

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

For students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the ability to comprehend English texts is an essential skill, particularly for those in the English Education Study Program. Students are required to understand various academic sources written in English, and vocabulary constitutes a crucial component in this process. Sidek and Rahim (2015) stated that there was a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, while Mehmood et al. (2025) explained that vocabulary serves as the foundation for the development of language skills. Without sufficient vocabulary mastery, students may encounter difficulties in comprehending texts and expressing their ideas. Therefore, vocabulary is a key component in supporting reading comprehension and overall academic success.

However, many students still experience difficulties in understanding English texts in real life, especially when they come across tough words. According to Afidah and Machfudi (2022) students often have trouble translating words, knowing their meanings, saying them correctly, spelling them, and remembering them. Additionally, Jidah and Tarigan (2025) found that many university students learning English as a foreign language experience difficulties with academic vocabulary, particularly in terms of word formation, pronunciation, and range of vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, not knowing enough vocabulary can make it hard for students to understand academic texts (Zeng et al., 2025).

These issues show that vocabulary is still a big hurdle for students when trying to understand English texts.

With technology growing quickly, different online tools are now used in learning languages, and one important tool is Machine Translation (MT). Machine Translation enables users to translate text into another language instantly, which is beneficial for students. According to Kamaluddin et al. (2024) found that DeepL was very accurate because it uses smart neural network technology. Likewise Asrul et al. (2025) found that DeepL does a better job than other translation apps when it comes to being smooth and fitting the context. Furthermore, Taufiqurrohman and Sofiana (2025) said that DeepL helps students learn new words. Therefore, DeepL can be considered an effective tool for supporting vocabulary learning. However, despite its advantages, the use of DeepL should be critically examined in the context of independent language learning.

Even though DeepL has its benefits, using it for learning languages can also come with some difficulties. It is quick and easy to use, but if people depend on it too much, it can be a problem. Sidiq (2024) found that some students rely on instant translation without checking if they are right which may negatively affect their critical thinking skills. This situation might also stop students from learning to understand language on their own and developing independent vocabulary learning skills

Although previous studies have discussed the use of DeepL in language learning, most of them focus on its effectiveness, accuracy, and translation quality. Several studies show that DeepL can support vocabulary learning and

improve translation results (Asrul et al., 2025; Kamaluddin et al., 2024; Taufiqurrohman and Sofiana, 2025).

However, there is still limited research on how students perceive and experience the use of DeepL in understanding difficult vocabulary in real learning contexts. In particular, studies focusing on students' perceptions in a qualitative context, especially among English Language Education students at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, remain limited. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap by exploring students' perceptions of using DeepL in vocabulary learning.

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of the use of DeepL in helping them understand difficult vocabulary. Additionally, this study aimed to explore how students use DeepL in their learning activities and how this supports their comprehension of English reading materials. Furthermore, the findings of this study were expected to provide insights into the effectiveness of DeepL as a vocabulary learning tool, particularly for students in the English Language Education Program at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji.

1.2 Identification of The Problem

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

1. Students still face difficulties in understanding English texts, especially when they find unfamiliar or difficult vocabulary, which makes it hard for them to understand the whole text.
2. Limited vocabulary does not only affect students' ability to understand texts, but also affects their confidence and participation in using English,

especially in academic situations.

3. The use of DeepL helps students translate and understand texts more easily and quickly. However, using it too often may make students depend on it and reduce their ability to think critically when learning English.
4. In addition, although some studies have discussed the use of DeepL in language learning, there are still limited studies that focus on students' perceptions of using DeepL to understand difficult vocabulary, especially among English Education students at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

This study was limited to exploring students' perceptions of using DeepL to help them understand difficult vocabulary among students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji. The focus of this research was to explore how students perceive the use of DeepL as a tool to assist them in understanding unfamiliar or difficult words in English texts. This study focused solely on students' perceptions and the use of DeepL in vocabulary learning and does not include other language skills such as speaking, writing, listening, or grammar, as well as other factors that may influence students' learning outcomes.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study and the identified problems, this research seeks to answer the following question: How do students perceive the use of DeepL to help them understand difficult vocabulary among students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji?

1.5 Research Objectives

The objective of this research was to investigate students' perceptions of using DeepL to help them understand difficult vocabulary among students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji.

1.6 Significance of the study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to contribute to the development of English language learning, especially in the area of vocabulary acquisition and the use of technology in language learning. By exploring students' perceptions of using DeepL to understand difficult vocabulary, this study provides a deeper understanding of how machine translation tools can support students in comprehending English texts. The findings of this study are also expected to enrich existing theories related to vocabulary learning and the integration of digital tools in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

2. Practical Significance

a. Students

This study can help students understand how to use DeepL more effectively as a learning tool to support their understanding of difficult vocabulary. It may also encourage students to use technology wisely without becoming overly dependent on it.

b. English Lecturers

This study provides information for lecturers about students' perceptions of using DeepL in vocabulary learning. It can help lecturers guide students in using digital translation tools appropriately and effectively in the learning process.

c. Institution

This study can provide useful information for the institution, especially the English Education Study Program, regarding the use of technology in supporting students' learning. The findings may be considered in improving learning strategies that involve digital tools.

d. Future Researchers

This study can serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in exploring the use of technology, especially DeepL, in language learning. It may also support further research on students' perceptions and vocabulary learning in different contexts.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1. Perceptions

Perception refers to the way a person understands, interprets, and reacts to a particular experience, situation, or phenomenon. Perception is shaped by an individual's experiences, thoughts, and the way they interpret what they experience or observe.

2. DeepL

DeepL is a machine translation tool that uses advanced technology to

translate words, phrases, and texts from one language to another. In this study, DeepL is used as a learning tool to assist students in understanding unfamiliar or difficult vocabulary in English texts.

3. Difficult Vocabulary

Difficult vocabulary refers to words that are unfamiliar, complex, or hard for students to understand. In this study, difficult vocabulary includes words that students find challenging when reading English texts.

