

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the essential components of the study, including the background, research problem, research objectives, significance, scope, and definitions of the key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the process of learning English, learners must develop four essential language skills. English language proficiency is generally built on four core skills: listening (oral reception), speaking (oral production), reading (reading written texts), and writing (written production). These four skills are interrelated. For example, reading skills often support vocabulary development, which in turn influences writing and speaking skills. Modern language teaching literature emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach that develops all four skills in a balanced way for learners to achieve communicative competence.[1]. An integrated approach is also recommended because each skill requires a complementary combination of receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) abilities.

Among these four language skills, reading occupies a very important position because it functions as a basis for acquiring knowledge, expanding vocabulary, and supporting the development of other language skills. Reading is very important when learning a language because they help students do well in school and also enables them to understand texts better, communicate more effectively, and develop other abilities like writing and learning new words. International assessments, including the OECD's PISA reading literacy assessment, have highlighted that reading ability is a fundamental indicator of students' academic readiness and overall literacy competence. [2]. In Indonesia, reading literacy remains a serious challenge, particularly among senior high school students. PISA 2022 Students in Indonesia scored significantly less on average reading tests than Singaporeans (543), with scores of (359), Vietnam

(462), and Malaysia (388), and only marginally lower than Thailand (379), while still ahead of the Philippines (347) and Cambodia (329), placing Indonesia among the region's lower-performing nations. [3]. Furthermore, the 2022 National Assessment revealed that fewer than 50% of Indonesian students met the minimum competency threshold for reading literacy. [3]. This situation reflects that many students have difficulty comprehending reading texts and lack interest in reading independently. This situation indicates that many students still have difficulty comprehending texts and show limited interest in independent reading. Consequently, low reading proficiency has become a significant educational problem that can impact academic achievement and readiness for higher education and global challenges.

At the provincial level, studies and classroom action research conducted in Indonesia also report reading comprehension difficulties among high school students, including in East Java Province. Key factors identified include limited academic vocabulary, ineffective reading habits, inadequate literacy support programs, and insufficient implementation of appropriate reading instructional methods[4], [5]. In addition, evaluations of extracurricular English programs in East Java high schools found that only a small proportion of schools implemented such programs to strengthen students' literacy development [6]. These conditions highlight the need for innovative and technology-based instructional approaches that can improve students' reading engagement and comprehension.

One possible approach to address this problem is Gamified Learning, which refers to the use of game design elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, and feedback in non-game contexts. The goal of Gamified Learning is to increase student motivation, engagement, and learning performance through the integration of meaningful game elements into educational activities[7][8],[9]. The effectiveness of this approach is also supported by a growing body of research exploring the integration of digital technology and gamification-based learning practices in English language learning contexts. Furthermore, broader studies on digital-based and multiliteracies English language learning have highlighted how EFL learners

engage with technology-based and gamification-based learning designs. Saifulloh, Sengsouk, Fatoni, and Irfan demonstrated that gamification-based digital projects, including interactive educational games, can transform students' English language learning experiences through structured, rule-based digital designs[10]. Related work by Saifulloh, Retnaningdyah, Mustopa, and Suhartono[11] further demonstrated that the language used in digital and online texts shapes how readers construct meaning, underscoring the pedagogical value of designing digital reading materials, such as those delivered through Educaplay, with a clear and purposeful language framework. These studies reinforce the relevance of digital platforms that use gamification as a tool capable of increasing engagement and understanding in the EFL classroom.

Previous studies have shown that gamified learning can positively impact EFL learning outcomes. A systematic review found that gamified EFL/ESL instruction in over ten non-English-speaking countries significantly increased students' motivation, engagement, and interest in language learning, while contributing to improved language competence and proficiency. [12]. Similarly, a quasi-experimental study reported that gamified instruction significantly improved EFL learners' reading competence by enhancing competitive awareness and encouraging students to improve their reading performance [13]. Another study conducted at a Thai university revealed that gamified instruction significantly increased students' reading engagement compared with a traditional teacher-centered approach, making reading classes more student-centered and interactive[14].

Despite these positive findings, the effectiveness of Gamified Learning is not absolute. Its impact may vary depending on several factors, including the design of gamified activities, learners' proficiency levels and motivation, the duration of implementation, and the extent to which game elements are meaningfully integrated into instruction [7], [12]. Accordingly, Gamified Learning is viewed not as a guaranteed solution but as a potentially beneficial instructional approach, the effectiveness of which in supporting EFL students'

reading comprehension at the senior high school level in Dawarblandong needs to be examined empirically.

From September 1, 2025, to November 7, 2025, initial observations at SMAN 1 Dawarblandong showed that eleventh-grade students faced several challenges in understanding English reading materials. This school was chosen as the research site for a few key reasons. Classroom observations showed that students had trouble figuring out the main points, finding specific details, understanding words based on how they're used, and making educated guesses about what's implied. Second, interviews with English teachers indicated that more than 40% of eleventh-grade students obtained reading scores below the minimum competency criterion (KKM = 65), suggesting an urgent instructional need.

In addition, the school environment supports the implementation of technology-based learning. Most students possess smartphones and have access to mobile internet, making it feasible to integrate Educaplay as a gamified learning platform within classroom instruction. These findings are consistent with broader national concerns. The results from the OECD PISA 2022 show that Indonesian students' ability to read and understand texts is still lower than the average of OECD countries, meaning that problems related to reading continue to exist over time. Reading is a very important skill when learning the English language, but many students still haven't reached a good level of reading ability.

One of the major difficulties observed is students' limited understanding of grammatical structures used in reading texts. The differences in how sentences are structured in English and Indonesian can make it hard for students to understand the gist of the passage. In addition, limited vocabulary mastery frequently causes students to rely on word-for-word translation, which hinders reading fluency and comprehensive understanding.

Another challenge is students' low interest and motivation in reading English texts. This can be seen in their passive participation during lessons, limited enthusiasm when completing reading tasks, and reluctance to engage with

lengthy or complex texts. Furthermore, some students perceive English, particularly reading comprehension activities, as difficult and uninteresting. Such perceptions contribute to low levels of student engagement and reduce the effectiveness of the learning process.

Some research has focused on the influence of gamification on EFL reading comprehension, yet notable gaps remain when compared to the present study. In terms of platform, prior research has largely relied on tools such as Quizizz [8], [15], Quizlet[16], each offering activity types and gamification features that differ structurally from Educaplay's multi-activity format (e.g., matching pairs, fill-in-the-blanks, unscramble words, and quiz-based games). In terms of research design, several studies employed a single-group pre-experimental design without a control group[15], while others emphasized instructional material development, for instance, a Design-Based Research approach to building a reading e-module rather than measuring the direct effect of an existing platform on comprehension [17]. Some examined reading comprehension primarily through vocabulary gains rather than comprehension itself[16], and others applied gamification as a general instructional framework rather than evaluating a specific platform [18].

In light of the above discussion, gamified learning applications may have a positive effect on reading achievements among students by fostering more interactive, engaging, and learner-oriented teaching practices. Although the above review indicates some promising results, there is still insufficient empirical evidence regarding the application of Educaplay as a gamified learning platform aimed at increasing the level of reading comprehension among students[7]. The majority of the previous studies have been investigating other learning platforms and their effects on learning outcomes, excluding the development of reading comprehension skills. Educaplay has been chosen for this paper because it applies game features to learning, such as quizzes, instant feedback, a point system, and interactive activities, enabling students to be active rather than passive recipients of the information. All of the above features are in line with gamification theory, suggesting that the use of game elements in education increases engagement and

persistence. Additionally, from the standpoint of Self-Determination Theory, Educaplay may promote intrinsic motivation among students by fostering their perceived competence through instant feedback, autonomy through self-paced learning, and fun while learning[19].

1.2 Formulation of the study

Based on the above objectives, this study addresses a research question:

1. Does the use of Educaplay affect reading comprehension in students at senior high school in Dawarblandong?

1.3 The objective of the study

1. To examine the effect of Educaplay as a gamified learning tool on the reading comprehension of high school students in Dawarblandong.

1.4 Scope and Limitation

This study looks at how using Educaplay, which is a game-based learning tool, affects the reading comprehension abilities of students in the eleventh grade. The study focuses on four key parts of reading comprehension: figuring out the main idea, finding specific details, understanding words based on their context, and making educated guesses based on the text. The study included two groups of students who were not disrupted (68 students total). These groups were selected using a specific method called purposive sampling. The study used a design that isn't exactly the same as a true experiment, and it involved a control group that wasn't exactly the same as the other group. This approach might limit how widely the study's results can be applied. Only multiple-choice pre-test and post-test tools were used to measure reading comprehension during the brief intervention. So, the results only apply to the specific situation, people involved, and time frame of this study. They can't be used to say anything about other language skills or broader school settings.

1.5 Significance of the study

1. Theoretical

In theory, this project should advance our understanding of English language teaching (ELT), specifically in the areas of gamified learning platforms. This study may provide empirical evidence for the theories of technology-enhanced language learning and interactive digital pedagogy in EFL environments by analyzing the **effect** of Educaplay **on** students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, by offering contextual data from Indonesian senior high school students, particularly in semi-rural educational settings, the findings may enhance earlier research on gamified learning tools.

2. Practical

Practically, this study is expected to provide meaningful contributions for several stakeholders. For English teachers, the findings may serve as a reference for implementing innovative and interactive teaching strategies using Educaplay to enhance students' reading comprehension. For students, the integration of Educaplay is expected to increase motivation, engagement, and active participation in reading activities. For the school, this research may support the integration of technology-based instruction to support learning outcomes. Lastly, for future researchers, this study may offer a relevant reference and empirical foundation for conducting further research related to gamification and reading comprehension in similar educational contexts.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1. Educaplay

With Educaplay, teachers can use the online learning platform to create educational activities using games, including interactive quizzes, puzzles, matching tasks, crossword puzzles, and interactive exercises. In this study, Educaplay refers to the digital platform used as a learning method in the experimental group to deliver reading materials and exercises through students' mobile devices.

2. Gamified Learning Tool

Gamification learning tools are digital learning media that integrate game elements such as points, challenges, immediate feedback, competitions, and interactive activities into educational environments to create more engaging and enjoyable learning experiences. These features encourage students to actively participate, monitor their learning progress, and maintain their motivation throughout the learning process. In this study, Educaplay was chosen as the gamification learning tool because it provides a variety of interactive activities, including quizzes, matching exercises, and educational games, which are expected to increase student engagement and support the development of their reading comprehension.

3. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the process of constructing meaning by understanding and interpreting information presented in written texts. In the context of this study, it is operationally defined as students' ability to identify the main idea, locate specific information, comprehend vocabulary based on its context, and draw inferences from the text. Students' reading comprehension is assessed based on their performance in the pre-test and post-test.

4. Analytical Exposition Text

An analytical exposition text is a type of text that aims to convince readers of the significance of a particular issue by presenting logical arguments supported by relevant reasons and evidence. It generally consists of three main components: **Thesis**, which introduces the writer's position or viewpoint regarding the issue; **Arguments**, which provide logical reasons and supporting evidence to strengthen the thesis; and **Reiteration**, which reinforces or restates the writer's position at the end of the text.