

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

As an international language spoken as a first or second language in many nations, English plays a significant role in the modern world. Hananuraga (2022) states that learning English significantly contributes to access to international academic literature. In Indonesia, English has become a compulsory subject in schools, so the development of teaching materials needs to adapt to the characteristics of students. Tomlinson (2011) emphasizes that good material must be engaging, relevant, and support active learning. However, many learners still experience difficulties because they have not found the proper learning method. Some people choose to read, watch, listen, or speak directly, but not everyone feels comfortable with these approaches. Therefore, enjoyable and easy-to-understand learning media are needed to make the English learning process more effective. Every English learner often faces difficulties in understanding reading materials, mainly due to limited vocabulary and challenges in translating from Indonesian to English. This is commonly experienced by learners at the A1 to A2 levels, who struggle to recall new vocabulary while reading uninteresting books and face a lack of engagement. Word definitions, or a lack of audio, often cause readers to become bored quickly. Nanda and Azmy (2020) found that poor reading comprehension among Indonesian EFL learners is often influenced by low motivation, limited prior knowledge, and insufficient vocabulary. This situation is closely related to the difficulties faced by A1–A2 learners, who often find it hard to stay engaged with reading materials, leading to decreased reading interest and slower vocabulary acquisition. However, in reality, many learning materials have not been able to address these needs fully.

Learning vocabulary in a second language (L2) is a challenge that requires active participation from students, teachers, and curriculum developers (Schmitt, 2008). Many English learners struggle to understand, remember, and use vocabulary in everyday conversations, which can lead to misunderstandings. Among the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—

reading is often given less attention by learners. However, engaging in various reading materials such as short stories, novels, comics, or magazines can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition, especially when accompanied by appealing visual elements. Merç (2013) discovered that learners who read texts supported by comic strips demonstrated better comprehension compared to those who read text-only materials. This finding aligns with the Dual Coding Theory, which explains that information presented both visually and verbally is processed and retained more effectively. Learning English can be achieved through various types of books, as long as the story's content is easy to understand. However, A2 level learners often face difficulties when continuing it, especially when they encounter words or sentences that are difficult to translate. That makes the learning process feel uninteresting. Many learners do not understand the content of the story due to the use of complex language, which reduces their interest in learning through English short story books.

The first skill in learning English is reading or listening, as it can train memory and help understand the meaning of vocabulary, one of which is through short story books. This is supported by Nazara (2019), who found that short stories are highly effective in English language teaching because they provide authentic materials, enrich cultural understanding, and significantly facilitate students' vocabulary development. However, many short stories in circulation still do not include vocabulary explanations on the story pages, making it difficult for readers to understand the meanings of the words. Additionally, limitations in remembering vocabulary and the book's appearance, which consists only of text without character illustrations, make the book less appealing. Short stories are considered adequate as teaching materials in English language learning. A good short story book should have a simple plot, vocabulary appropriate for the basic level, and supporting visuals. For A2-level learners, using basic words and sentence structures is crucial to making the learning process feel manageable. Therefore, reading short story books with themes closely related to real life, such as adventure, professions, or motivation, becomes an attractive alternative for building learning habits. With the support of attractive character visuals, learning becomes more enjoyable and

effective in adding new vocabulary. This is in accordance with the findings of Azisah, Sanjani, and Asnidar (2017), which show that the use of short stories significantly improves students' vocabulary acquisition, highlighting how well-chosen literary materials can serve as effective learning media.

Text-based vocabulary learning methods are often ineffective for A2 learners who are still in the early stages of language proficiency. The learners need visual aids to understand meaning in context. Research also supports this approach for instance, Chung (2023) found that using visual aids like images, videos, flashcards, and infographics significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, retention, and engagement—especially among learners with lower proficiency levels. Additionally, a study by Nguyen and Pham (2024) with beginner-level learners in Vietnam confirmed that visual aids greatly improve vocabulary acquisition compared to traditional methods. These findings underscore how character visuals and multimedia support can transform vocabulary learning into a more meaningful, memorable, and effective experience. Character illustrations in stories can be a solution, as they help students connect new vocabulary with visual memories, such as facial expressions, physical traits, or emotional situations of the characters. Paivio (1990) dual coding theory supports this approach, explaining that information is more easily understood when presented both verbally and visually. A similar explanation is provided by Mayer (2005) through his multimedia learning theory, which states that combining images and text can enhance understanding, especially for beginner learners.

The creation of an anthology of short stories in English at the A2 level with a professional theme aims to create an engaging, interactive, and beneficial learning media for beginners in learning English. This book is designed to help learners expand their vocabulary through stories relevant to daily life, supported by visual illustrations of characters, a simple grammar style, and audio narration accessible via barcode. With this approach, learners not only read the text but also gain listening experience and enjoy visual elements that bring the stories to life. This book presents stories with basic vocabulary that is easy to understand, accompanied by vocabulary tables and motivational sentences at the end of each story. The

audiobook provided via barcode helps develop listening skills and reinforces understanding of sentence structure. The visual characters are designed as an additional attraction to help learners better understand the story context and prevent boredom while reading. This product serves not only as reading material but also as an educational medium that combines text, images, and audio to support comprehensive vocabulary understanding. With this multimodal approach, the anthology is designed. To facilitate learners' knowledge, retention, and application of new vocabulary in context.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Based on the background described above, the research questions in this study are as follows:

- a) How to develop a short story anthology using vocabulary that is easy for A2 level learners to understand.
- b) How do the visual characters in the anthology of short stories make the book appealing to learners?
- c) Why can an anthology of short stories themed around professions be used as a media for learning English at the A2 level?

1.3. Objective of the Study

As stated in the research question, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- a) To provide interesting stories, use vocabulary and a simply sentences that can enhance reading comprehension.
- b) To share attractive visual images of each character, which makes the book visually appealing when reading the short story anthology.
- c) To present the content of the short story anthology book, which focuses on engaging and creative professions found in everyday life.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The benefits of this research are as follows:

- a) Theoretical – Supports English language learning research by integrating short stories with visual character illustrations (Paivio, 1990) to enhance vocabulary retention. It provides an understanding of simple words or sentences to increase vocabulary and make learning easier.
- b) Practical – Offers engaging A2-level materials by combining text and visuals, adding visual characters and story elements to keep the book interesting.
- c) Pedagogical – Serves as adaptable resources for independent learning, presenting light, engaging plots with good vocabulary and sentences for easy reading and comprehension.

1.5. Output

The results used in this study are a short story anthology entitled "Kaleidoscope of Careers". This book contains 10 different professional stories with a total of 85 pages, each illustrated with two visual character illustrations, accompanied by colour markers for the present and past tenses, a table of contents, coloured vocabulary in the stories, vocabulary tables, e-books and audiobooks that can be accessed via QR codes available on Google Drive. This book is designed as an English learning media for A2 level.