

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the study

Everyone was often exposed to many sources of information that required quick and accurate comprehension. Therefore, mastery of reading was essential. Within the educational framework, reading proficiency facilitated students' access to information and knowledge, improved their linguistic abilities, and prepared them to face academic and professional challenges. (Rahmawati et al 2024) In addition, reading played a vital role in academic success and contributed to students' character development and critical thinking skills, which equipped them to face future challenges. Reading constituted a fundamental pillar of education and personal development. It functioned as a mechanism for information acquisition and underpinned the enhancement of complementary skills, including writing, speaking, and critical thinking. In formal education, proficient reading were instrumental in determining students' success in comprehending curricular content and expanding their intellectual horizons (Pahamzah & Viona 2021)

Reading served as a fundamental skill essential to the learning process. Through reading, individuals were able to go beyond mere letter and word recognition to develop analytical capabilities and comprehend the meaning embedded within the written content they encountered. Reading was an interactive process between the reader, the text, and the context in which the

text was presented. The reader represented the most crucial element in this process. Meaning was constructed by the reader rather than being inherently present in the text itself. The interpretation derived from textual engagement was shaped by the reader's existing background knowledge. (Aripovna 2020) Piaget advocated this concept, describing learning as a dynamic process whereby individuals constructed understanding and significance through engagement with their surroundings and personal experiences. Prakash Chand (2023) Piaget emphasised that learning was not a passive activity; instead, students actively formed their understanding by combining their experiences with the new experiences they got

Rahmawati et al (2024) stated that Reading provided an understanding of the information that was wanted, so readers were not just looking for information. They could also analyze the text carefully to get information. Reading comprehension represented the process through which individuals extracted information from written material. Readers engaged with texts for diverse objectives, whether for entertainment purposes like enjoying narrative literature or for educational aims such as studying historical texts. Put differently, the reading objective guided readers in selecting appropriate materials.

These skills could be improved through formal education, from primary school to university. The reading learning process had to be well implemented at the primary education level to be effective. This was very important because primary school was the first educational institution that

became the basis for student success in continuing to higher education. (Herlina 2016)

Therefore, students needed reading skills because their academic success depended on their reading ability. If students' reading ability was low, they risked failure in their studies or at least faced difficulties achieving progress. Conversely, students with good reading had a greater chance of success in their education Tussa'diah & Nurfadillah (2018) Nevertheless, a considerable disparity persisted among learners in acquiring proficiency in English reading, despite its significance. Multiple elements contributed to this disparity, including approaches to reading comprehension, which indicated that understanding written texts was not an ability that could be readily acquired through classroom instruction alone. Rather, continuous support from both parents and educators was necessary, coupled with ongoing practice to enhance comprehension skills. As reading materials grew increasingly varied and complex, learners needed to develop new strategies to process these texts effectively. Academic content sources, including textbooks, periodicals, news publications, and scholarly articles, presented distinct comprehension obstacles for students. Aripovna (2020) .

To understand these comprehension challenges more deeply, it was important to examine the teaching methods currently used in English classes in Indonesia and evaluate their effectiveness in supporting students' active engagement with texts. In various educational contexts, reading instruction often relied on PowerPoint as the primary teaching media for delivering

material. Research showed that PowerPoint presentations, when used without interactive elements, tended to encourage passive learning experiences where students observed slides rather than actively interacting with the material (Ledy & Syafradin, 2023) . Research indicated that combining PowerPoint with engaging instructional materials enhanced learner motivation and fostered active involvement in English language acquisition. (Shala & Shatri 2022). These findings highlighted the need for complementary teaching strategies that provided students with practical and manipulable learning resources, such as flashcards, to encourage deeper engagement in reading comprehension activities.

Recognising the limitations of conventional presentation-based teaching , educators were increasingly seeking interactive learning media that could transform passive learning experiences into active engagement with reading material. The disparity in English language proficiency among learners suggested that a more hands-on methodology was required for instruction. Such an approach could be realized through the implementation of appropriate instructional tools in the teaching process to enhance learning engagement via interactive resources. Interactive media designed for students could foster motivation in learning, especially in English learning. Media in learning could serve as a tool for teachers to create a new learning atmosphere, not only relying on traditional learning methods. Interactive media could attract students' attention through visual media, audio, etc. Media in learning was a technology that conveyed messages in any form,

intentionally prepared, aiming to express information clearly during the learning process. In addition, media in learning could also attract students' interest, which would impact their learning outcome . (Salam et al 2022)

The incorporation of instructional tools in English language education served a crucial function in facilitating learners' comprehension of the subject matter. It additionally shaped students' methods of tackling complex or demanding content. Basically, this media made it easier for students to grasp what was being taught and helped teachers in their teaching process by acting as a useful tool.. (Darmayanti 2023)

To address these reading comprehension challenges, flashcards had been explored as a visual teaching medium, generating both support and debate among educators. Proponents argued that flashcards could create an engaging and interactive learning environment, which increased students' active participation in reading activities (Sukesih et al 2024) Research showed that flashcards were effective and reliable in improving reading comprehension among junior high school students. (Mu'ammalatun & Wahyuni, 2024) The use of flashcards as an instructional medium had been shown to increase student motivation and make the learning atmosphere more enjoyable (Rahman et al 2023) . However, critics were concerned about the potential limitations of flashcards in developing comprehensive reading skills. Research showed that isolated strategy practice, such as using flashcards without meaningful context, was not as effective as teaching skills in topically related texts that allowed students to make

Connections. Sawchuk (2024) , Nevertheless, when implemented as part of comprehensive reading instruction with rich contextual support, flashcards could serve as a valuable tool for improving reading (Harisanty et al 2020)

Although research on flashcards showed promising results at various levels of education, existing studies revealed significant gaps that required further investigation. At the elementary school level, Sri Rahayu et al. (2025) investigated flashcards' influence on beginning literacy abilities among first-grade pupils at SDN Wargasetra 1, with 40 participants allocated between experimental and control conditions. Nevertheless, a limitation existed in this research as it concentrated predominantly on foundational reading mechanics the technical components of reading including letter identification, phonetic awareness, and elementary word recognition—rather than textual comprehension. Comprehension of written material required advanced cognitive functions such as grasping central concepts, drawing conclusions, recognizing substantiating information, and construing textual significance. Consequently, while flashcards demonstrated efficacy in developing decoding abilities, the investigation did not explore whether this tool facilitated students' understanding of the content they decoded.

At the middle school level, Putri & Nurhadi (2022) carried out an investigation into flashcard efficacy for enhancing reading comprehension among eighth-grade learners at MTs Ma'arif Klego, with 40 participants distributed across experimental and control conditions. Nevertheless,

several limitations characterized this research. Initially, the investigation centered on eighth-grade pupils who were midway through lower secondary education and possessed well-developed foundational literacy abilities, whereas seventh-grade learners situated in a critical transitional period between elementary and secondary schooling remained unexamined. Additionally, the study failed to specify the textual genre employed, whether narrative, procedural, expository, or descriptive in nature. Notably, descriptive texts, which constituted the emphasis of the Merdeka Curriculum Phase D for seventh-graders, possessed distinctive features requiring learners to comprehend object classification, elaborate characteristic descriptions, and authorial perspective elements that distinguished them from comprehension demands of alternative text types. Furthermore, the investigation took place within MTs (faith-based secondary institutions) in Central Java, thus its applicability to state-run schools across different geographical areas warranted further examination.

At the senior secondary level, Rahman et al (2023) investigated flashcard effectiveness for enhancing reading comprehension among eleventh-grade learners at a senior high school in Pringsewu, Lampung, with particular attention to explanatory texts. Nonetheless, multiple limitations existed within this research. Initially, the investigation exclusively examined explanatory texts materials that elucidate the mechanisms or reasons behind phenomena through causal connections—thereby leaving uncertain whether flashcards proved equally effective across alternative textual

genres, such as descriptive texts, which exhibited distinct organizational patterns and comprehension demands. Additionally, this research targeted eleventh-grade students who already possessed advanced literacy capabilities and cognitive development, whereas flashcard effectiveness for younger learners still progressing through comprehension strategy development remained unexplored. had different structures and comprehension requirements. Second, this study was aimed at eleventh grade students who already had high reading skills and cognitive maturity, while the effectiveness of flashcards for younger students who were still in the process of developing reading comprehension strategies had not been studied.

While these investigations offered significant insights regarding flashcard efficacy across primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education, a methodical examination of their scope uncovered substantial deficiencies in grade-level representation, textual genre precision, and regional setting elements that constituted the focal points of the present research. Analyzing the three investigations revealed that flashcards had been implemented in first-grade elementary education, eighth-grade lower secondary education, and eleventh-grade upper secondary education, yet no investigation had specifically targeted seventh-grade lower secondary students. The seventh-grade phase represented a crucial developmental transition wherein learners progressed from foundational literacy instruction toward more sophisticated intermediate-level textual analysis,

thereby confronting distinctive obstacles in utilizing elementary skills they had acquired while adjusting to more intricate written materials.

In addition, some studies had focused more on early reading in grade 1, general reading comprehension without specifying text types in grade 8, and explanatory texts in grade 11, while none had examined the effectiveness of flashcards for descriptive text comprehension. This gap was particularly important because descriptive texts were a key element in the Merdeka Curriculum Phase D for seventh graders, which required students to identify and understand detailed characteristics, recognize organizational patterns (identification, description, and commentary), and process visual and sensory information. Furthermore, existing research had been conducted mainly in Java and Sumatra, so its effectiveness in other areas such as the Kepulauan Riau, particularly in Tanjungpinang, still required empirical investigation. Finally, initial observations at SMPN 16 Tanjungpinang showed that teachers rarely used flashcards in actual reading comprehension learning practices, relying instead on PowerPoint presentation, which created a gap between research evidence showing the effectiveness of flashcards and practical application in the classroom.

This investigation addressed these deficiencies by examining flashcard effects on descriptive text comprehension abilities among seventh-grade learners at SMPN 16 Tanjungpinang. Through concentrating on a particular grade level (seventh-grade lower secondary), a defined textual genre (descriptive text), and a localized setting in Tanjungpinang, this research

contributed empirical findings to guide pedagogical approaches in comparable educational environments, while broadening current understanding regarding flashcard effects on reading comprehension within English language instruction. These identified deficiencies established the foundation for exploring flashcard effects specifically on seventh-grade students' descriptive text understanding in the Tanjungpinang context, through resolving theoretical discussions and empirical constraints present in prior scholarship.

### **1.2 identification of the problem**

Based on the background above, the researcher found several problems, especially reading skills in students, such as:

1. Seventh-grade learners at SMPN 16 Tanjungpinang encountered challenges in comprehending English written materials.
2. Reading lessons frequently depended on PowerPoint as instructional tools, which had a tendency to foster passive learning engagement.
3. Disagreement existed among teaching professionals regarding flashcard utilization effectiveness: supporters contended that flashcards facilitated an interactive educational atmosphere, whereas skeptics raised concerns about possible constraints in cultivating comprehensive reading abilities.

### **1.3 Limitation problem**

This investigation concentrated on the effect of using flashcards on the reading comprehension of seventh-grade learners at SMPN 16 Tanjungpinang, drawing comparisons between flashcard utilization and PowerPoint implementation.

### **1.4 Research Question**

Drawing from the previously outlined background, the research question was constructed as follows: Did the use of flashcards have an effect on the reading comprehension of seventh-grade students at SMPN 16 Tanjungpinang?

### **1.5 Purpose of the research**

This investigation sought to identify the effect of flashcard media on reading comprehension as instructional resources. For educators, the findings of this investigation could serve as guidance in implementing flashcards as pedagogical instruments for interactive student reading comprehension development.

### **1.6 Significance of the research**

#### **1.6.1 Theoretical Significance**

This study aimed to confirm and validate existing theories in English Language Teaching (ELT) regarding the effectiveness of flashcards as a learning media in teaching reading comprehension. By analyzing the effect of flashcards on seventh graders' comprehension of descriptive texts, this study provided empirical evidence that supported or

challenged current theoretical understanding of visual learning media in the context of ELT.

### **1.6.2 Practical Significance**

#### 1. Teachers

This research was helpful for teachers, especially English teachers. They could find out the effect of flashcards and apply this media as a support in learning to make it more interactive in the classroom.

#### 2. Students

The research was helpful for students to get an enjoyable learning experience with the effect of flashcards as a learning media in reading comprehension.

#### 3. Other researchers

This study could be used by researchers who examined similar topics for additional information.

### **1.7 Definition of Key Terms**

#### 1. Flashcards

Flashcards were learning media in the form of cards containing simple images, text, or symbols that were easy to carry and flexible.

## 2. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension was the ability to understand, interpret, and extract meaning from written text, including identifying main ideas, supporting details, and drawing conclusions.

## 3. PowerPoint presentation

A PowerPoint presentation was a slide-based visual aid used as the primary media for delivering reading material in the classroom.

