CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background

Vocabulary is crucial in language learning. Miller in Mukoroli (2011, p. 6) states that "Vocabulary is basic of words that is the basic building blocks used in generation and understanding of sentences". This statement indicates that by having sufficient vocabulary, the students will be able to listen, to speak, to read, and to write thoroughly. On the contrary, if there is no sufficient vocabulary, students will not be able to express their ideas or even to communicate with others. In learning English, vocabulary plays an important role. It is one of the language components that supports four skills of English, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This means that vocabulary for English learners is the main language component to learn and master in order to learn a language successfully.

Vocabulary is defined as a specific set of words, including single items and phrases or chunks or several words which convey a particular meaning that a person is familiar with and is able to use in a language. As Hatch and Brown in Nushi and Jenabzadeh (2016, p. 52) defined, "vocabulary is the specific set of words a person is familiar with and can use in a language". Thus, mastering vocabulary, as Liando *et al.* (2019) stated, deals with the knowledge of words and words meaning.

In Indonesia school context, students at Junior High School levels (English Curriculum, 2013) are expected to achieve one of the standard competences that includes the ability to list and describe something like animals, places, persons or things around them. To achieve this standard competence, the students should learn vocabulary first because, without vocabulary, the students will find difficulties achieving those competences. In other words, the students need to have sufficient vocabulary to learn the four language skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing.

In reality, there was a gap between the school curriculum expectations and the fact that was happening in the classroom where the current research was conducted. Based on the researcher's pre-observation at SMP Borneo Bengkayang. The researcher

found that since the beginning of the semester 2 in the academic year 2022/2023, the students had lack of vocabulary and indicated that they also got difficulties in improving their vocabulary particularly nouns and adjectives. They also found difficulties in memorizing new words that are presented in the texts that the teacher delivered. Therefore, the students did not know the meaning of words and how to use them in a text.

In addition, the researcher' pre-observation indicated that the students' lack of vocabulary and difficulties in memorizing new words also affect the process of learning English in the classroom and the classroom atmosphere. The students seemed to have low motivation and interest in joining the learning process because they thought learning English is difficult. This condition, in turn, caused the classroom atmosphere to become not effective for their learning English, particularly in learning vocabulary. This condition motivates the researcher to address this gap and the problem of practice, particularly in helping improve the students' vocabulary mastery by offering a different way of teaching and learning vocabulary.

There are many ways in learning vocabulary. One of the effective ways in learning vocabulary is by using word search puzzles. Word search puzzle is one of the games which can be used in vocabulary learning activity. Word search puzzle is a puzzle that consists of hidden words which aims for students to find the words hidden. According to Vossoughi and Zargar in Maylani *et al.* (2021, p. 218), "Word search puzzle as an instructional game consist of letters arranged in a grid and persuade students to find the listed words in any direction: horizontally, vertically, diagonally, forwards, and backwards". To be concluded, word search puzzle is an instructional puzzle game consists of words placed in any directions which persuade students to find out the words hidden in the puzzle.

Word search puzzle is considered to be an effective way for improving students' vocabulary mastery because the main function of the word search puzzle is to help students build vocabulary so that they can recognize it and improve learning and group activities. The word search puzzle can be used as a way of learning vocabulary for students in junior high schools. ZA *et al.* (2021) has conducted research related to using words search puzzle to improve students' vocabulary entitled, "Improving Students' Vocabulary Through Word Search Puzzle Game". This research found that the

implementation of Word Search Puzzle has been effective in increasing students' motivation and understanding in learning English vocabulary for students at SMP Kartika XIV-1 Banda Aceh. The research showed that the percentage of the students' understanding in learning English vocabulary and students' activity, either in pre-cycle or 1st cycle has increased from 50% to 100% as the students' activity during teaching and learning process.

In the current research, the researcher would like to use word search puzzle games for teaching English vocabulary. This puzzle game requires ingenuity to solving puzzle, so it can make students have more training their brain, and they can have more motivation to learn vocabulary. Therefore, the researcher intends to investigate how word search puzzle game can improve students' vocabulary to the eighth-grade students of SMP Borneo Bengkayang.

In this research, the researcher is interested in conducting classroom action research entitled "Word Search Puzzle Games – Based Vocabulary Learning: An Action Research to Junior High School in Bengkayang".

B. Research Question

Based on the research background above, the researcher formulated the research question as follows, "How can the teacher improve students' vocabulary learning using word search puzzle games to the eight-grade students of SMP Borneo Bengkayang?".

C. Research Purpose

Based on the research question above, the purpose of this research is "To find out how the teacher can improve students' vocabulary learning using word search puzzle games to the eight-grade students of SMP Borneo Bengkayang."

D. Significance of Research

By conducting this research, the researcher hopes that the result of this research is can be very useful and gives goodness contribution to everyone related to English Education. There is some expectation to be achieve from this study:

1. Theoretical Significance

    Theoretically, this research will give more information and knowledge about how to improve students' vocabulary through word search puzzle games.

2. Practically Significance

This researcher hopes that this research will have some benefits in teaching vocabulary for the teacher, students, school, and other researchers.

    a. To Students

        The researcher hopes that it can help students improve their English vocabulary mastery. This way will help students' increase them motivation in learning English, so that students are more active in their learning.

    b. To English Teacher

        The researcher hopes that it can help to avoid monotonous learning, which tends to be teacher centered. Researcher also hopes that after this research, English teacher can add to the teacher's insight in applying appropriate, unconventional, varied, and innovative learning media.

    c. To Other Researcher

        The results of this study can be used as a reference in conducting future research to test the effectiveness of word search puzzle game media in improving English vocabulary mastery.

E. Scope of the Research

1. Research Variable

    In this research, the researcher identified a single variable; the single variable in this research is the improvement of student' vocabulary mastery by using word search puzzle games. Creswell (2012, p. 112) defines that "A variable is a characteristics or attribute of an individual or an organization that the researchers can measure or observe and among individuals or organizations studied". According to Marudhar (2019, p. 865), "Variables are qualities, properties, or characteristics of person, things, or situations that change or vary. Variables are classified based on their nature, action, and effects on the variables".

2. Research Terminologies

    For the seek of clarity, the researcher provides the following explanation on the terms which are used in this research. The terms are below:

a. Vocabulary is an inseparable part of any language learning process. Learning the vocabulary is the basic thing that should be learnt by the English learners in order to be able to communicate well.

b. Word Search Puzzle is a word search media, a type of puzzle where random letters have been provided by marking letters that are usually square and rectangular and can be found horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

c. SMP Borneo Bengkayang is located in Jalan Panglima Libau, Kec. Bengkayang, Kab. Bengkayang, Kalimantan Barat.

F. Action Hypothesis

An action hypothesis is an expected outcome that may occur in the classroom of the school. According to Nayak Jayanta and Singh Priyanka (2015, p. 55), "hypothesis is the composition of some variables which have some specific position or role of the variables i.e. to be verified empirically." Then, Weiss (2012, p. 341) stated that a hypothesis is a statement that something is true. The action hypothesis of this research is "by using word search puzzle game, students' vocabulary learning on the eighth-grade students of SMP Borneo Bengkayang can improve".