

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

In learning English as a foreign language (EFL), vocabulary acquisition is a crucial component in developing language skills, including reading, writing, and speaking. Munibi's (2022) research shows that mastery of the mother tongue contributes significantly, accounting for approximately 20% of the variation in English reading ability among Sekolah Menengah Pertama students. In line with these findings, Harmoko (2022) reports that English vocabulary contributes significantly to the descriptive writing skills of eighth-grade students at SMPN Bekasi, accounting for approximately 32.6%. In this context, the mother tongue is one of the important factors that can have an impact on English vocabulary acquisition, as a strong understanding of the first language can support the process of learning a second language. This aligns with learning theories that state that good mastery of the mother tongue can help with the process of acquiring a second language (Meyer, 2018).

As for English language learning, KEMENDIKBUD (*Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*) provides flexibility for schools to determine whether to teach English or not, as long as it does not interfere with other subjects (Sirajuddin, 2013). Although English is not officially included in the primary school curriculum until grade IV, many schools continue to teach it as a local subject. Introducing English at this age is intended to provide students with the linguistic abilities required in the era of globalization. Students who learn English

cannot only obtain information from numerous sources but also communicate with people from other nations. As a result, English language instruction is supposed to be delivered progressively and in tandem with Indonesian language instruction, allowing students to develop their language abilities holistically.

Linguistics and education researchers have focused on theories about the correlation of one's mother tongue with learning another. According to Cummins (2000), the mother tongue is a vital basis for second language acquisition. Students with an excellent command of their home tongue find it easier to acquire other languages, particularly foreign ones. This is related to the transfer of linguistic and cognitive abilities from the mother tongue to the second language. For example, comprehending sentence structure, vocabulary, and basic concepts in one's mother tongue can assist students in comprehending other languages they are learning.

Mother tongue is responsible for distinguishing a person's linguistic ability. Both conscious and unconscious methods are used when learning a mother tongue. An essential tool for the development of the physical, intellectual, and moral fields of education is the mother tongue. All other subjects can be effectively understood, communicated, learned, and approached using the mother tongue. Mastery of the mother tongue enhances cognitive clarity and the ability to convey thoughts effectively. If a learner's mother tongue is weak, their thinking and expression will be paralyzed. A more profound understanding, increased awareness, and the ability to generate new knowledge and ideas are contingent upon an individual's comprehension of the subject through their mother tongue (Ahmed, 2014).

In a positive context, positive transfer occurs when structures or vocabulary

in the mother tongue are similar to those in the target language, thus facilitating the learning process. For example, students who speak Chinese may find similarities in sentence structure when learning English, such as similar subject-predicate-object (SPO) patterns (Shi, 2022). This can accelerate their understanding of new grammar and vocabulary. However, negative transfer can also occur, where differences between the two languages lead to errors in grammar usage or pronunciation. Students may feel insecure or experience difficulties when speaking in a second language if they rely too much on the thought patterns of their mother tongue. Furthermore, the social and cultural environment also plays an important role in the correlation of the mother tongue on learning another language. Students who learn in an environment that supports the use of a second language tend to be more successful compared to those in a less supportive environment. For example, students from areas with many native speakers can acquire speaking skills faster because they have the opportunity to practice directly and receive feedback from native speakers (Liando et al., 2023).

Some Indonesian schools, particularly in linguistically varied areas, have adopted a bilingual approach to teaching that includes both mother tongue and Indonesian. According to Hamid and Siti (2019), schools that use the mother tongue as the language of instruction help students understand the subject matter while also strengthening their cultural identity. In this setting, the mother tongue acts as a bridge connecting students to local culture and customs, resulting in a more relevant and meaningful learning environment. Despite the numerous advantages of employing the mother tongue in instruction, problems persist. According to

Suwandi's (2020) research, it found that not all teachers have the necessary skills to teach in their mother tongue, particularly in places with a wide range of languages. This can lead to differences in the quality of education provided to kids. As a result, the government and educational institutions must offer enough training for teachers so that they may properly implement the usage of the mother tongue in the educational process.

Each individual's mother tongue is how that individual engages with social work knowledge. Another correlation of the mother tongue is that it stimulates thinking and learning of successful social models of action and speech. The acquisition of language is essential not only to a person's cognitive development but also to their social development and well-being. The early years are recognized as the foundation years for a person's development. In particular, the first six years are crucial for young children in developing their first language and cultural identity, and it is during these early years that children build up their knowledge of the world around them (Clarke, 2000). Similarities between the mother tongue and English may help with vocabulary recognition, while structural differences might be confusing. This research focused on the impact of communication on children aged 11-13 years due to variations in speech with the same mother tongue backgrounds. The researcher selected students in grade eight at SMPN 9 Kabupaten Tebo as the research subjects. Grade eight was selected because it is the time when students start to learn most of the subjects in English.

To fill the gap between this research and the previous studies, the researcher focused on the students' mother tongue and English vocabulary acquisition in

Sekolah Menengah Pertama. Since this research focused on a specific grade level and institution, its findings may not apply to other EFL students in different grade levels or educational environments.

Based on the background above, the researcher is interested in conducting research entitled “The Correlation between Mother Tongue and English Vocabulary Acquisition of EFL Students Grade 8th at SMPN Tebo”.

1.2 Research Question

English vocabulary acquisition is a critical component of language learning, particularly for grade eight students in the early stages of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Mother tongue, or the language spoken at home, has a significant impact on children's cognitive abilities and linguistic skills, which might hinder their capacity to learn and comprehend English terminology. Understanding this correlation can help educators and policymakers create more successful language learning practices that account for their students' different language origins. For this reason, the researcher formulates a research question, namely:

Is there any correlation between the mother tongue and English vocabulary acquisition of grade eight EFL students?

After formulating the research question that is the main focus of this research, the next step is to formulate a hypothesis as tentative assumptions to be tested through the research process. According to Kountur (2003), the hypothesis is an assumption or a temporary answer to a research problem that requires data to test the truth of the assumption. In general, the hypothesis is stated in the form of an alternative hypothesis (H_a) and a null hypothesis (H_0). The alternative

hypothesis is a statement of what is expected to happen and not what is expected not to happen. In contrast, the null hypothesis is a statement that shows no change. The hypothesis serves as an initial answer to the research question, which is based on theory, previous research results, and logical reasoning. With a hypothesis, the direction of this research becomes more focused because it provides a basis for systematic data collection and analysis. Therefore, the hypothesis in this research is formulated as follows:

1. Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no correlation between Mother Tongue and English Vocabulary Acquisition in grade eight at SMPN 9 Kabupaten Tebo.
2. Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): There is a correlation between Mother Tongue and English Vocabulary Acquisition in grade eight at SMPN 9 Kabupaten Tebo.

1.3 Research Purposes

The primary goal of this research is to investigate the correlation between mother tongue and English vocabulary acquisition among grade eight EFL students at SMPN 9 Kabupaten Tebo. This research specifically seeks to discover whether there is a significant correlation between students' skill in their mother tongue and their capacity to learn English vocabulary. Specifically, this research aims to determine whether there is a significant correlation between students' proficiency in their mother tongue and their ability to acquire English vocabulary. In this research, the researcher sought to shed light on the role of the mother tongue in shaping students' language learning experiences and outcomes. Through a quantitative analysis of data collected from students in grade eight at SMPN 9 Kabupaten Tebo. This research is expected to provide insights into the complex

dynamics of language learning processes and lay the foundation for evidence-based teaching strategies for teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) working with linguistically diverse student populations.

1.4 Limitations of Research

This research specifically limits the analysis to the correlation of Javanese as a mother tongue on English vocabulary acquisition in grade eight Sekolah Menengah Pertama students. The choice of the Javanese language is based on its prevalence as a regional language that is still actively used in daily communication in the research location. By focusing the research on Javanese, this research can identify specific patterns or barriers that arise due to the interference of Javanese structures, phonology, or lexicon in the English learning process. In addition, this restriction allows for a more in-depth analysis than if the research covered multiple mother tongues at once, potentially complicating the generalizability of the findings. The results of this research can serve as a basis for recommendations for English teachers in Javanese-speaking areas to design learning materials or strategies that minimize negative interference. On the other hand, this research opens opportunities for further research by comparing the correlation of other mother tongues (such as Sundanese or Malay) or testing additional variables such as learning motivation and exposure to English media. Therefore, the conclusions that the researcher draws from this research should be interpreted with caution and considered in the context of these limitations.

1.5 Research Significance

Theoretical

Contribution to the field of language acquisition: This research adds to existing understanding concerning the importance of mother tongue in second language acquisition, with a focus on vocabulary. It has the potential to bring fresh insights into established language acquisition theories and models.

Exploration of a specific situation: This research focuses on the context of Indonesian students learning English, which may provide significant insights for other similar scenarios where students have a similar language background.

Potential for future research: The findings of this research can be used to lay the groundwork for future research into the correlation between mother tongue and English vocabulary learning. Other factors influencing vocabulary acquisition, including teaching techniques, learning materials, and individual characteristics, should be investigated in future research.

Practical

Language teaching: The findings in this research can help to build more successful language teaching methods that use students' current knowledge of their mother tongue to help them learn English vocabulary.

Creating appropriate curriculum and materials: Understanding the correlation can help guide the development of curriculum and materials that are targeted to the specific vocabulary acquisition demands of EFL students.

Identifying potential obstacles: This research can assist in identifying potential challenges that students who are learning English while developing their mother

tongue vocabulary may experience. This information can be utilized to create interventions and support systems to address these issues.

Individualized instruction: The findings in this research can help teachers tailor instruction to each students' mother tongue vocabulary level and learning style.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Some of the terms contained in this research title will be defined to avoid confusion and ambiguity in the research. The researcher only defines the important terms, they are:

Correlation

According to Creswell (2012), correlation is a statistical test that determines the tendency or pattern for two (or more) variables or sets of data to change consistently. It signifies that the variance of both variables is the same. In addition, it is used to analyze the possibility of a linear relationship between two continuous variables. It is easy to compute and understand.

Mother Tongue

Mother tongue is the first language a child learns. It is also called primary language, mother tongue, or L1 (first language) (Gass and Selinker, (2008:7). In this research, mother tongue is defined as the language that a person speaks most frequently at home before attending school if they learned two languages at the same time as a child.

Vocabulary Acquisition

In the opinion of Schmitt (2017), vocabulary acquisition is incremental in

many ways. First, not all components of word knowledge are necessarily learned at the same rate. Rather, some elements are learned before others and at varying speeds; however, it is still possible to establish a general pattern because only a few researchers have looked at the concurrent acquisition of many aspects.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

According to Gebhard (2006), EFL can be defined as the research of English by people who live in places in which English is not used as a means of first-language communication. He further indicated that in such a setting, the students have few chances to be exposed to English for communication outside the classroom.