CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, purposes of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, clarification of key terms, thesis organization and concluding remarks.

1.1. Background of the Study

Vocabulary is crucial for language mastery. Vocabulary plays a vital role in expressing thoughts and aiding in comprehending written and spoken utterances. Understanding its significance in language acquisition is critical to academic success in learning a language. According to Nation and Webb (2011), improving all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) requires vocabulary. Moreover, according to Nunan (2006), establishing a significant vocabulary is essential for successful second language fluency. Without extensive vocabulary, the students will not be able to apply the structures and functions they may have learned for effective communication.

Schmitt (2008) argued that vocabulary is important since it is a key indicator of language proficiency. Studying any foreign language could be hindered by a lack of vocabulary, similar to how learning a second language is significantly affected by vocabulary knowledge. Without an adequate vocabulary, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners may not achieve certain proficiency levels (Macis & Schmitt, 2017). It can be inferred that without sufficient vocabulary, language learners cannot achieve language competency and will encounter great difficulty understanding the language for education and communication purposes.

Furthermore, examining the manner in which teachers introduce and familiarize students with vocabulary is an intriguing issue. Although the students' endeavor in learning determines whether they are successful in acquiring new vocabulary, the teacher should contribute significantly to helping the students by incorporating vocabulary teaching in the lesson (Hyso & Tabaku, 2011). Several

decades ago, there was a shift in the delivery of vocabulary through texts and tasks, abandoning the traditional approach of teaching words in isolation. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate vocabulary into the lesson using a genre-based approach that is more contextual and communicative. Unfortunately, in the implementation, when English is taught in school, the vocabulary teaching tends to be neglected. While it's recommended to continue developing vocabulary through reading texts and tasks, most teachers tend to prioritize grammar principles over vocabulary, even though teaching grammar should also be delivered implicitly through contexts.

That premise is reflected in Ivone's (2005) experience, she faced particular challenges in learning and teaching English in school in which English was merely a collection of grammar rules and a pile of vocabulary items to memorize. She recalled that language study only relied on textbooks emphasizing abundant grammar rules and words. She could only keep the new words for a short time when they were in translation mode. Later, when she became a teacher, she discovered that most of her students struggled to understand the meaning of many words in their reading books. Her students could not complete the translation tasks assigned to them and hence could not answer the reading comprehension questions.

The researcher herself had experienced a similar situation. As a private English teacher, she encountered numerous students who struggled with their assignments. When her students practiced answering the English National Examination set, some of them indicated that they were unable to understand the meaning of the questions. They were busy translating the words one by one before grasping the intention of the questions, meaning that they could only answer the question after translating it to Indonesian. When the researcher's students must interpret each word to understand the passage's content, further issues arise, it made their work much more complicated, and in most cases, it became a burden.

The above examples might not represent the situation in all EFL classrooms in the Indonesian context. However, numerous studies indicated that students could not employ grammatical rules in everyday practice if they do not have sufficient vocabulary (Yokubjonova, 2020). Many foreign language learners struggle to comprehend texts, passages and documents due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge and strategies for learning vocabulary. This case occurs at every stage of language

acquisition (Hyso & Tabaku, 2011). It implies that students should acquire new and necessary words before mastering grammar rules.

It is acknowledged that vocabulary is one of the crucial aspects of learning a foreign language. Even though vocabulary tended to be a neglected topic to be studied, it had been researched for more than half a century in the 1960s (Ivone, 2005; Khan et al., 2018). In 1980, research concerning vocabulary instruction had grown substantially. During this time, numerous specialists and linguists became aware of vocabulary teaching. For example, in the 1980s, Terrel (in Ochilova, 2020) suggested the *herbal* method, which prioritizes comprehensible input and conveys meaning over grammatically accurate creation. Historically unpopular, teaching and learning vocabulary is currently a controversial matter. Few studies indicated that teaching vocabulary can be troublesome since some teachers are unsure of the optimal instructional practices and are sometimes unaware of how to begin putting an instructional emphasis on vocabulary.

Furthermore, the crucial discussion that follows the awareness of the importance of vocabulary is the teachers' perceptions and practices of vocabulary teaching, as teachers' beliefs or perspectives influence their vocabulary teaching practices (Kahn, 2000). Moreover, beliefs concerning vocabulary teaching affect the way teachers plan to teach vocabulary, selecting the vocabulary teaching strategy, the media, the material, and the type of resources, interacting and communicating with students in the classroom, managing the classroom, and responding to any possible classroom conditions (Kennedy, 1997; Xu, 2012). Furthermore, the issue of teachers' beliefs and understanding was emphasized for specific reasons, even when a teacher has the same knowledge as other teachers, there is a possibility that their teaching strategies would be different. It would happen if the teacher's perceptions of the subject, teaching, and learning were also different (Masduki et al., 2019).

This study employs the term "teachers' conceptions" instead of solely teachers' perceptions or beliefs, as it examines more than just participants' subjective assumptions. Teachers' conceptions can be defined as an interrelated set of principles and intentions, including understanding and belief about teaching, that govern teachers' perspective of a situation, provide rationale for teachers' actions,

and influence their preferred ways of teaching (Chan & Elliott, 2004; Pratt, 1992). Thus, teachers' conceptions in this study refer to teachers' perceptions or beliefs, teachers' knowledge, their teaching experiences, their learning experiences, and their educational background regarding vocabulary teaching, along with some other contextual factors such as teaching time and the school's facilities.

Recent studies on teachers' conceptions and practices of vocabulary teaching were highlighted as this issue was explored. Numerous researchers observed teachers' understanding and perception, including the vocabulary teaching practices (Alaro, 2020; Asyiah, 2017; Lu, 2017; Lundström & Siedlecki, 2017; Mardali & Siyyari, 2019; Mirzaie et al., 2018; Terfa, 2017). The results of these studies indicate that EFL classes do not emphasize vocabulary teaching. Furthermore, it was found that the teacher lacked sufficient knowledge and theoretical orientations of vocabulary teaching methodologies and the practical abilities necessary to adopt various vocabulary teaching strategies (Alaro, 2020; Terfa, 2017). Moreover, studies revealed that several cases found in which teachers' beliefs conflict with their practices in class (Bouirane, 2017; Lu, 2017; Mardali & Siyyari, 2019; Mirzaie et al., 2018). Although EFL teachers possess sufficient knowledge and insights on vocabulary teaching strategies, they need to prove such declarative understanding in an actual action in classroom.

Furthermore, acknowledging that traditional vocabulary teaching in today's teaching and learning approach is indeed assumed to be no longer relevant and important, as vocabulary is expected to be delivered through texts and tasks, this study aims to determine whether teachers are truly aware of the role of vocabulary and how it should be effectively given to the students through contextual activities in the classroom.

Then, a question arises, "Do the teachers really implement the curriculum's suggested communicative and contextual ways for vocabulary teaching, or are they neglecting it because they no longer pay attention to it?" Thus, teachers' practices are also examined according to the principles of vocabulary teaching that lie in the current curriculum employed by teachers, along with the examination of whether the teachers' conceptions align with their actual teaching practices. The mentioned

elaboration above becomes the gap that differentiates this study from others and is expected to enrich the literature in this field.

In summary, this study aims to explore the teachers' conceptions regarding vocabulary teaching and examine how they can influence the practices of vocabulary teaching in the classroom. It is necessary to study how teachers teach vocabulary so that students get the most exposure to the words and achieve proficiency. This study also discusses challenges in teaching vocabulary to gain insight into the problems that arise in the classroom and how the teachers deal with the difficulties.

1.2. Research Questions

The issue of this study is "To what extent EFL Teachers' conceptions influence their vocabulary teaching practice in secondary education". To clarify the focus of the study, the following questions are to be answered.

1. What are EFL teachers' conceptions of vocabulary teaching?
2. How do EFL teachers' conceptions influence their vocabulary teaching practices?
3. What challenges do EFL teachers encounter in teaching vocabulary?

1.3. Purposes of the Study

Derived from the research questions, this research will cover the following issues:

1. Exploring EFL teachers' conceptions of vocabulary teaching.
2. Investigating the influence of EFL teachers' conceptions on their vocabulary teaching practices.
3. Examining challenges encountered by EFL teachers in teaching vocabulary.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The study's findings are expected to be significant from three perspectives, theoretical, practical and policy.

1. Theoretically, this study will bridge the gap in second language acquisition research on vocabulary teaching in Indonesian context and provide a comprehensive description of vocabulary teaching in EFL classrooms. This research can be considered a reference for other researchers investigating English vocabulary teaching. This study is expected to enrich the literature about the concept of vocabulary teaching, teachers' practices of vocabulary teaching and challenges in teaching vocabulary.

2. Practically, this study is expected to provide guidance to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in secondary schools regarding the understanding of vocabulary teaching and practices. In addition, the study is expected to influence EFL teachers to be aware of their teaching practice, to consider incorporating vocabulary teaching in their classroom, evaluate their concepts and strategies for vocabulary instruction in the classroom and examine challenges encountered in teaching vocabulary so that the teachers can seek solutions to the challenges.

3. By policy, this study is expected to help resolving the issues related to vocabulary teaching and challenges in English language teaching. Through the study, it is expected that policymakers will gain insight into more effective vocabulary teaching practice.

1.5. Scope of the Study

This qualitative case study investigates how EFL teachers' conceptions influence their vocabulary teaching practices. The term "conceptions" refer to the teachers' perceptions and knowledge regarding vocabulary teaching along with some other factors such as teachers' educational background, their teaching and learning experiences, teaching time and school facilities. Moreover, this study also

examined the challenges in teaching vocabulary. The study involves three junior high school teachers in Bandung, West Java as participants. These teachers were inquired about their perspectives and knowledge of vocabulary teaching, as well as their practice of vocabulary instruction in the classroom, including the strategies employed and challenges encountered when teaching vocabulary. Those data were collected by using interviews, document analysis and classroom observations.

1.6. Clarification of Terms

In order to define the essential terminology used throughout this study, the following definitions are provided.

1. **Teachers' Conceptions:** Teachers conception is defined as an interrelated set of principles and intentions, including understanding and belief about teaching, that govern teachers' perspective of a situation, provide rationale for teachers' actions, and influence their preferred ways of teaching (Chan & Elliott, 2004; Pratt, 1992). However, teachers' conceptions in this study refer to teachers' perceptions or beliefs, teachers' knowledge, their teaching experiences, their learning experiences, and their educational background regarding vocabulary teaching, along with some other contextual factors such as teaching time and the school's facilities. Thus, this study not only discusses teachers' perceptions or beliefs but also some other factors that are wrapped into a realm called "teachers' conception."

2. **Teachers' Practices of vocabulary teaching:** Vocabulary teaching practices in this study refer to the teachers' ways of introducing and familiarizing students with new words and additional information about vocabulary, such as word knowledge and related teaching-learning strategies. The references are derived from Schmitt's (1995, 2000) and Nation's (1990, 2001, 2005) works on vocabulary teaching. Furthermore, teachers' practices in this study context also include the discussion of both implicit and explicit ways of teaching vocabulary, as proposed by several researchers (Ellis, 1994; Sedita, 2005). Moreover, this study examined

teachers' practices not only based on their claims but also based on their actual teaching activities in the classroom, as well as their planning, which was integrated into the lesson plan and teaching materials they used.

3. **Challenges in Teaching Vocabulary:** In the context of this study, the central issues regarding challenges in teaching vocabulary revolve around "what to teach" and "how to teach" vocabulary, referring to what has been highlighted by Amiryousefi and Dastjerdi (2010). Those problems are associated with teachers' knowledge of vocabulary teaching, which includes selecting the appropriate vocabulary to teach, utilizing proper materials and media, and the way they conducted the lesson by incorporating vocabulary teaching strategies into their teaching practices.

1.7.Thesis Organization

This thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 presents the study's background, research questions, purposes, significance, scope, clarification of key terms, thesis organization and concluding remarks.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature for the study, including the teachers' conceptions, teachers' conceptions of vocabulary teaching and teachers' knowledge of vocabulary teaching; teachers' practices of vocabulary teaching including implicit vocabulary teaching, explicit vocabulary teaching, strategies in teaching vocabulary and practices of vocabulary teaching in curriculum; challenge in teaching vocabulary; related previous studies; and concluding remarks.

Chapter 3 addresses the methodology which used in conducting the research. This chapter consists of seven sections. These include the research design, the research site and participants, data collection techniques, research procedures, data analysis, triangulation and concluding remarks.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and discussions of the study organized into two main sections: findings and discussions, along with the concluding remarks.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion, implication, limitation and recommendation of the study as well as the concluding remarks.

1.8. Concluding Remarks

This chapter covers the introduction to the research. It includes the background of the study which explain the foundation of this study and inspires the researcher to conduct the study, research questions that address the primary issues of the study, the purposes of the study, the significance of the study which describes the practicality that will be attained from the study, the scope of the study, the clarification of key terms which functioned to make each term clearer and concluding remarks which summarize the information in this chapter.