

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter, the researcher will provide a background to the study, a statement of the research problem, the objectives of the study, the scope and limitations of the study, and definitions of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

English is one of the subjects that plays an important role in junior high school because it provides students with the foundation for accessing global information, communicating in an international context, and developing 21st-century skills.¹ In English language learning, reading skills, vocabulary mastery, and student participation are fundamental aspects. Reading skills enable students to understand the content of a text, identify main ideas, and interpret the meaning of what they read. Meanwhile, vocabulary serves as the main foundation for all language skills; without adequate vocabulary mastery, students will have difficulty understanding texts, interpreting context, and producing effective communication. In addition, student participation is also an important indicator of their engagement, motivation, and the quality of their interaction with the material and learning environment.²

¹ Budiyo et al., "21st Century English Learning: A Revolution in Skills, Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Visual Communication," *Asian Journal of Applied Education (AJAE)* 3, no. 1 (January 2024): 43–54, <https://doi.org/10.55927/ajae.v3i1.7841>.

² "Reading Comprehension," in *Spotlight on Reading*, 0 ed., by Glynis Hannell (Routledge, 2013), 67–103, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203060735-7>.

This view is consistent with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which asserts that language and cognitive development occur through social interaction. Students develop when they collaborate, discuss, and receive guidance from teachers or more capable peers.³ This means that reading, vocabulary, and student participation will develop more optimally if learning provides space for interaction and language practice.

In the context of language development, according to the Output Hypothesis proposed by Swain (1985, as cited in Sales, 2013), it is emphasized that producing language, such as through speaking or writing, allows learners to see gaps in their knowledge, test cognitive hypotheses, and engage in metalinguistic reflection, thereby improving vocabulary comprehension and overall language development.⁴ Nation (2001) adds that good vocabulary acquisition requires input, output, direct learning, and fluency development, not just memorization. Therefore, learning must provide space for various forms of more meaningful vocabulary exercises.⁵

However, in reality, the learning conditions in the classroom show that these three aspects are still not optimally developed. Learning is still dominated by lecture methods, reading exercises lack variety, and vocabulary mastery is mostly done through memorization, which tends to be boring. In addition, student participation in classroom activities such as answering questions, discussing, or practicing

³ L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole et al. (Harvard University Press, 1980), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4>.

⁴ Antonia De Jesus Sales, "The Output Hypothesis and Its Influence in the Second Language Learning/Teaching: An Interview with Merrill Swain," *Interfaces Brasil/Canadá* 20 (July 2020): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.15210/interfaces.v20i0.18775>.

⁵ I. S. P. Nation, *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, 8. print, The Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006).

reading is still low. The lack of use of interesting digital media also makes students less enthusiastic about learning. This situation shows that the choice of learning approach is not yet fully in line with students' needs. Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2009) emphasize that the right learning model plays an important role in improving student engagement and abilities.⁶ Brown (2001) also adds that effective teacher-student interaction can create a learning environment that is more conducive to language development.⁷

The real problems found in the classroom show that students' reading skills are still low. Students have difficulty understanding the content of texts, are unable to identify main ideas, and often misinterpret words or phrases in the reading material. Their vocabulary is also limited; many students do not know the meaning of common words, which hinders their understanding of the text. In addition, the level of student participation in learning has also declined. Students tend to be passive, less active in answering questions, lack confidence, are afraid of making mistakes and embarrassed when reading aloud in front of the class, and do not engage in discussions. This condition is in line with Ellis' (2008) view, which states that interaction serves as an important source of language input for the development of reading and vocabulary skills. When interaction and participation are low, students' opportunities to acquire language input and practice are also reduced.⁸ As a result,

⁶ Bruce R. Joyce, Marsha Weil, and Emily Calhoun, *Models of Teaching*, 8. ed (Boston: Pearson, 2009).

⁷ H. Douglas Brown, *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*, 2. ed (White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, 2001).

⁸ Rod Ellis, *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*, 2. ed., [9. Nachdr.], Oxford Applied Linguistics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014).

daily test scores are low, understanding of the material is poor, and motivation to learn is unsuitable.

Based on interviews with students (P.A.R, M.F.P.S, M.A.M.P.W, and L.H.A.S), it can be concluded that in learning English, they have difficulty understanding definitions and using specific vocabulary, as well as spelling or reading English words that are difficult to pronounce, making them feel that learning English is very difficult. and according to them, English classes are boring and make them feel sleepy. Meanwhile, interviews with seventh-grade English teachers revealed that only a few students have a good understanding of the subject; most of them find it difficult to understand the material and have limited vocabulary, which makes them tend to be passive. To become more active, they need to study the material more thoroughly. Their reading skills are also lacking; they have difficulty understanding the content of the reading text, identifying the main ideas, and interpreting the meaning of the reading. Regarding student participation, some students stand out, while others are quiet. Some still have playful personalities, while others lack confidence and are afraid of making mistakes. In addition, based on initial observations made by researchers while conducting internships in English classes at MTs Assyafi'iyah Gondang Tulungagung, it was found that student participation in English lessons was low. Many students are passive, rarely answer questions, and are hesitant to speak in English. Factors such as limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and teacher-centered teaching methods contribute to this, so that students prefer to talk with friends rather than pay attention to lessons in class.

These problems are caused by several factors. First, teaching methods do not facilitate active student involvement, resulting in low participation. Second, students find English difficult, which weakens their motivation to learn vocabulary and read texts. Third, the lack of variety in media and the absence of interesting independent learning tools make vocabulary and reading practice unsustainable. Fourth, the absence of an individual progress monitoring system means that students do not receive helpful feedback. All of these factors contribute to low reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery, and student participation.

If this situation is not addressed immediately, students will continue to have difficulty understanding texts, have limited vocabulary, and remain passive in learning. The long-term impact is low English literacy skills, low self-confidence, and unpreparedness to face higher academic demands. In addition, low student participation can make the learning process less interactive and less effective.

To address these issues, a learning approach is needed that can increase students' motivation, engagement, and confidence in learning English. The researcher introduced Duolingo for Schools as an innovative digital learning platform to support English learning in the classroom. By integrating this platform into classroom activities, learning is expected to become more interactive and engaging, helping students make progress, improving reading skills, introducing new vocabulary, boosting motivation, and increasing their participation in English lessons. Duolingo is a digital language learning platform that provides gamified features such as XP points, badges, levels, and instant feedback, making learning

feel more enjoyable and meaningful for students.⁹ Duolingo for Schools allows teachers to create virtual classes, assign lessons, monitor student progress in real-time, and personalize learning, while students continue to enjoy the familiar Duolingo experience.¹⁰ This supports Godwin-Jones' (2011) view that gamification can help increase student motivation and engagement by making learning more enjoyable.¹¹ Research by Vesselinov and Grego (2012) also found that regular use of Duolingo can significantly improve students' English vocabulary and grammar.¹²

The first previous study, and the most closely related to the present research, was conducted by Wijaya, Yufrizal, and Kadaryanto (2016), who investigated the use of Duolingo in teaching English to seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar Lampung. The study revealed that Duolingo significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery and increased their engagement, making it highly relevant because it involved the same grade level and an in-class learning environment.¹³

The second most relevant study is Hadi (2020), whose Classroom Action Research demonstrated that Duolingo's gamified learning approach successfully improved students' vocabulary mastery over two treatment cycles. This study is

⁹ Pilar Munday, "Duolingo . Gamified Learning through Translation," *Journal of Spanish Language Teaching* 4, no. 2 (July 2017): 194–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23247797.2017.1396071>.

¹⁰ Lisa Steiner, "Duolingo (2024)," *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German* 57, no. 2 (September 2024): 307–8, <https://doi.org/10.1111/tger.12287>.

¹¹ Robert Godwin-Jones, "Games in Language Learning: Opportunities and Challenges," *Language Learning & Technology* 18, no. 2 (June 2014): 9–19, <https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/44363>.

¹² Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, and Rhonda Nixon, *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2014), 18–21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4560-67-2>.

¹³ Rizky Kurnia Wijaya, Hery Yufrizal, and Budi Kadaryanto, *Improving Vocabulary Through Duolingo Application In Call At The Seventh Grade Of Smp*, N.D.

strongly aligned with the present research because it used the CAR design and reported improvements in students' participation and learning outcomes.¹⁴

The third study, conducted by Aqla (2022) from UIN SATU Tulungagung, found that using Duolingo made students more active and enthusiastic in learning English. This aligns with the present study's focus on enhancing students' participation and learner engagement.¹⁵

The fourth study by Amin (2022) also supports this claim, reporting that Duolingo's gamification features increased students' motivation and made learning more enjoyable compared to traditional textbook-based instruction.¹⁶

The next relevant study, conducted by Nuroh (2021), explored improving students' vocabulary using Duolingo and reported positive outcomes. Although focused on vocabulary, it is still related to the present research because it highlights students' increased involvement and improvement while using the application.¹⁷

Another supporting study by Aulia, Whjuningsih, and Andayani (2020) titled *The Effect of Duolingo Application on Students' English Vocabulary Mastery* found that Duolingo effectively enhanced vocabulary acquisition and increased student motivation due to its interactive interface.¹⁸ A similar finding was presented by

¹⁴ Y. D. K. K. Hadi, "Using Duolingo Application To Improve Student Vocabulary For First Grade At Ma At-Thoriyah Ngantru Tulungagung" (Uin Satu Tulungagung, 2020).

¹⁵ Linda Saniatul Aqla, "The Implementation Of Duolingo Media For English Learning And Teaching At The First Grade Students Of Mtsn 09 Blitar At Academic Year 2021/2022" (N.D.).

¹⁶ Sausan Nafis Amin, "Gamification Of Duolingo In Rising Student's English Language Learning Motivation," *Jurnal Bahasa Lingua Scientia* 13, No. 2 (November 2021): 191–213, <https://doi.org/10.21274/Ls.2021.13.2.191-213>.

¹⁷ Ahyu Khurin Nuroh, "The Effectiveness Of Using Duolingo Application In Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery At The Seventh Grade Of Mts Subulussalam Sriwangi" (N.D.).

¹⁸ Husnur Rosyidah Aulia, Eka Wahjuningsih, And Rika Andayani, "Effect Of Duolingo Application On Students' English Vocabulary Mastery," *Eltr Journal* 4, No. 2 (July 2020): 131–39, <https://doi.org/10.37147/Eltr.V4i2.71>.

Ramdhani and Subiyantoro (2025), titled *The Effect of the Duolingo App to Improve Vocabulary Mastery Among Gen-Z in an English Course Program*, showing that Gen-Z learners responded positively to Duolingo's game-like learning environment and demonstrated improved vocabulary performance.¹⁹

Lastly, the broader but academically strong study by Jiang et al. (2024) examined *The Effectiveness Of Duolingo English Courses Using Standardized STAMP Assessments*. The study found that Duolingo users who completed the A2 content reached the Intermediate High level in reading and listening proficiency, providing robust evidence that Duolingo is effective in developing key language skills. Although the context is not specific to junior high school classrooms, this study strengthens the theoretical foundation for using Duolingo as a credible and effective learning tool.²⁰

Previous studies also support Duolingo's effectiveness. A study by Wijaya, Yufriзал, and Kadaryanto (2016) showed an increase in vocabulary and engagement among seventh-grade students after using Duolingo.²¹ Classroom action research by Hadi (2020) shows that Duolingo gamification can improve vocabulary mastery and participation.²² Studies by Aqla (2022) and Amin (2022) found that Duolingo

¹⁹ Ilham Ramdhani And Hariyanto Subiyantoro, "The Effect Of The Duolingo App To Improve Vocabulary Mastery Among Gen-Z In An English Course Program," *Journal Of General Education And Humanities* 4, No. 4 (October 2025): 1635–46, <https://doi.org/10.58421/gehu.v4i4.720>.

²⁰ Xiangying Jiang Et Al., "The Effectiveness Of Duolingo English Courses In Developing Reading And Listening Proficiency," *Calico Journal* 41, No. 3 (October 2024): 249–72, <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.26704>.

²¹ Wijaya, Yufriзал, And Kadaryanto, *Improving Vocabulary Through Duolingo Application In Call At The Seventh Grade Of Smp*.

²² Hadi, "Using Duolingo Application To Improve Student Vocabulary For First Grade At Ma At-Thoriyah Ngantru Tulungagung."

makes students more active and motivated.²³ Research by Nuroh (2021), Aulia et al. (2020), and Ramdhani and Subiyantoro (2025) shows an increase in vocabulary and motivation, while research by Jiang et al. (2024) proves Duolingo's effectiveness in improving reading and listening skills through the STAMP international assessment.²⁴

However, most of these studies used the standard version of Duolingo, not Duolingo for Schools, which allows teachers to monitor progress through a teacher dashboard, assign digital tasks, and track XP in a classroom context. In addition, most studies focused only on vocabulary improvement or motivation, without directly examining how the app improves student participation in classroom activities. In terms of research design, most studies use quasi-experiments or descriptive research, while the use of Classroom Action Research (CAR) to observe gradual changes in learning behavior is still rarely used. Furthermore, research related to the use of Duolingo in the context of Madrasah Tsanawiyah, especially in seventh grade, is still very limited.

Based on these gaps, this study was conducted to fill the research gap by integrating Duolingo for Schools into English language learning through the Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach, using the Kemmis and McTaggart model consisting of four stages, namely planning, action, observation, and

²³ Aqla, "The Implementation Of Duolingo Media For English Learning And Teaching At The First Grade Students Of Mtsn 09 Blitar At Academic Year 2021/2022"; Amin, "Gamification Of Duolingo In Rising Student's English Language Learning Motivation."

²⁴ Nuroh, "The Effectiveness Of Using Duolingo Application In Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery At The Seventh Grade Of Mts Subulussalam Sriwangi"; Aulia, Wahjuningsih, And Andayani, "Effect Of Duolingo Application On Students' English Vocabulary Mastery"; Jiang Et Al., "The Effectiveness Of Duolingo English Courses In Developing Reading And Listening Proficiency."

reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).²⁵ This model was chosen because it allows researchers to make continuous improvements to learning in each cycle. Through the implementation of Duolingo for Schools, it is hoped that there will be a significant improvement in students' reading skills, vocabulary mastery, and participation. This study aims to improve the reading skills, vocabulary mastery, and participation of seventh-grade students at MTs Assyafi'iyah Gondang Tulungagung so that learning becomes more effective, interactive, and enjoyable.

B. Problem Identification

Based on the above background, the problems identified are as follows:

1. The reading skills of seventh-grade students are still low.
2. Students' vocabulary is still limited.
3. Student participation in English language learning is low.
4. Learning has not made optimal use of technology.

C. Formulation of the Research Problem

Based on the background of the study, the problems identified in this research can be formulated as follows:

1. How can the implementation of Duolingo for Schools improve the reading skills of seventh-grade students at MTs Assyafi'iyah Gondang Tulungagung?
2. How can the implementation of Duolingo for Schools improve the vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade students at MTs Assyafi'iyah Gondang Tulungagung?

²⁵ Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon, *The Action Research Planner*.

3. How can Duolingo for Schools enhance the Students' Participation during the English learning process at MTs Assyafi'iyah Gondang Tulungagung?

D. The Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this research are formulated in line with the research problems stated above, namely:

1. To determine the improvement in students' reading comprehension through the implementation of Duolingo for Schools.
2. To determine the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery through the implementation of Duolingo for Schools
3. To investigate the increase in students' participation after implementing Duolingo for Schools in English learning.

E. Benefits of Research

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits for the field of English language education, particularly in the context of Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic Junior High School).

1. Theoretical Benefits

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of English language learning studies through the use of gamification-based digital media. The findings of this study reinforce the Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) theory, which states that the use of technology can improve the quality of language learning through interactive exercises and direct feedback. Furthermore, this study supports the theory of gamification in learning by showing that game elements such as points, levels, and rewards can increase

student interest and participation. This study also adds to the empirical study of the use of digital media to increase student participation and enriches the theory of technology-based independent learning. Moreover, this study provides a theoretical basis for further research on the integration of digital media in Classroom Action Research (CAR).

2. Practical benefits

a. For Teacher

This study offers an innovative approach to English teaching by integrating Duolingo for Schools, an interactive digital learning platform. By implementing this application, teachers can create more engaging lessons, monitor student progress in real time, and encourage active participation during classroom activities. The study also serves as a reference for teachers to adopt technology-based learning strategies that enhance students' motivation and learning outcomes.

b. For Students

This research helps students improve their English learning achievement through active participation in technology-supported activities. By using Duolingo for Schools, students can practice vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and reading comprehension in a fun and interactive way. The gamified features of the application, such as XP points, levels, and badges, are expected to increase their motivation, self-confidence, and independence in learning English.

c. For School

The results of this research provide an example of the effective integration of digital learning media that aligns with the goals of modern education in the Madrasah Tsanawiyah environment. It demonstrates how technology can be implemented to support the school's vision of improving students' language proficiency and adapting to 21st-century learning practices.

d. For future Researchers

This study provides both theoretical and empirical foundations for future research on the use of gamification-based applications such as Duolingo for Schools in English language education. It can serve as a reference for further studies exploring how digital learning platforms enhance students' motivation, classroom interaction, and overall learning outcomes in various educational settings.

F. Scope and Limitation

a. Scope of research

This research was conducted at MTs Assyafi'iyah Gondang Tulungagung, focusing on seventh-grade students during the second semester of the academic year. The study specifically aimed to improve Reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery, and students' participation through the use of Duolingo for Schools as a digital learning medium. The research employed the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method following the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which

consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting cycles.²⁶ This method was chosen to improve the learning process through continuous reflection and systematic action. The implementation focused on integrating Duolingo for Schools activities into classroom instruction to encourage active participation and enhance students' engagement in English lessons.

b. Limitation of research

This research had several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study focused on two specific English competencies, namely reading and vocabulary mastery, among seventh-grade students at MTs Assyafi'iyah Gondang Tulungagung. Other language skills, such as listening, speaking, and writing, were not included in the scope of this research. Second, the type of participation measured in this study was limited to individual students' participation, rather than classroom participation as a whole; therefore, the findings represent students' personal involvement rather than collective classroom dynamics. Third, this research relied solely on the use of Duolingo for Schools as the primary instructional medium, so the results cannot be generalized to other digital platforms or learning applications. Finally, the study was conducted through two cycles of Classroom Action Research (CAR), which provided a relatively short time frame for observing changes. Consequently, long-term effects or sustained improvements beyond the two cycles could not be fully assessed.

²⁶ Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon, 18–21.

G. Definition of Key Terms

a. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to students' ability to understand, interpret, and construct meaning from written texts. It includes identifying main ideas, recognizing supporting details, understanding vocabulary in context, and making logical inferences from the text.²⁷

b. Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary mastery refers to students' knowledge, understanding, and ability to use a wide range of English words correctly. It includes word recognition, word meaning, spelling, pronunciation, and the ability to apply vocabulary appropriately in reading and communication.²⁸

c. Students' Participation

Student participation refers to how actively students engage in learning, both mentally and through their actions. This can involve answering questions, participating in discussions, completing assignments, and collaborating with classmates. A high level of participation indicates that students are motivated, engaged, and confident in learning English.²⁹

²⁷ "Reading Comprehension," In *Spotlight On Reading*, 0 Ed., By Glynis Hannell (Routledge, 2013), 67–103, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203060735-7>.

²⁸ Fitdarlin Waruwu Et Al., "Increasing The Student's Vocabulary Mastery Through How Special Am I Game Of The Tenth Grade Smk Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli In 2022/2023," *Academy Of Education Journal* 14, No. 2 (August 2023): 1117–23, <https://doi.org/10.47200/Aoej.V14i2.1985>.

²⁹ Kathleen Czokanski And Zane Wolf, "Encouraging And Evaluating Class Participation," *Journal Of University Teaching And Learning Practice* 10, No. 1 (January 2013), <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.10.1.7>.

d. Duolingo for Schools

Duolingo for Schools is a separate platform from the main Duolingo app, specifically designed for teachers to manage and integrate Duolingo into classroom teaching. This feature enables teachers to create classes, assign lessons, track student progress, and personalize learning, all while students continue to enjoy the same Duolingo learning experience. Duolingo for Schools is a tool that enables educators to integrate Duolingo into their teaching methods. The app incorporates gamification features like XP points, badges, levels, and automatic feedback, making the learning process feel like play.³⁰

³⁰ Steiner, “Duolingo (2024).”