

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of the research. It consists of the background of the study, research questions, research objectives, significance of the research, scope of the research, conceptual framework, previous studies, and research hypothesis.

A. Background of Study

Language is an essential part of human life, and vocabulary plays a key role in mastering a language. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners may have difficulty understanding messages, expressing ideas, and communicating effectively. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge enables learners to understand and use language meaningfully. For junior high school students, vocabulary learning focuses on basic word classes such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, with nouns being especially important because they represent people, places, objects, and ideas commonly used in daily communication.

English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia, where Indonesian is the primary language used in daily communication. As a result, English is rarely used outside the classroom, giving students limited opportunities to practice it in real-life situations. Therefore, English learning in Indonesia mainly occurs in formal classroom settings, where the learning process plays an important role in developing students' English proficiency, including their vocabulary knowledge.

Many junior high school students still face difficulties in mastering English noun vocabulary, such as remembering word meanings, pronouncing words correctly, and using them in sentences. This problem is often caused by teaching methods that rely on memorisation, translation, and repetitive drills where students simply repeat vocabulary after the teacher rather than using it actively. According to Thornbury (2002), vocabulary learning becomes more effective when students

are exposed to meaningful repetition and actively involved in interactive learning activities.

To overcome the challenges in vocabulary learning, teachers need to create engaging and interactive learning environments. One effective approach is the use of games as learning media because games can make the learning process more enjoyable, reduce students' anxiety, and encourage active participation. According to the Constructivist Learning Theory proposed by Piaget (1972), learners construct knowledge through active interaction with their environment, meaning that learning occurs when students are involved in meaningful activities that allow them to explore, interact, and solve problems.

One example of a game that can support vocabulary learning is the Snakes and Ladders game. This traditional game can be adapted as an educational medium by integrating vocabulary tasks into each square of the board. When students land on a square, they may be required to complete vocabulary tasks such as identifying noun vocabulary, recognising correct word forms and spelling, or using nouns in simple sentences. Through these activities, students can actively recall and practice vocabulary in a fun and engaging way.

In recent years, traditional board games have also been adapted into digital learning media. Digital board games allow teachers to integrate simple technology into classroom activities while maintaining the interactive nature of traditional games. The use of digital board games can increase students' engagement and provide a more dynamic learning experience. This approach is in line with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction and active language use in the learning process (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Previous studies by Wright et al. (2006) and Patra et al. (2022) showed that games help learners remember vocabulary more effectively because they involve repetition, interaction, and meaningful practice. In addition, several studies have discussed the use of digital media and game-based learning in English vocabulary

instruction. However, most previous studies focused on general vocabulary learning, conventional games, or digital language applications in broader contexts. Limited studies have specifically investigated the effectiveness of a digital Snakes and Ladders board game in improving noun vocabulary mastery among junior high school EFL learners. Moreover, few studies have explored how digital board games can promote active participation and interactive vocabulary learning in EFL classrooms. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by examining the use of a digital Snakes and Ladders board game to improve students' noun vocabulary mastery at the junior high school level.

This research is important because noun vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of English learning that supports students' ability to communicate effectively in daily contexts. In addition, this study is expected to contribute to English teaching practices by providing an engaging and interactive learning medium for vocabulary instruction in junior high schools. Furthermore, this research may contribute to a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of digital game-based learning in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery in EFL classrooms.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the learners' vocabulary scores before using the digital Snakes and Ladders board game?
2. What are the learners' vocabulary scores after using the digital Snakes and Ladders board game?
3. Is there a significant difference in learners' vocabulary scores before and after using the digital Snakes and Ladders board game?

C. Research Purposes

The objectives of this study are:

1. To discover the learners' vocabulary mastery before using the digital Snake and Ladder board game.

2. To discover the learners' vocabulary mastery after using the digital Snake and Ladder board game.
3. To find out whether there is a significant difference in learners' vocabulary mastery before and after using the digital Snake and Ladder board game

D. Research Significances

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of English language teaching, particularly in the area of vocabulary development through interactive learning activities such as a digital Snakes and Ladders board game.

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this research contributes to the existing body of literature on the use of the digital Snakes and Ladders board game as an effective medium for improving students' vocabulary mastery, especially nouns. It provides empirical evidence on how game-based learning can support vocabulary acquisition by offering meaningful repetition, interactive practice, and comprehensible input within an enjoyable learning environment. In addition, the findings strengthen theoretical perspectives related to Nation's Vocabulary Learning Principles (2001), Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies (1997), and Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), showing how interactive activities such as digital Snakes and Ladders board games can enhance students' retention, understanding, and use of English nouns effectively.

2. Practical Significance

Practically, this study gives significance to:

a. For the Teachers

This study offers insights for English teachers, especially at the junior high school level, on integrating game-based learning into vocabulary instruction. It provides practical guidance on using a digital Snakes and

Ladders board game to create a more engaging and interactive learning environment and to motivate students in learning noun vocabulary.

b. For the Students

This study is expected to positively influence students' noun vocabulary mastery. Learning through a digital Snakes and Ladders board game may create a fun and less stressful learning atmosphere, increasing students' motivation, participation, and vocabulary retention.

c. For other Researchers

This study may serve as a reference for future research on game-based learning in vocabulary development. The findings can be used as a foundation for exploring similar games, other language skills, or different educational levels in English language learning.

E. Research Scope

This research focuses on the use of a digital Snakes and Ladders board game as a medium to improve English vocabulary, specifically nouns, among EFL learners in junior high school. The subjects of this study are seventh-grade students at SMP IT Ar-Rifqi in the 2025/2026 academic year, with a total of 18 students participating as the research sample. The study employs a pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest approach to measure students' improvement in noun vocabulary mastery before and after the treatment. The research was conducted over three meetings, in which the first and second meetings introduced vocabulary related to specific themes bathroom and bedroom in the first meeting, and kitchen and living room in the second while the third meeting focused on reinforcing previously learned vocabulary through gameplay without introducing new material. Each meeting followed a structured procedure consisting of opening greetings and prayer, explanation of learning objectives, explanation of the game's rules and procedures, students completing vocabulary tasks at each stage of the board, and teacher guidance and feedback throughout the game. Students' vocabulary improvement was measured through pretest and posttest scores, which were analyzed using SPSS to determine the significance of improvement and the

N-Gain score. The study limits its focus to measuring students' improvement in noun vocabulary only, not in other parts of speech such as verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. However, the study is limited to one school and one class, which may affect the generalizability of the findings, and facility constraints such as the limited availability of a projector may also have influenced the implementation of the treatment.

F. Conceptual Framework

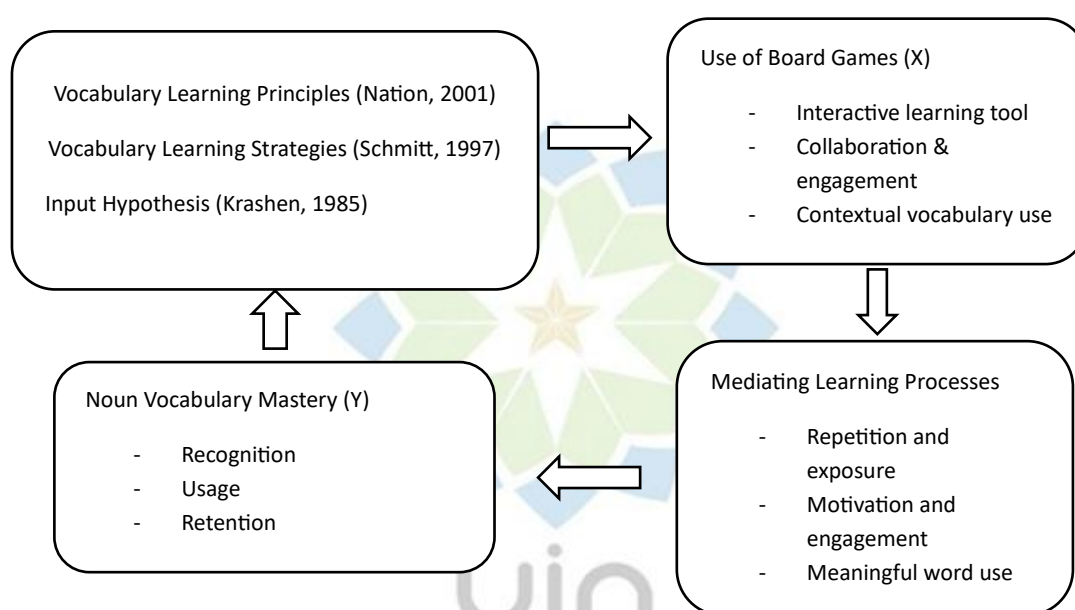


Figure 1. 1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on several key theories related to vocabulary learning. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary learning becomes more effective through repetition, meaningful exposure, and the frequent use of words in different contexts to strengthen students' vocabulary mastery. In addition, Schmitt (1997) explains that students learn vocabulary through various vocabulary learning strategies, such as memory, cognitive, and social strategies, which help them understand, remember, and use new words effectively. Furthermore, Krashen (1985) through the Input Hypothesis states that students acquire language successfully when they receive comprehensible input that is slightly above their current level of understanding in enjoyable and meaningful learning situations. Therefore, the use of interactive learning activities and games can support students'

vocabulary mastery by providing repetition, meaningful practice, and comprehensible input in an engaging learning environment.

With these theories as the foundation, the digital Snakes and Ladders board game is used as the learning medium in this study because it provides interactive and enjoyable activities that align with how students naturally learn. Through a digital Snake and Ladders board game, students can practice nouns repeatedly, interact with their classmates, and use English in a meaningful way. These experiences trigger several learning processes that act as mediators, such as increased exposure to vocabulary, higher motivation during gameplay, and opportunities to use words in honest communication.

When these mediating processes work together, they help improve students' mastery of noun vocabulary. Students become better at recognising nouns, using them correctly, and remembering them for longer periods. Therefore, the cycle, starting with theories, moving to the use of a digital Snakes and Ladders board game, then to mediating learning processes, and finally leading to improved noun, clearly shows how the digital Snakes and Ladders board game can support vocabulary learning effectively and engagingly.

G. Previous Studies

Several previous studies have investigated the use of game-based learning in vocabulary instruction, offering various perspectives on how games can be utilized to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. These studies range from digital game-based learning approaches to more traditional, low-tech game media, providing a broad foundation for understanding the potential of games in EFL vocabulary instruction.

The first study, a systematic literature review by Lestari (2025), finds that Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) significantly enhances students' vocabulary acquisition, especially through increased motivation, engagement, and vocabulary retention. By synthesizing findings from multiple studies, Lestari (2025) highlights that the interactive nature of digital games allows students to engage with

vocabulary in a more meaningful and enjoyable way compared to conventional instruction. The review also emphasizes that interactive features and accessible digital media support vocabulary mastery effectively, as these elements provide immediate feedback and repeated exposure that reinforce word retention over time.

Rahmah et al. (2025) examined the effectiveness of flashcard games in improving vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade students at SMPN 7 Palu. Using a quasi-experimental design, their study compared students taught with flashcard-based game activities to those taught through conventional methods. Their results confirmed that flashcard-based game activities significantly improved students' vocabulary recall and overall performance, suggesting that game-based strategies are effective even in low-tech learning environments where access to digital devices may be limited. This finding is particularly relevant for school contexts similar to the one in the present study, where facility constraints may restrict the use of fully digital or technology-heavy interventions.

Furthermore, a study by Langkawi (2019) examined the effect of Interactive Board Games (IBG) on vocabulary achievement among junior high school students. The results showed that students taught using Interactive Board Games achieved significantly higher vocabulary scores than those taught through conventional methods. The study, conducted over eight sessions, demonstrated that board-game-based learning increased students' motivation and facilitated better vocabulary retention, as the game format encouraged active participation and reduced students' anxiety toward learning new vocabulary compared to traditional rote memorization techniques.

Although previous research provides evidence that games, including digital games, mobile applications, flashcard games, and interactive board games, can effectively enhance vocabulary learning, several gaps remain. First, most prior studies focused on general vocabulary acquisition without examining specific word classes, such as noun vocabulary, leaving it unclear whether game-based interventions are equally effective when the target is narrowed to a single part of speech. Second, the majority of these studies were conducted using either fully

digital platforms requiring individual devices or entirely traditional, non-digital board games, resulting in a gap in research examining hybrid approaches. Research that investigates the use of traditional-style board games delivered through digital platforms, such as a Canva-based digital Snakes and Ladders board game displayed via projector, is still very limited, particularly in the Indonesian junior high school EFL context.

Therefore, this study fills the gap by examining the effectiveness of a digital Snakes and Ladders board game specifically designed to improve noun vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade students. By integrating a traditional board-game design with a low-tech digital medium (projector-based gameplay), this research provides new insights into how simple digital tools can support vocabulary learning in EFL classrooms, particularly in school settings with limited technological facilities, such as SMP IT Ar-Rifqi, where only one projector unit is available for shared use among teachers.

H. Research Hypothesis

Based on the research problem, this study involves two variables. The independent variable (the use of board games) and the dependent variable (students' noun vocabulary achievement). The hypotheses are formulated as follows:

1. H_0 (Null Hypothesis)

There is no significant difference in students' noun vocabulary achievement before and after the use of board games.

2. H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis)

There is a significant difference in students' noun vocabulary achievement before and after the use of board games.