence pronunciation, and dialogue

pronunciation among senior high school students are still limited. Furthermore, there has been limited research conducted in the context of grade XI students at SMA Negeri 12 Kupang.

Based on the problems mentioned above, the researcher is interested in investigating whether the use of the Duolingo application can improve students' pronunciation skills. Therefore, the researcher conducts a study entitled: "Enhancing pronunciation skills through the use of the Duolingo application in grade XI students at SMA Negeri 12 Kupang."

1.2. *Research Problem's*

Based on the background above, the research problem is formulated as follows: Is there a significant difference in the pronunciation skills of grade XI students at SMA Negeri 12 Kupang before and after using the Duolingo application?

1.3. *Aim's of Study*

The aim of this study is to determine whether the use of the Duolingo application significantly improves the pronunciation skills of grade XI students at SMA Negeri 12 Kupang.

1.4. *Significance of Study*

This study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to English language learning, especially in pronunciation instruction.

1.4.1. *Implication*

This study is expected to increase understanding of the effectiveness of digital learning applications in improving students' pronunciation skills. This study can contribute to the development of knowledge in the field of Technology-Assisted Language Learning (TALL) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), particularly regarding the use of the Duolingo application in English pronunciation practice. According to Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008), MALL enables learners to practice language anytime and anywhere, providing greater flexibility and opportunities for continuous learning. Furthermore, Stockwell (2010) states that mobile learning applications encourage learner autonomy by allowing students to engage in self-paced learning.

This study is also supported by Constructivist Learning Theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978), which emphasizes that learning occurs actively through interaction and continuous practice. Through Duolingo, students receive immediate feedback and repetitive pronunciation exercises, which may facilitate the development of pronunciation skills. In addition, Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis suggests that language acquisition is enhanced when learners are exposed to comprehensible input in a low-anxiety environment. Duolingo provides interactive exercises and gamified learning that may reduce learners' anxiety while increasing motivation to practice English pronunciation.

It is hoped that this study can increase understanding of how digital learning applications support students in improving aspects of pronunciation, including

segmental features (individual sounds) and suprasegmental features such as word stress, rhythm, and intonation in words, sentences, and dialogues, as explained by Calce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010).

In addition, this research is expected to serve as a useful reference for future researchers interested in English pronunciation and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). It may also provide additional insights into the integration of digital applications in English language teaching and learning.

1.4.2. Application

Practically, this study is expected to provide benefits for students, teachers, schools, and future researchers.

1. For Students

The use of Duolingo may help students improve their pronunciation skills and increase their confidence in speaking English. This is consistent with Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, which explains that repeated successful learning experiences can strengthen learners' confidence in performing language tasks.

2. For Teacher

This study may provide English teachers with an alternative instructional medium for teaching pronunciation in a more interactive and engaging way. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), integrating technology into language teaching can enhance learner engagement and support communicative language learning.

3. *For Schools*

The findings may support the implementation of technology-based learning in English classrooms. This aligns with the principles of Technology Integration in Education, which emphasize that digital learning tools can improve learning effectiveness and encourage innovation in classroom instruction (Koehler & Mishra, 2009).

4. *For Future Researchers*

This study may serve as a reference for conducting similar research related to pronunciation learning and educational applications. It may also contribute to the growing body of literature on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and technology-enhanced language education.