



CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Review of the Related Teories

1. Definition of Vocabulary

It is evident that vocabulary is among the key elements in language acquisition due to the fact that it provides the learners with an opportunity to communicate effectively. Having enough vocabulary allows the learners to develop skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Vocabulary can be described as the foundation of language learning, as Rahmah et al. (2023: 35) suggest, because all the skills of language learning depend on vocabulary knowledge to ensure successful communication and understanding. Likewise, according to Rosyada and Apoko (2023: 489), vocabulary can be defined as the fundamental requirement for language learning; therefore, the lack of vocabulary knowledge hinders the acquisition of the target language.

Apart from language learning, vocabulary knowledge is vital for communication. Tolaganova and Panabayeya (2022: 221) suggest that good vocabulary helps in interacting in the second language, while bad vocabulary knowledge impedes communication and prevents the learners from communicating their thoughts properly. Rama et al. (2023: 17081) agree with this viewpoint by stating that vocabulary should be learned before developing other language skills because vocabulary is the base for understanding the language.

Conceptually, vocabulary is the set of words that are at the disposal of the language users according to Hatch and Brown (1995: 1). Moreover,



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vocabulary is defined as a lexicon system arranged alphabetically. It differs from other language systems. In light of the above perspectives, it could be concluded that vocabulary entails a set of words that convey meanings and act as the main building block in the use of language. The importance of mastering vocabulary cannot be overlooked since it acts as the basis for language use and development.

2. The Importance of Vocabulary Mastery

Language acquisition and use of vocabulary are some of the key aspects in acquiring language proficiency. This is because vocabulary skills are measured based on an individual's understanding of the meanings of lexical items, as well as proper usage of words in context. This is supported by the statement by Mukhtar et al. (2023: 682), which states that vocabulary skills are among the most complicated parts of language because vocabulary forms the foundation for any language. Insufficient vocabulary mastery may lead to communication problems. Moreover, limited knowledge of words, word structure (morphology), reading and writing skills, grammar, and meaning (semantics) can affect overall language performance, since these components are interdependent.

Milawati et al. (2025: 243) state that vocabulary mastery is a complex process requiring a deep understanding of both meaning and word structure. Nevertheless, the present study focuses only on meaning and usage, as preliminary evidence indicated that students particularly struggled with these



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aspects. The effectiveness of the expression of the ideas of learners is determined mainly by the extent of the knowledge of the vocabulary of the learners. The vocabulary is thus considered the key aspect of language proficiency since the lack of lexical items constrains the learners' ability to express their thoughts effectively. The above view is held by Andriani and Sriwahyuningsih (2019: 170). Based on the theoretical viewpoints discussed above, it could be said that vocabulary proficiency has many advantages for learners which include the following:

- 1) This improves communication skills, enabling students to express ideas clearly and effectively.
 - 2) This improves reading comprehension, when someone has a good vocabulary, they can understand written words well.
 - 3) Listening skills are also improved, while supporting the development of writing skills through more accurate and creative sentence construction.
 - 4) Vocabulary mastery strengthens grammar and linguistic structure, as vocabulary is closely related to morphology, syntax, and semantics.
 - 5) Finally, vocabulary mastery can improve learners' confidence in using language, allowing them to actively participate in various learning and speaking activities.
3. Definition of Difficulty

Based on Longman Dictionary in Irvani (2020: 8), difficulty refers to a problem or something that causes trouble. In the context of learning, students' difficulties are conditions where they face such problems, often reflected in



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their mistakes and errors. In addition, Reskiawan et al. (2020: 35) also explain In the learning process, there will certainly be difficulties and problems to face, and everyone has their own obstacles, such as in communication, grammar, and one of the most common is vocabulary mastery. When there are obstacles in vocabulary mastery, a student will have difficulty in mastering the four skills of English. These problems are more pronounced when it comes to English as a foreign language (EFL). This is because in this situation, the students need to learn vocabulary in a language that is not commonly used on a day-to-day basis. As per Afidah & Machfudi (2022: 3), difficulties in mastering vocabulary skills mean the problems that the students face in mastering lexical competence. These can be seen in many areas such as spelling, word meanings, pronunciation, and usage. These difficulties slow down the process of mastering vocabulary.

4. Indicators of Difficulty Vocabulary Mastery

The errors that learners make while learning may be used as an indicator of the difficulties faced by students while learning English vocabulary. Some of the common difficulties include those related to pronunciation, spelling, and translation of words, which indicate the inadequacy of knowledge of students regarding vocabulary. According to Lynne Cameron as cited in Gushendra (2017: 54-55), word knowledge involves aspects such as pronunciation, spelling, meaning and grammar .The explanation of the aspects:



a. Pronunciation

The differences in the phonology between the English language and the Indonesian language pose a significant problem for learners trying to master proper English pronunciation skills. As Komalasari (2022: 272) puts it, these differences in the phonologies of the languages are among the main reasons why learners have problems with their pronunciation. Therefore, vocabulary words with difficult pronunciations are much harder to learn than easier ones, which makes pronunciation a frequent problem when learning English vocabulary. In English, one example word can be pronounced differently than another, and different sounds can also have different meanings. This is because Indonesian words are pronounced as they are written, whereas English words are not. Therefore, this can also make it difficult for someone who is just learning English.

b. Spelling

Another problem faced by many students in learning vocabulary is correct spelling. As explained by Komalasari (2022: 273), spelling mistakes may occur since the students get confused about the link between the pronunciation of the English words and their spelling, especially when they do not understand the context of the sentence containing those words. The study also found that many students have difficulty with spelling, which ends up interfering with other aspects of English. Therefore, spelling is also an important aspect

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c. Grammar

Grammar related to certain words can be challenging, particularly when it differs from the learner's first language. Students often struggle to recall. This was explained by Afidah (2021: 25).

d. Meaning

Learners tend to experience confusion when two words overlap in meaning. Vocabulary items with more than one meaning can be problematic as well, since students may resist acknowledging a second meaning after mastering the first. Research from Salam and Nurnisa (2021: 49) shows that students have difficulty identifying the meaning and implications of new vocabulary. They explain that unfamiliar words hinder their ability to translate and understand accurately.

B. Review of Related Findings

This study will use several previous studies to compare their results with those of this study. The following are some of the research results that will be analyzed in this study:

The study done by Diah Ayu Komalasari in the Journal of Griya Cendikia in 2022 under the title "An Analysis of Student Difficulties in Mastering Vocabulary in Eight Grade at SMPN 06 Kotabumi in 2021/2022" utilized qualitative research methodology through a case study approach in studying the difficulties faced by students in mastering vocabulary. This study was conducted with eighth grade students, using interviews and observations as data collection



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techniques. This research involved a case study method of data collection where the gathered data were subjected to three levels of qualitative data analysis; data reduction, data display and concluding/verifying. From this analysis, the research found out that the students faced different challenges in vocabulary learning which included wrong pronunciations, inability to differentiate between words having a similar spelling and pronunciation, lack of understanding of grammar and lack of understanding on how to use English language in context. Out of all the problems that the students faced, lack of understanding of sentence context was identified to be the most prominent challenge as it affected their pronunciation, spelling and grammar.

Yet another related research paper titled Students' Difficulties in Vocabulary Mastery authored by Anissa'ul Afidah and Moch. Imam Machfudi and published in the Critical Review of English-Arabic World Journal in 2022 focused on determining the difficulties that the students face when trying to master English vocabulary. In this research, the authors used qualitative methods of data collection employing a phenomenological approach. Data collection involved interviews and documentation with triangulation technique being applied to improve the reliability and validity of the data. The study showed that the participants had problems in the following areas of vocabulary acquisition: translation from English to Indonesian language, understanding of the word meaning, pronunciation, spelling of the word, and memorizing vocabulary. Contributing factors include reluctance to use dictionaries, low interest in learning English, limited opportunities for practice,



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inadequate facilities, and negative peer influences, all of which hinder vocabulary acquisition.

There is another study carried out by Laura Monica Lumbanraja and Nazli Fahada which is featured in the English Language Teaching Prima Journal in 2024 in an article entitled 'Analyzing Students' Difficulties in Mastering Vocabulary at SMP Pangeran Antasari.' In their research, the authors analyzed the problems faced by junior high school students in learning English vocabulary with consideration of the fact that low lexicon knowledge limits learners' capability to communicate well in foreign languages. In order to conduct their study, the researchers utilized a descriptive qualitative approach for collecting data from eighth graders through observation, interviews, and document analysis. As a result, it turned out that the learners have had many problems with remembering vocabulary within proper context since their average level of achievement equaled 57.5% where grades varied from 40 to 71. Besides, there have been discovered several reasons for the mentioned problem which include pronunciation issues because of difference between English and the learners' native language, low level of grammar knowledge owing to disparity between oral and written English, lack of participation in English learning exercises, lack of vocabulary extension attempts, small access to learning sources, and tendency to forget learned words.

In contrast to the current study, the following features of similarity and difference can be noticed in relation to the previous studies. First of all, An Analysis of Student Difficulties in Mastering Vocabulary in Eighth Grade at SMPN 06 Kotabumi in the Academic Year of 2021/2022 is similar to the current one because



they share the common research problem which is related to investigating students' problems with vocabulary mastery. However, while both studies are focused on junior high school students, they have been conducted on different research groups in different educational environments. Secondly, the research titled Students' Difficulties in Vocabulary Mastery shares the similar research issue with the current study but differs from it with respect to the participants of the investigation since it concerns senior high school students instead of the eighth-grade students. Finally, Analyzing Students' Difficulties in Mastering Vocabulary at SMP Pangeran Antasari is the most similar to the current study as it investigates the identical topic and uses eighth-grade students as the participants.

Generally speaking, all three of the earlier research works highlight the problem of students struggling to learn English vocabulary. At the same time, the studies differ from the current one in terms of research tools, methodology, participants, and factors that cause problems in acquiring vocabulary knowledge. Such a difference allows the current study to contribute more empirical evidence concerning the problem of vocabulary mastery challenges. The first study by Komalasari (2022), this research use case study design, using interview and observation, and focused in specific pronunciation errors, confusion with similar spelling words, grammar difficulties, lack of contextual understanding. In contrast, with the second study Afidah and Machfudi (2022), this research use phenomenological design, and focused in specific translation problems, word meaning, and memorization. The third study by Lumbanraja and Fahada (2024),

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this research use vocabulary tests, interview and document analysis, and focused in low average scores (57,5%).

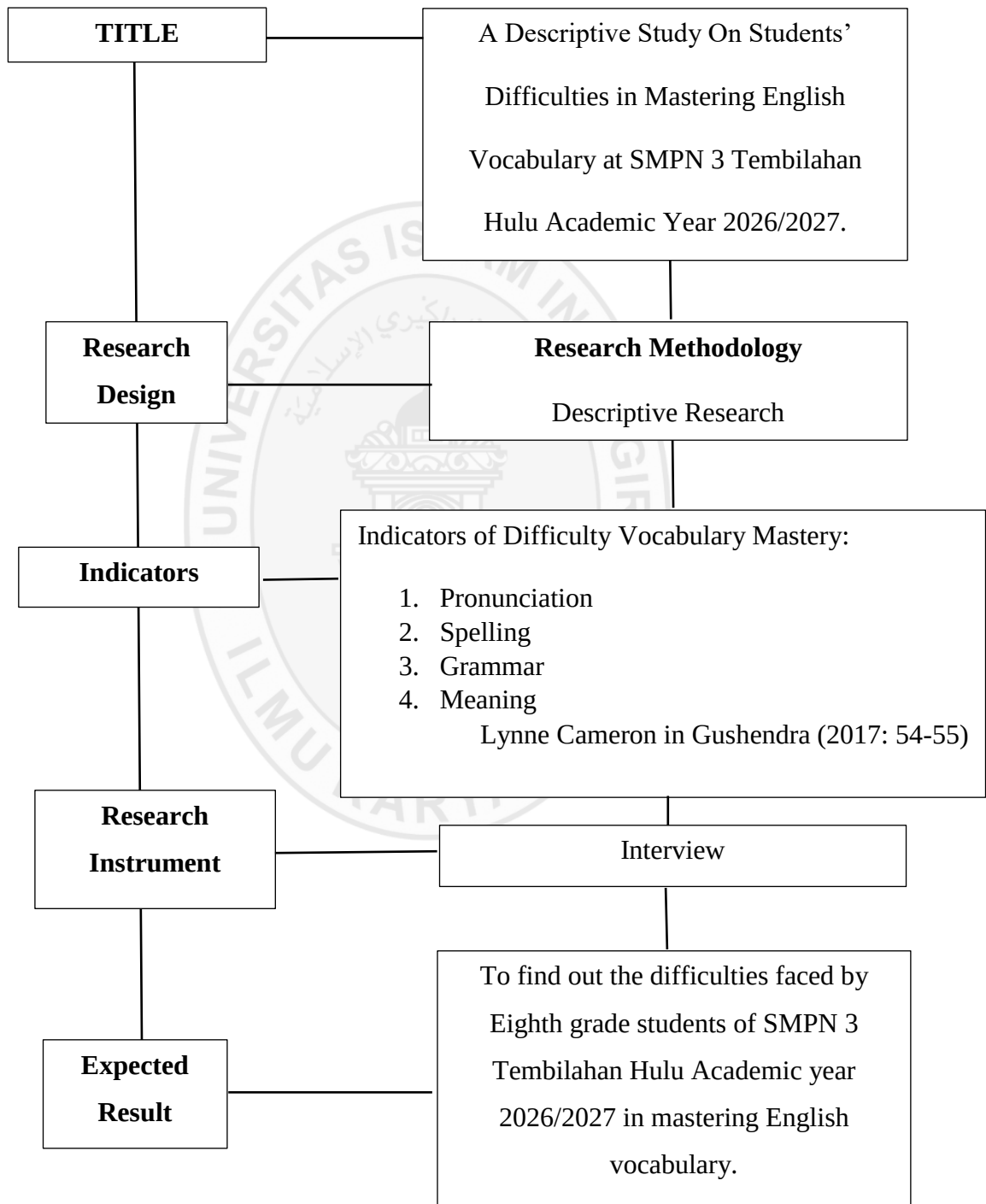
Despite differences in subject and method, the three studies show that vocabulary mastery is a complex aspect and a major obstacle in English language learning. Comparing the results of the three earlier conducted researches, one can observe the common pattern of problems which students face when acquiring vocabulary. In particular, in all researches, there were reported problems with pronunciation, spelling, grammar and proper usage of vocabulary depending on the context. Besides, the researches prove that poor vocabulary knowledge has a negative impact on students' oral and written communication skills. Thus, based on these results, one can clearly see that there is solid evidence proving the fact that vocabulary learning is an important part of English language acquisition.

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C. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research can be seen below:



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The conceptual framework illustrates the process of the study entitled “A Descriptive Study on Students’ Difficulties in Mastering English Vocabulary at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu Academic Year 2026/2027.” This research employs a descriptive research methodology to investigate students' difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. The study focuses on four indicators of vocabulary difficulties, namely pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and meaning, as proposed by Lynne Cameron in Gushendra (2017: 54-55). The data are collected through interviews conducted with eighth-grade students. By using this framework, the researcher expects to obtain a comprehensive description of the students’ difficulties in mastering English vocabulary and to identify the aspects that present the greatest challenges for the students at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu in the academic year 2026/2027.

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