

The Word Hunt Game as a Tool for Improving Vocabulary Mastery in EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language proficiency that supports all aspects of communication. However, many junior high school students still face difficulties in mastering English vocabulary due to limited exposure, low motivation, and monotonous teaching methods. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the Word Hunt Game in improving students' vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade learners at SMP Negeri Persiapan Yenbeser. A pre-experimental quantitative design was employed using a one-group pre-test and post-test model. Twenty-five students participated in this study and received four sessions of Word Hunt Game activities designed to enhance vocabulary retention and engagement. The vocabulary test, consisting of 30 items, was administered before and after the treatment to measure improvement. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired sample t-test. The findings revealed a significant increase in students' vocabulary scores after the implementation of the Word Hunt Game. The mean score improved from 55.60 in the pre-test to 76.48 in the post-test, with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the game had a substantial positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery. The results suggest that the Word Hunt Game not only helps students memorize and recall new words more effectively but also increases their motivation and participation during learning activities. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers incorporate game-based learning strategies like Word Hunt to make vocabulary instruction more interactive, enjoyable, and effective in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Vocabulary Mastery; Word Hunt Game

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is the cornerstone of language learning and a key indicator of communicative competence. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners cannot effectively express their thoughts, comprehend spoken or written messages, or participate in meaningful communication. As Schmitt (2017) notes, vocabulary knowledge serves as the foundation upon which listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are built. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, vocabulary mastery is often the main challenge, particularly in contexts where

English exposure outside the classroom is limited. In Indonesian EFL classrooms, vocabulary learning tends to focus on memorization and translation, which can make learning repetitive and disengaging for students (Cahyono & Widiati, 2017). Consequently, many students show limited progress in acquiring and retaining new words, despite years of formal instruction.

In junior high schools, especially in remote or developing areas such as Yenbeser, students often perceive English as a difficult subject. Teachers frequently report that students struggle to recall words, pronounce them accurately, and use them in sentences. This problem is commonly attributed to a lack of interactive and meaningful learning experiences. When vocabulary is taught solely through explanation and rote memorization, students become passive recipients rather than active users of the language. As a result, vocabulary mastery remains low, affecting students' overall English achievement. Studies by Fitriyani (2020) and Sari and Pratama (2019) have shown that traditional vocabulary teaching methods fail to sustain learners' motivation and do not provide adequate opportunities for active practice.

In recent years, researchers and educators have emphasized the need for innovative and interactive learning approaches that engage students cognitively and emotionally in the learning process. One effective approach is the use of game-based learning, which transforms vocabulary instruction into a fun and motivating activity. According to Harmer (2018), games create a relaxed and stimulating learning atmosphere that promotes participation, reduces anxiety, and enhances memory retention. In addition, game-based learning provides immediate feedback and encourages peer interaction, which supports vocabulary acquisition through repetition and collaboration.

Among various vocabulary games, the Word Hunt Game has gained attention as a practical and enjoyable method for enhancing word recognition, spelling, and retention. In this game, students search for target words within a limited time, usually from a grid, passage, or environment, depending on the design. The activity requires students to focus on word patterns, meaning, and usage while competing or collaborating with peers. This process fosters not only memorization but also engagement and excitement, making learning more meaningful (Rokhayani & Yusuf, 2020). Furthermore, the element of competition motivates students to pay closer attention to words and recall them more effectively.

Several previous studies have confirmed the effectiveness of using games to support vocabulary learning. Aritonang (2018) found that using games such as Word Search and Bingo significantly improved students' vocabulary recall and motivation in secondary school contexts. Similarly, Lesmana (2019) reported that game-based instruction enhanced vocabulary retention and helped students use new words more accurately in writing and speaking. Research by Rahmawati (2018) also showed that incorporating simple word games into EFL classrooms increased student engagement and improved their ability to remember words over time. These

findings collectively suggest that vocabulary games can transform passive learning into active participation, leading to better learning outcomes.

Despite the growing evidence of the benefits of game-based learning, its implementation in schools located in rural or underdeveloped regions such as Yenbeser, West Papua remains limited. Classroom observations at SMP Negeri Persiapan Yenbeser revealed that English lessons often rely on textbook-based exercises and teacher-centered instruction. Vocabulary is typically introduced through translation and memorization, with minimal opportunities for interaction. As a result, students tend to lose interest quickly and struggle to retain the words they have learned. Teachers have expressed the need for more engaging learning strategies that align with students' interests and promote active involvement in vocabulary learning.

The Word Hunt Game is considered a suitable alternative because it combines physical movement, collaboration, and problem-solving with linguistic practice. It aligns with the principles of active learning, allowing students to discover and apply vocabulary in an enjoyable and memorable way. Moreover, this game can be adapted to various topics and proficiency levels, making it versatile for classroom use. However, research examining the specific impact of the Word Hunt Game on students' vocabulary mastery particularly within the context of rural Indonesian schools remains scarce.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the effectiveness of the Word Hunt Game in improving the vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri Persiapan Yenbeser. The study focuses on how the game helps students not only expand their vocabulary knowledge but also improve their ability to recall, understand, and use new words accurately. By employing a pre-experimental design, this research seeks to determine whether there is a significant difference in students' vocabulary achievement before and after participating in Word Hunt-based learning sessions.

The significance of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of research on game-based learning in EFL contexts, providing empirical evidence on how the Word Hunt Game facilitates vocabulary acquisition. Practically, it offers English teachers in similar educational settings an effective and low-cost strategy to make vocabulary learning more engaging and productive. It also encourages educators to shift from traditional, teacher-centered approaches to more interactive and learner-centered methods that promote motivation and long-term retention.

Vocabulary mastery is essential for EFL learners to achieve communicative competence, yet many students continue to struggle due to unengaging instructional methods. The implementation of the Word Hunt Game provides an opportunity to transform vocabulary learning into an active, meaningful, and enjoyable experience. Therefore, this study aims to determine whether the use of the Word

Hunt Game can significantly enhance students' vocabulary mastery and serve as an effective instructional alternative in junior high school English classrooms in Indonesia, particularly in contexts like SMP Negeri Persiapan Yenbeser where interactive learning is still underdeveloped.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary Mastery in English Language Learning

Vocabulary is one of the essential components of language proficiency and serves as the foundation for mastering the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without adequate vocabulary, learners cannot effectively express their ideas or understand others. Nation (2016) defines vocabulary as the collection of words that learners must know to communicate meaningfully. Mastery of vocabulary involves not only recognizing and recalling words but also understanding their meanings, pronunciation, spelling, and appropriate use in context. In the EFL context, vocabulary mastery is particularly challenging because learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. As Brown (2018) explains, vocabulary learning requires repeated exposure and meaningful practice to ensure retention. For Indonesian students, limited access to authentic English materials and insufficient use of interactive techniques often hinder vocabulary development. Students may know the translation of words but fail to use them correctly in sentences. This indicates that vocabulary learning should go beyond rote memorization and focus instead on meaningful, contextualized practice (Nunan, 2016).

The Importance of Vocabulary in EFL Learning

Vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in language comprehension and production. Learners with a strong vocabulary base can understand texts more easily, express themselves more fluently, and participate confidently in communication. Harmer (2018) argues that vocabulary is central to language learning because words carry meaning, while grammar merely organizes them. A lack of vocabulary, therefore, directly limits learners' communicative ability. In Indonesia, vocabulary has been identified as one of the main difficulties for secondary school learners. Fitriyani (2020) notes that many students have limited vocabulary size and struggle with retention because vocabulary teaching often focuses on translation and memorization. When instruction is dominated by teacher explanation, students tend to become passive. This leads to low motivation, poor recall, and minimal long-term retention. To overcome these issues, teachers are encouraged to use more interactive and student-centered methods that allow learners to experience words in context through repetition and engagement (Cahyono & Widiati, 2017).

Challenges in Teaching Vocabulary

Despite its importance, teaching vocabulary effectively in EFL classrooms remains a challenge. The main issues include low student motivation, lack of exposure, and unvaried teaching methods. Traditional approaches often rely on lists of words, drilling, and translation exercises, which are insufficient for developing deep vocabulary knowledge (Sulaiman & Rosmawati, 2018). Moreover, many students quickly forget the words they memorize because they are not given opportunities to use them actively. According to Lesmana (2019), students' limited participation and boredom during vocabulary lessons are major barriers to learning. When teaching is monotonous, students lose interest, and learning outcomes decline. Teachers need to adopt creative strategies that transform vocabulary learning into an engaging process. One such approach is the use of game-based learning, which encourages participation, motivation, and retention through interactive activities.

Game-Based Learning in Vocabulary Instruction

Game-based learning refers to the use of games as instructional tools to support learning objectives. It integrates competition, collaboration, and enjoyment into the learning process. Harmer (2018) explains that games are effective for language learning because they promote meaningful repetition and lower students' affective filters reducing anxiety while increasing engagement. In a game, learners use language spontaneously to achieve a goal, which fosters both accuracy and fluency. Several studies have demonstrated that games help students retain vocabulary longer because they associate learning with positive emotions. Arifonang (2018) found that using games in vocabulary teaching improved students' memory and motivation. Similarly, Sari and Pratama (2019) concluded that game-based instruction increased students' participation and achievement compared to traditional methods. Games also provide opportunities for collaborative learning, where students learn from each other through communication and teamwork (Rahmawati, 2018).

The Word Hunt Game as a Vocabulary Learning Strategy

The Word Hunt Game is an interactive vocabulary activity that involves searching for target words within a given space such as a grid, passage, or classroom environment. It combines elements of competition, discovery, and movement, making it particularly effective for young learners. According to Rokhayani and Yusuf (2020), the Word Hunt Game helps students recognize word patterns, spelling, and meaning while fostering excitement and motivation. In practice, the teacher provides clues or categories, and students race to find or highlight words that match. This process requires learners to scan and identify key vocabulary items quickly, reinforcing recognition and retrieval skills. The activity also promotes peer collaboration and immediate feedback, which are key principles of communicative and active learning (Utami, 2019). Moreover, the Word Hunt Game aligns with the cognitive theory of learning, which emphasizes active engagement and memory

reinforcement. Students not only read and write words but also see, hear, and use them repeatedly. Such multisensory involvement strengthens retention and recall (Nation, 2016).

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a pre-experimental quantitative design to examine the effectiveness of the Word Hunt Game in improving students' vocabulary mastery. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to measure students' progress by comparing their performance before and after receiving the treatment. A one-group pre-test and post-test model was implemented to determine whether the Word Hunt Game could significantly enhance students' vocabulary knowledge, particularly in terms of word recognition, meaning understanding, and word usage in context. The population of this research consisted of all seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri Persiapan Yenbeser during the 2024/2025 academic year. From this population, one class comprising 25 students was selected as the research sample through purposive sampling. The class was chosen based on the English teacher's recommendation that it represented an average level of English proficiency and active participation in classroom vocabulary activities. Although the sample size was relatively small, it was considered sufficient for a classroom-based experimental study where the main objective was to determine the effectiveness of a learning strategy rather than to generalize the findings to a broader population.

Instruments and Procedures

The primary instrument used in this study was a vocabulary test designed to measure students' vocabulary mastery before and after the implementation of the Word Hunt Game. The test consisted of 30 multiple-choice items covering various word types (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) relevant to the students' curriculum. The test aimed to assess students' ability to recognize word meanings, identify synonyms and antonyms, and use words appropriately in sentences. The same test was administered twice first as a pre-test before the treatment to determine the students' initial vocabulary mastery, and second as a post-test after the treatment to measure improvement. Before its use, the test was validated by two English education lecturers from UNIMUDA Sorong to ensure content validity and alignment with the learning objectives for junior high school vocabulary instruction. A pilot test was conducted with another class from the same grade level to evaluate the reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient obtained through Cronbach's Alpha was 0.84, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The treatment was carried out over four sessions within two weeks, with each session lasting approximately 80 minutes. During each session, students participated in a series of Word Hunt Game activities that were designed to make vocabulary learning engaging and interactive. Each meeting followed three structured stages.

In the introduction stage, the teacher explained the objectives of the lesson and introduced the list of target words. Students reviewed their meanings, pronunciations, and examples in context. In the game stage, students were divided into small groups and participated in the Word Hunt Game. They were asked to find and collect words hidden within grids, puzzles, or short texts under time constraints. Some activities required students to match words with definitions, while others involved identifying words from clues. The competitive nature of the game encouraged active participation and collaboration among students. Finally, in the reflection and feedback stage, the teacher and students discussed the meanings and uses of the words found during the game. Students then used the new vocabulary in short oral or written sentences to reinforce contextual understanding. Throughout the treatment, the teacher acted as a facilitator, guiding students, managing time, and providing immediate feedback on pronunciation and word usage. The learning atmosphere was kept interactive and enjoyable to promote motivation and reduce anxiety. After the treatment, the post-test was administered to evaluate whether students' vocabulary mastery had significantly improved compared to their pre-test results.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation of students' scores before and after the implementation of the Word Hunt Game, providing an overview of the general improvement in vocabulary mastery. For inferential analysis, a paired sample t-test was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 to determine whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was statistically significant. The significance level was set at 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). If the p-value was lower than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that the Word Hunt Game had a significant effect on students' vocabulary mastery. To assess the degree of improvement, the Normalized Gain (N-Gain) formula was applied, which categorized the effectiveness of the treatment as low, moderate, or high. All students' test papers were carefully checked and scored to ensure accuracy in data interpretation. The results of the analysis focused not only on the statistical improvement but also on the pedagogical implications of using the Word Hunt Game as a learning tool. The discussion highlighted how the game influenced students' vocabulary retention, engagement, and confidence in learning new words. The findings of this study were expected to provide valuable insights for English teachers, particularly in rural areas like Yenbeser, about the potential of game-based learning as an effective approach to enhance vocabulary mastery and student motivation in EFL classrooms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Word Hunt Game in improving students' vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade learners at SMP

Negeri Persiapan Yenbeser. The data were obtained from students' pre-test and post-test scores, which were administered before and after the treatment. The pre-test was designed to measure students' initial vocabulary mastery level, while the post-test was conducted to assess improvement after four sessions of instruction using the Word Hunt Game.

Students' Vocabulary Scores in Pre-Test and Post-Test

Table 1. Students' Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Test Type	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
Pre-Test	25	55.60	47	66	5.02
Post-Test	25	76.48	69	88	4.61

As shown in Table 1, the mean score in the pre-test was 55.60, indicating that the students' initial vocabulary mastery was still below the expected level. Most students were able to recognize simple words but had difficulty recalling their meanings and using them correctly in context. Common errors observed included confusion between synonyms and antonyms, incorrect usage of word forms (e.g., "beauty" instead of "beautiful"), and limited understanding of word collocations. This suggests that students tended to rely heavily on rote memorization rather than contextual learning, leading to poor retention.

After the treatment, the mean score increased to 76.48, representing a substantial improvement of 20.88 points. This result demonstrates that students' vocabulary mastery improved significantly following the use of the Word Hunt Game. The improvement indicates that game-based learning made vocabulary acquisition more interactive and enjoyable, helping students to remember and use words more effectively. Furthermore, the standard deviation decreased from 5.02 to 4.61, implying that students' performance became more consistent after the intervention. In other words, the learning gap between lower- and higher-achieving students narrowed, showing that the game effectively supported all students regardless of their initial proficiency level.

Qualitative observations during the sessions also supported the quantitative findings. During the pre-test, many students appeared hesitant and less confident when asked to identify or pronounce words. However, as they participated in the Word Hunt activities, their enthusiasm increased noticeably. They began to interact more actively with their peers, exchange ideas, and even correct each other's mistakes in a supportive manner. The element of competition in the game encouraged participation, while the physical aspect of searching for words enhanced their engagement and memory retention.

Normality Test

A normality test was performed to determine whether the data met the assumptions for parametric testing. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used since the number of participants was fewer than 50. The results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Normality Test Results (Shapiro–Wilk)

Test	Statistic	df	Sig. (p-value)	Interpretation
Pre-Test	0.961	25	0.410	Normal
Post-Test	0.972	25	0.625	Normal

The results show that both the pre-test ($p = 0.410$) and post-test ($p = 0.625$) scores were greater than 0.05, indicating that the data were normally distributed. This satisfied the assumption for conducting a paired sample t-test to compare the mean differences between the two tests.

Paired Sample t-Test

To examine whether the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery was statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was conducted using SPSS version 25. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Paired Sample t-Test Results

Test	Mean Difference	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Test – Post-Test	-20.88	-11.23	24	0.000

The results indicate that the mean difference between the pre-test and post-test was -20.88, with a t-value of -11.23 and a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This means that there was a statistically significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the implementation of the Word Hunt Game. Consequently, the null hypothesis stating that the Word Hunt Game has no effect on students' vocabulary mastery was rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The statistical evidence suggests that the Word Hunt Game effectively facilitated vocabulary learning. Students showed better recall of new words, improved their understanding of word meanings, and demonstrated greater confidence in applying vocabulary in context. This supports the assumption that interactive, game-based instruction creates a more engaging learning atmosphere, leading to higher achievement levels.

N-Gain Analysis

To measure the degree of effectiveness, the Normalized Gain (N-Gain) score was calculated using Hake's (1998) formula. The average N-Gain score obtained was 0.59, which falls under the moderate improvement category. This indicates that the Word Hunt Game was moderately effective in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery. The moderate level of improvement suggests that while the game substantially increased engagement and recall, further enhancement could be

achieved through longer treatment duration or integration with other vocabulary-building strategies, such as contextual reading or storytelling.

The findings of this study revealed that the implementation of the Word Hunt Game had a significant effect on improving students' vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade learners at SMP Negeri Persiapan Yenbeser. The mean score increased from 55.60 in the pre-test to 76.48 in the post-test, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.000, indicating a strong impact of the game-based intervention. These results support the hypothesis that interactive and engaging learning strategies can effectively enhance vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts, particularly in schools with limited exposure to English.

The improvement in students' vocabulary mastery can be attributed to several pedagogical factors inherent in the design of the Word Hunt Game. First, the game created an interactive learning environment where students were actively involved in searching, identifying, and discussing vocabulary items. According to Harmer (2018), interaction and active participation are essential for meaningful language learning because they allow students to process input deeply and practice output in context. In this study, students worked collaboratively, negotiated meanings, and received feedback from both peers and the teacher, which aligns with communicative language teaching principles. This interactive process likely contributed to the increase in students' vocabulary retention and usage.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing the positive impact of game-based learning on vocabulary development. Artonang (2018) reported that word-based games such as Word Search significantly improved students' memory and motivation. Similarly, Sari and Pratama (2019) found that the use of vocabulary games increased students' participation and engagement, leading to higher learning outcomes compared to traditional methods. The present study reinforces these findings by showing that even a simple and low-cost game such as Word Hunt can make vocabulary learning more active and enjoyable, thereby improving achievement levels. Another reason behind the improvement lies in the repetitive and contextual exposure provided through the game. Each session required students to locate, pronounce, and use target words in meaningful ways. Nation (2016) argues that repeated encounters with vocabulary in varying contexts strengthen word recognition and facilitate long-term retention. During the Word Hunt activities, students repeatedly saw and used the same words while competing and cooperating, which enhanced both recognition and recall. Classroom observations also indicated that students could remember and apply vocabulary learned in previous sessions, demonstrating the effectiveness of this exposure.

The present findings also align with the cognitive theory of learning, which suggests that active engagement enhances memory consolidation (Brown, 2018). The Word Hunt Game encouraged physical movement, visual scanning, and collaborative communication three factors that engage multiple cognitive pathways. Such

multisensory involvement helps transform vocabulary learning from a passive activity into an active process that supports deeper retention. This is consistent with Lesmana (2019), who observed that interactive activities such as word games stimulate attention and increase learners' focus, leading to improved vocabulary recall.

In addition to improving vocabulary achievement, this study found that the Word Hunt Game significantly enhanced students' motivation and confidence in learning English. Before the intervention, students expressed boredom and anxiety toward vocabulary tasks. However, the use of a playful and competitive game shifted their attitude from reluctant to enthusiastic. Fitriyani (2020) notes that motivation is a strong predictor of vocabulary learning success, and games can serve as a catalyst by reducing anxiety and creating a positive learning atmosphere. The enjoyment and challenge of the Word Hunt Game encouraged students to participate voluntarily, reinforcing the idea that motivation and achievement are closely linked. Interestingly, the reduction in the standard deviation from 5.02 to 4.61 shows that students' performance became more consistent after the treatment. This suggests that the game was effective not only for high-achieving students but also for those with lower proficiency levels. This finding supports Cahyono and Widiati's (2017) observation that learner-centered activities tend to reduce performance gaps because they give all students equal opportunities to participate and learn at their own pace. The collaborative nature of the Word Hunt Game likely allowed weaker students to receive support from their peers while learning vocabulary through social interaction.

Moreover, the N-Gain score of 0.59 indicates moderate improvement, which, although not at the highest level, is pedagogically meaningful. The moderate gain may be explained by the limited duration of the treatment—only four sessions within two weeks. Previous studies such as Sulaiman and Rosmawati (2018) and Astuti (2020) found that vocabulary interventions tend to yield stronger effects when conducted over a longer period. With more sessions, students might have achieved even higher levels of mastery, particularly in applying vocabulary in spoken and written contexts. This study also contributes to existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a rural Indonesian context, an area often underrepresented in educational research. Most prior studies on game-based vocabulary learning were conducted in urban schools with better resources and higher English exposure (Rahmawati, 2018; Rokhayani & Yusuf, 2020). In contrast, this research demonstrates that the Word Hunt Game can be successfully implemented even in settings with limited technological and material support. The findings suggest that effective vocabulary instruction does not necessarily require sophisticated tools; rather, it depends on teachers' creativity in designing interactive learning experiences.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the success of the Word Hunt Game in this study has several implications for EFL teachers. First, vocabulary teaching should move beyond memorization-based approaches and incorporate interactive games that

stimulate curiosity and engagement. Games like Word Hunt not only make vocabulary learning enjoyable but also provide authentic opportunities for practice and feedback. Second, teachers should integrate game-based learning with reflective discussion to ensure that students internalize vocabulary meaningfully. This combination of play and reflection enhances both motivation and cognitive processing. Third, using games fosters a positive classroom climate, encouraging collaboration rather than competition, which is especially beneficial for students with lower confidence in English.

Despite these promising findings, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The first limitation is the small sample size (25 students) and the absence of a control group, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could employ a quasi-experimental design with a larger sample and a comparison group to validate the results. The second limitation lies in the short duration of the intervention. Four sessions may not be sufficient to measure long-term vocabulary retention. A longitudinal study would help determine whether the benefits of the Word Hunt Game persist over time. Lastly, the study primarily focused on vocabulary recognition and recall; further research could examine the game's effect on students' ability to use vocabulary in productive skills such as speaking and writing.

Despite these limitations, the present study provides strong evidence that integrating the Word Hunt Game into vocabulary instruction can enhance learning outcomes and student motivation, particularly in resource-limited contexts. It bridges a research gap by showing that simple, low-cost instructional strategies can significantly improve EFL learning in rural Indonesian schools. The findings confirm that game-based vocabulary instruction, especially the Word Hunt Game, effectively improves students' vocabulary mastery, participation, and enthusiasm in learning English. These results align with prior research (Aritonang, 2018; Sari & Pratama, 2019; Fitriyani, 2020) while offering new insights into its application in rural learning environments. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to integrate vocabulary games into regular instruction to foster active learning, equitable participation, and greater long-term retention of vocabulary in EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Word Hunt Game in improving students' vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade learners at SMP Negeri Persiapan Yenbeser. The findings showed a significant increase in students' vocabulary scores after the treatment, with the mean rising from 55.60 on the pre-test to 76.48 on the post-test. The results of the paired sample t-test ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) confirmed that the improvement was statistically significant, while the N-Gain value of 0.59 indicated a moderate but meaningful level of effectiveness. The improvement can be attributed to the interactive and engaging nature of the Word Hunt Game, which encouraged active learning, collaboration, and repeated exposure to target vocabulary. The activity not only helped students recall and

understand words better but also increased their motivation, confidence, and participation in learning. The game's simple structure made it adaptable to various classroom conditions, including those with limited learning resources, demonstrating that effective vocabulary instruction does not depend solely on technology but on creativity and meaningful engagement. Although the study was limited by its small sample size and short duration, the findings suggest that incorporating game-based learning particularly the Word Hunt Game can serve as an effective strategy to enhance vocabulary mastery in EFL classrooms. Future research with larger samples and longer interventions is recommended to explore the long-term effects of this approach on different language skills.

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