

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the background of the research, research questions, and purposes, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, hypotheses, and previous studies.

A. Research Background

English has become a global means of communication and is widely used as a lingua franca in international interaction (Gunantar, 2015). In the field of education, English plays a crucial role not only as a subject taught at school, but also as a tool for accessing knowledge, technology, and global communication. For learners in countries where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), mastering English is essential to support academic success and future career development (Kirkpatrick, 2007).

One of the most fundamental components of English proficiency is vocabulary. Vocabulary serves as the foundation of language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Hatch and Brown (1995) define vocabulary as a collection of words that form the basis of communication in a particular language. Similarly, Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is a key element in effective language use, as learners cannot express ideas. One important aspect of vocabulary learning is the ability to recognize the meanings of words. Vocabulary meaning recognition refers to learners' ability to identify and understand the meanings of English words when they encounter them. This ability is important because recognizing word meanings provides a foundation for learners to understand language input and develop further vocabulary knowledge.

In the context of Indonesian junior high schools, vocabulary learning and recognizing the meanings of English vocabulary remains challenge for many students. Students may encounter difficulties when they are introduced to unfamiliar English words, particularly when they are required to identify the meanings of words

without relying on direct translation or memorization. Difficulties in recognizing vocabulary meanings can affect students' understanding of sentences, texts, and classroom instructions. Vocabulary learning is often conducted through conventional methods, such as memorizing word lists, completing worksheets, and answering textbook-based exercises. Although these methods may help students recognize some words temporarily, they may provide limited opportunities for students to actively engage with vocabulary and understand word meanings in meaningful learning situations (Gazali, 2022).

Another contributing factor is the mismatch between teaching methods and students' learning characteristics. Junior high school students, typically aged between 13 and 15 years old, are in a developmental stage where they may benefit from active, engaging, and interactive learning experiences. At this age, students are transitioning from childhood to adolescence, and their learning can be supported through physical movement, social interaction, and exploration. Conventional teacher-centered instruction may limit students' participation and may not sufficiently accommodate these learning needs, particularly when vocabulary is taught mainly through memorization and written exercises (Suaib, 2019).

To address these issues, English teachers are encouraged to adopt innovative and student-centered teaching strategies that actively involve learners in the learning process. One potential alternative is the use of the Scavenger Hunt strategy. A scavenger hunt is an interactive learning activity in which students work individually or in groups to search for specific items, clues, or information within a structured task (Wise, 2003). In vocabulary learning, a scavenger hunt can be designed to require students to identify the meanings of words, match vocabulary with clues or visual information, and locate vocabulary items through movement-based exploration and collaboration. Such activities provide students with opportunities to encounter and recognize vocabulary meanings through active participation rather than relying solely on memorization.

Previous studies have shown that scavenger hunt activities can positively influence students' learning outcomes. Zarimah (2024), for instance, reported a significant increase in students' vocabulary scores after the implementation of scavenger hunt activities, indicating that game-based and experiential learning can enhance students' engagement and vocabulary acquisition. Other studies have also highlighted the effectiveness of scavenger hunts in improving motivation, reading comprehension, and grammar understanding (Nafi'ah, 2025). These findings suggest that scavenger hunts create an enjoyable learning environment that encourages active participation and deeper processing of language input.

In addition, the implementation of the Scavenger Hunt strategy aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning, collaboration, creativity, and meaningful learning experiences. The curriculum encourages teachers to design learning activities that actively engage students and connect classroom instruction with meaningful contexts. Scavenger hunts support these principles by promoting exploration, teamwork, movement, and active interaction with learning materials. In vocabulary learning, these activities can provide students with opportunities to repeatedly encounter and recognize word meanings in an engaging learning environment.

However, despite the growing use of scavenger hunt activities in English language teaching, previous studies have generally examined broader learning outcomes, such as vocabulary scores, learning motivation, reading comprehension, and grammar acquisition. Limited research has specifically focused on students' vocabulary meaning recognition as a measurable outcome of implementing the Scavenger Hunt strategy, particularly among junior high school students in an EFL context. This gap indicates the need for further investigation into whether the Scavenger Hunt strategy can influence students' ability to recognize the meanings of English vocabulary.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of the Scavenger Hunt strategy on students' vocabulary meaning recognition at SMP Mekar Arum.

Specifically, this study examines students' vocabulary meaning recognition before and after the implementation of the Scavenger Hunt strategy and determines whether there is a significant difference in their performance following the treatment. By focusing specifically on vocabulary meaning recognition, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence regarding the potential of an experiential and movement-based learning strategy to support students' ability to recognize and understand English vocabulary meanings in the junior high school context.

B. Research Question

Based on the background explanation above, several research questions could be formed, as follows:

1. What is the level of students' vocabulary meaning recognition before being taught using Scavenger Hunt at SMP Mekar Arum?
2. What is the level of students' vocabulary meaning recognition after being taught using Scavenger Hunt at SMP Mekar Arum?
3. How significant is the influence of the Scavenger Hunt strategy on students' vocabulary meaning recognition at SMP Mekar Arum?

C. Research Purpose

Based on the research questions above, the purpose of this research is as follows:

1. To describe the level of students' vocabulary meaning recognition before being taught using Scavenger Hunt at SMP Mekar Arum.
2. To describe the level of students' vocabulary meaning recognition after being taught using Scavenger Hunt at SMP Mekar Arum.
3. To examine the extent to which the Scavenger Hunt strategy influences students' vocabulary meaning recognition at SMP Mekar Arum.

D. Research Significance

This research highlights the potential of adapting the scavenger hunt as an innovative strategy for English teaching. Therefore, this research has two significances, there are theoretically and practical.

First, theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to current knowledge on vocabulary meaning recognition and English language teaching. Through the implementation of Scavenger Hunt activities as a movement-based and interactive learning strategy, students are provided with opportunities to actively participate in the learning process and recognize the meanings of English vocabulary through direct experiences. Active involvement in learning activities may support students' engagement, motivation, and enthusiasm in learning vocabulary.

Second, practically, this study offers teachers an interactive teaching strategy that can be used to address students' lack of interest in conventional vocabulary learning. Teachers can apply Scavenger Hunt activities to encourage students' active participation, cooperation, exploration, and engagement in recognizing vocabulary meanings. For students, this strategy provides an enjoyable and interactive learning experience that may support their ability to recognize and understand the meanings of English vocabulary while increasing their interest and confidence in learning English. Furthermore, this study can serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in investigating the use of Scavenger Hunt strategies in vocabulary learning, particularly in relation to students' vocabulary meaning recognition.

E. Research Scope

The scope of this study is limited to the implementation of the Scavenger Hunt strategy in teaching English vocabulary to eighth-grade students at SMP Mekar Arum. This study focuses on vocabulary learning within the context of interrogative sentences as taught in the eighth-grade English curriculum.

Vocabulary in this study is defined as content vocabulary presented within the context of interrogative sentences. The study specifically focuses on students'

vocabulary meaning recognition, referring to their ability to recognize and understand the meanings of vocabulary items presented in context. Grammar instruction is provided only to support students' understanding of vocabulary within interrogative sentences and is not treated as the primary focus of the study.

The influence of the Scavenger Hunt strategy is measured through students' pre-test and post-test scores. The tests assess students' ability to recognize the meanings of vocabulary items presented in context through multiple-choice questions. Therefore, this study does not examine other aspects of vocabulary knowledge, such as vocabulary production, spelling, pronunciation, or the ability to use vocabulary independently in speaking and writing.

F. Conceptual Framework

Vocabulary is an essential component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because sufficient vocabulary knowledge supports learners in understanding and processing language input. One important aspect of vocabulary learning is vocabulary meaning recognition, which refers to learners' ability to recognize and understand the meanings of vocabulary items when they encounter them in a particular context. However, many junior high school students experience difficulties in recognizing the meanings of unfamiliar English vocabulary. Conventional vocabulary learning that relies heavily on memorization and teacher-centered instruction may provide limited opportunities for students to actively engage with vocabulary and understand word meanings.

This study is grounded in Experiential Learning Theory proposed by Kolb (1984) as the grand theory. (Kolb, 1984) states that learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. According to this theory, effective learning occurs through a cycle consisting of four stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. Learners gain knowledge not merely by receiving information, but by actively experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and applying what they learn. In language learning, especially vocabulary learning, experiential learning

emphasizes direct engagement with language use in meaningful contexts rather than passive memorization of word lists.

To support Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, this study also adopts several supporting theories. this study also adopts several supporting theories. One of them is Game-Based Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through interactive, enjoyable, and goal-oriented activities. Game-based learning allows students to acquire knowledge actively through challenges, exploration, competition, and collaboration. This approach is particularly relevant for junior high school students, who tend to learn more effectively when they are engaged in fun and meaningful learning experiences. Research shows that game-based learning can increase students' motivation, participation, engagement, and memory retention, especially in vocabulary learning (Al-Khresheh, 2025). Through game-oriented activities such as scavenger hunts, students are encouraged to interact directly with learning materials, solve problems, and apply vocabulary in contextual situations. As a result, students are more likely to process vocabulary deeply and retain it for longer periods.

In addition, this study is supported by Vocabulary Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful and contextualized vocabulary learning. Nation (2001) explain that vocabulary learning involves developing knowledge of the words, including their meanings and uses. In this study, the focus is specifically placed on students' ability to recognize vocabulary meanings. Presenting vocabulary within meaningful contexts and engaging students in interactive activities can provide opportunities for students to encounter vocabulary items and establish connections between words and their meanings.

The Scavenger Hunt is positioned in this study as a teaching strategy rather than merely a game or classroom activity. A teaching strategy refers to a planned and systematic set of instructional actions designed to achieve specific learning objectives. The Scavenger Hunt qualifies as a teaching strategy because its activities are deliberately structured around learning objectives, procedures, student

interaction, and assessment. In this study, the strategy is designed to guide students through vocabulary learning activities involving exploration, collaboration, and problem-solving, with the specific objective of supporting students' ability to recognize vocabulary meanings.

Furthermore, the Scavenger Hunt strategy is aligned with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle. Students experience the Concrete Experience stage when they physically search for vocabulary clues or learning materials. They engage in Reflective Observation when they discuss and review the vocabulary meanings they encounter. Through Abstract Conceptualization, students develop an understanding of the meanings of the vocabulary items based on the information and feedback provided during the activities. Finally, students engage in Active Experimentation when they use their understanding to complete subsequent vocabulary tasks. Thus, the Scavenger Hunt provides an experiential learning process that connects students' direct experiences with vocabulary meaning recognition.

To provide a structured learning process, the Scavenger Hunt strategy is integrated with the Genre-Based Approach (GBA), which emphasizes systematic language learning through meaningful contexts. According to Suharyadi and Basthomi (2020), the Genre-Based Approach can be implemented through the Teaching–Learning Cycle (TLC), consisting of Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modeling of the Text (MOT), Joint Construction of the Text (JCOT), and Independent Construction of the Text (ICOT). In this study, these stages provide scaffolding for students before, during, and after the Scavenger Hunt activities. In the BKOF stage, students are introduced to the topic and vocabulary related to interrogative sentences. In the MOT stage, students observe examples of language use and vocabulary in context. In the JCOT stage, students work collaboratively with their peers and teacher guidance to complete the Scavenger Hunt activities and identify vocabulary meanings. Finally, in the ICOT stage, students independently demonstrate their understanding through vocabulary-related tasks. The integration of the Scavenger Hunt strategy with the Teaching–Learning Cycle provides a structured

learning process that supports students in developing vocabulary meaning recognition.

Based on this conceptual framework, the implementation of the Scavenger Hunt strategy, grounded in Experiential Learning Theory and supported by Game-Based Learning Theory and Vocabulary Learning Theory, is expected to influence students' vocabulary meaning recognition. The Scavenger Hunt provides students with active, contextual, and interactive experiences through which they encounter vocabulary items and identify their meanings. The influence of the strategy is examined by comparing students' pre-test and post-test scores. The vocabulary test consists of multiple-choice items designed to measure students' ability to recognize the meanings of vocabulary items presented in context. Therefore, an improvement in students' post-test scores compared with their pre-test scores is used to determine whether the Scavenger Hunt strategy significantly influences students' vocabulary meaning recognition. The framework of the study could be viewed as follows:

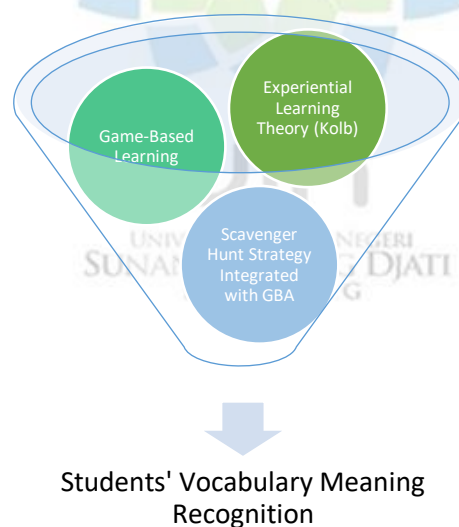


Figure 1. 1 Theoretical Framework

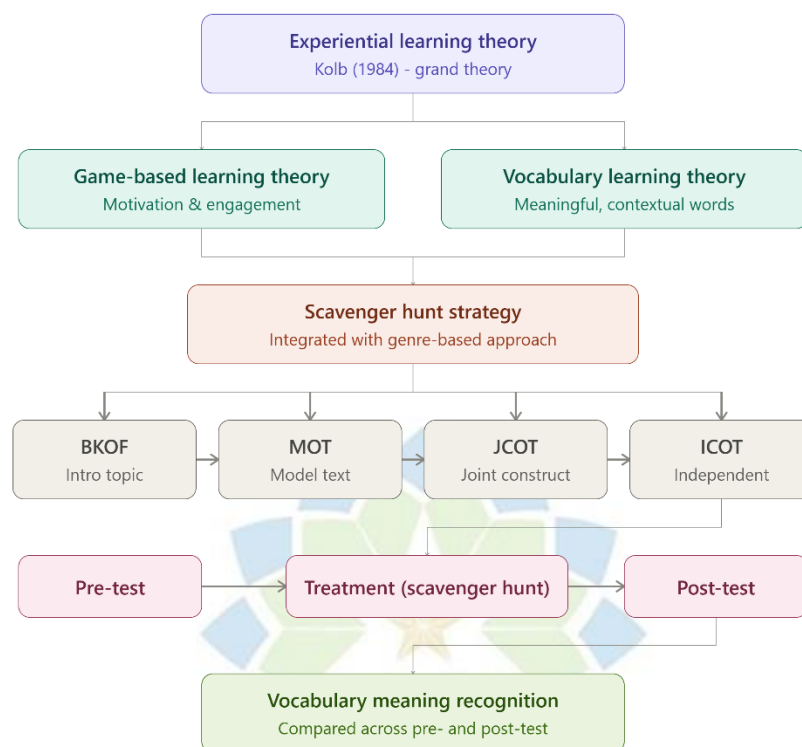


Figure 1. 2 Conceptual Framework

G. Hypotheses

This study focused on two variables tested to show the relationship between them. The two variables are the independent variable (X) and the dependent variable (Y). In this study, the use of scavenger hunt is the X, and students' vocabulary meaning recognition is the Y. Therefore, the hypotheses of this study could be written as follows:

1. H₀ (null hypothesis): There is no significant influence of implementing scavenger hunt activities on English vocabulary meaning recognition in SMP Mekar Arum.
2. H_a (alternate hypothesis): There is a significant influence of implementing scavenger hunt activities on English vocabulary meaning recognition in SMP Mekar Arum.

H. Previous Studies

The first previous study from research paper conducted by Nafi'ah Hasta Rucita is titled "The use of scavenger hunt activities in the English learning motivation of fifth-grade students: A case study at SDN Jatiendah." The study examined their behavioral, emotional, and cognitive responses. The result indicated that the exercise significantly increased students' motivation until they became more enthusiastic to participate, responsible for finishing assignments, and gained confidence in using basic English expressions. Students who were previously passive were inspired to participate actively in class because of the physical movement and game-like framework. Nafi'ah (2025) came to the conclusion that scavenger hunt activities enhanced students' interest in English, boosted their willingness to regularly participate in learning activities, and helped establish a more dynamic learning environment based on observations, interviews, and students' task results.

The second previous study from journal article conducted by (Oktarind, 2022) is titled "The implementation of Scavenger hunt game in teaching Reading Comprehension of Descriptive Text." is based on the results of the Classroom Action Research conducted with the tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya. Students were instructed to look for hints, facts, or textual elements that matched the descriptions in the reading material as part of the investigation. The results showed, if the scavenger hunt game motivated students to read more carefully, focus on adjectives, important words, and facts, and actively connect the textual content with the assigned tasks. With this approach, reading was no longer a passive pastime but rather a hands-on, exploratory process that required pupils to do significant text analysis. Improvements in students' capacity to recognize key concepts, comprehend supporting details, and draw connections between text and actual objects or images were also noted in the study. Because the exercise felt more like a challenge than a

test, students who had previously struggled with reading comprehension became more involved.

The previous study conducted by (Farhana, 2023), titled “Using Scavenger Hunt in Enhancing the Learning of Collective Nouns in Primary ESL Classrooms.” The data were collected from Year 5 pupils in a primary ESL classroom. According to the study, when students were asked to find phrases, images, or objects connected to particular collective noun categories (such as "a flock of birds" or "a bunch of keys"), their comprehension of collective nouns improved. According to the study, the scavenger hunt fostered a vibrant and inspiring environment where students worked together, explored solutions, and shared their findings with one another. The ability of students to remember collective nouns, utilize them in sentences, and distinguish them from plural nouns has improved, according to teachers. Shamsul came to the conclusion that by incorporating mobility, exploration, and contextual practice, scavenger hunt activities greatly improved grammar acquisition and made the lesson more significant, engaging, and memorable.

The difference between this research and previous studies is specifically focuses on examining the efficacy of using scavenger hunts to improve vocabulary meaning recognition as a measurable learning outcome, whereas earlier studies looked at various aspects of scavenger hunt activities, such as improving students' learning motivation (Nafi'ah, 2025), enhancing reading comprehension of descriptive texts (Oktarind, 2022), and supporting the understanding of collective nouns in grammar learning (Farhana, 2023). Previous studies tended to highlight motivation, engagement, reading abilities, or grammar; this research is focused on the degree of vocabulary improvement accomplished through the activity, making it more outcome-based and directly tied to vocabulary meaning recognition.