**CHAPTER I**

**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter covers the background, the problem statement and research questions, the objectives, the scope, and the significance of the research viewed from the theoretical and practical standpoints.

1. **Background**

It is certainly inevitable that prospective teachers bring with themselves many cognitions about the nature of teaching and learning and that these cognitions interact with the content and pedagogy of their teaching procedures and influence what and how they teach. Hence, it would implicitly affect their students’ learning process. Based on Borg's (2006) definition, second language teacher’s cognition (SLTC) is “an often tacit, personally-held practical system of mental constructs held by teachers and which are dynamic-i.e. defined and refined on the basis of educational and professional experiences throughout teachers’ lives” (p. 35). This definition implies that teachers are highly influenced by their cognitions which are related to their ideas, to their views of the world, and to their values and conceptions of their environment. At last, the study of teachers' cognitions forms a part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work (Hassankiadeh, 2013).

The idea of this current study on teachers’ cognitions results from the EFL students’ low proficiency in English subject, particularly when it deals with English vocabulary. From some empirical data where vocabulary tests were used to measure EFL students vocabulary size in the university where the researcher taught, it was found out that most of the students had poor vocabulary which was shown by low scores (<50). This problematic condition was aligned with some previous studies concerning EFL learners’ lack of vocabulary (Hui, 2004; Mustafa, 2017; Rohmatillah, 2014). Hui (2004) carried out a quantitative research by applying 4 instruments including Nation’s Vocabulary Level Test, a reading passage, a recall protocol (RP), and (4) an Inventory of Content Knowledge and Interest Questionnaire (ICKIQ). The findings of this study showed that on the average, university students’ vocabulary knowledge does not reach the necessary threshold of vocabulary knowledge. Although university students have rich content knowledge, their lack of vocabulary knowledge markedly prevents them from applying their content knowledge to gaining information from a reading text. Most university students in Taiwan only know a few general academic words so that it is difficult for them to read academic texts printed in English. Mustafa’s (2017) study revealed that the vocabulary test results showed Indonesian high school graduates did not meet the curriculum expectation. He used Nation and Beglar’s vocabulary test and the reading texts from National Examination (2015-2016) and found out that the students scored 72% in the 1st 1,000, and the scores were even much lower in the next levels. These vocabulary sizes were not adequate for comprehension. Another study on kinds and factors of students’ difficulties in learning vocabulary was investigated by Rohmatillah (2014). Through a qualitative case study, she revealed that the students found some difficulties in terms of pronunciation, how to spell and write, and the different grammatical form of a word known as inflections. In addition, some factors that caused students’ difficulties in learning vocabulary were identified, including the different forms of a word in written and spoken English, the large number of words that students need to learn, the limitations of sources of information about words, the complexity of word knowledge, lack of understanding of grammatical of the words, and the incorrect pronunciation.

Related to the above major point about vocabulary learning, both internal and external factors are believed to affect the students’ English mastery (Wenglinsky, 2001). One of the common external factors is teacher classroom practice, such as the choice of teaching methods and strategies. As a matter of fact, teachers’ decisions on instructional practices used have been influenced by their cognition. As Borg (2015) postulated that teachers were no longer viewed as mechanical implementers, but as active, thinking decision-makers, who processed and made sense of a diverse array of information in the course of their work. Hence, teacher cognition has obtained great importance and the focus of attention in L2 research education has considerably changed from studying teachers' observable behaviors to teachers' knowledge and beliefs to prop up their instructional practices, reflections, and pedagogical decisions (Freeman, 2002; Johnson, 2006).

In recent years, a plethora of attempts have been made on teachers’ cognition with the aim of understanding the complications of reinforcing teacher cogniton and classroom practices (e.g. Borg, 1998a; 1998b; Burri, 2015; Moini, 2009; Niu & Andrew, 2012; Rahimi, 2014). Studies of teacher cognition largely comprise the teaching of grammar (Borg, 2001, Borg & Burns, 2008; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Phipps & Borg, 2007), of reading (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 1999; Tercanlioglu, 2001), and of writing (Lee, 2010; Yigitoglu, 2011). Even though a huge number of studies on teacher cognition have been carried out, other aspects of English teaching have received less attention from the teacher cognition perspective, and thus very little is known about teachers’ cognition, particularly in relation to vocabulary teaching.

Research on vocabulary primarily focused on the importance of vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary learning strategies for English language learners (Ahmadvand & Nejadansari, 2014; Barcroft, 2009; Cakir, Unaldi, Arslan, & Kilic, 2016; Lu, 2008; Naeimi & Foo, 2015; Nezhad & Shorpour, 2012; Teng, 2015; Vela & Rushidi, 2016). However, there has been little or no well-prepared research about how teachers’ cognitions about vocabulary instruction influence their instructional practices, particularly in Indonesian context. In terms of research methodology, EFL teachers’ cognition research pertaining to vocabulary so far has included relatively little classroom observation data collection.

As mentioned before that there has been little or no well-prepared research concerning how teachers’ cognitions about vocabulary instruction influence teachers’ practices in Indonesian context, this present study aims to fill this gap. The importance of investigating teachers’ cognition on teaching practice is expected to reveal research findings showing that the relationships between what teachers think, believe, and know and what they demonstrate in the real classroom practice could offer a new insight concerning the improvement of vocabulary teaching and learning strategies in Indonesian context. Moreover, findings of teachers' cognition studies would contribute to the theoretical knowledge bases of teachers’ educational practices. Additionally, a number of factors which might result in some problems for EFL teachers to interpret their cognitions into practice could provide some considerable points in this current study. Accordingly, based on a number of important points mentioned above, the researcher will seek to investigate teachers’ cognitions concerning vocabulary instruction and their reflection on teachers’ practices.

1. **Problem Statement and Research Questions**

Borg (2009) argues that vocabulary as a curricular area in L2 teaching has been marginalized to date from a teacher cognitive perspective and little is known about this curricular area of language teaching. In Indonesia, vocabulary is one of the most challenging issues in language teaching. Accordingly, this present study is going to describe the teachers’ cognitions along with their instructional practices when teaching vocabulary in Indonesian classrooms. Therefore, it focuses on the following questions:

1. What beliefs do high school English teachers hold about the teaching of vocabulary in the classrooms?
2. How do high school English teachers carry out vocabulary instructional practices in the classrooms?
3. To what extend do the high school English teachers’ instructional practices reflect their beliefs about vocabulary instruction?
4. What factors constrain the high school English teachers from interpreting their beliefs about vocabulary teaching and learning into classroom practices?
5. **Objectives of the Research**

Based on the abovementioned research questions, this current research aims:

1. To identify the beliefs high school English teachers hold about the teaching of vocabulary in the classrooms.
2. To discover the vocabulary instructional practices carried out by high school English teachers in the classrooms.
3. To find out the extent to which the high school English teachers’ beliefs about vocabulary teaching are reflected into their instructional practices in classroom.
4. To describe the factors which constrain the high school English teachers from interpreting their beliefs about vocabulary teaching and learning into classroom practices.
5. **Scope of the Research**

The major focus of the present study is to identify teacher cognition which is depicted from teachers’ beliefs on vocabulary teaching and learning including the role of vocabulary, vocabulary knowledge, vocabulary teaching strategies, pedagogical content knowledge on vocabulary instruction, prior language learning experience, and teacher education including undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Additionally, this present study inquired into what teachers believe, know and do in the context of schools in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. Four EFL teacher participants from four different state high schools in Samarinda were involved in this study. Those participants were the teachers of the eleventh grade in those schools.

1. **Significance of the Research**

This present study intends to carry out an exploration concerning the beliefs the teachers hold and their instructional practices of vocabulary teaching in EFL classrooms. Theoretically, this current study is expected to contribute to the development of the existing theories of teachers’ cognitions, particularly in EFL countries, such as Indonesia. As Borg (2009) asserts that vocabulary is one of the areas which needs exploring in terms of teacher cognition, it is very important that this study be conducted.

Practically, the results of the study serve as a reference for mentors, school administrators, and those dealing with teacher professional development because this study guides decisions they make and influences their subsequent judgments and actions in classrooms. In addition, the data obtained in this study could be used as a framework for teaching English pertaining to vocabulary instruction, particularly in secondary school contexts. Moreover, by knowing what the teachers have in their mind pertaining to teaching and learning process, some solutions to students’ weaknesses in learning English could be provided. As the curriculum used is the most recent curriculum, *Kurikulum 2013*, it is expected that the result of this current study will serve as a reference for the consideration of teaching vocabulary in secondary schools in Indonesia today.