



**PLAY AND LEARN: STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS ON WORD CONNECT
GAME APPLICATION FOR VOCABULARY ACQUISITION**

THESIS

BY:

AMELIA ZAHWA KUMALA FAIRISA

22302073020



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**PLAY AND LEARN: STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS ON WORD CONNECT
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THESIS

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By

Amelia Zahwa Kumala Fairisa

NPM: 22302073020

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: word connect, game-based learning, vocabulary acquisition, student perception

This thesis investigates the perceptions of junior high school students toward the use of the Word Connect game application as a tool to enhance their English vocabulary acquisition. In the context of English language learning, vocabulary plays a crucial role as the foundation for listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. However, conventional vocabulary learning student interest and engagement. In response to this challenge, game-based learning has emerged as a promising alternative that offers both educational value and entertainment. This study aims to examine how students perceive the Word Connect game application, what benefits they experience in their vocabulary learning process, and what challenges they encounter while using it.

The study was conducted at SMPN 3 Singosari, Malang, using quantitative and qualitative approach. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews involving eight-grade students who had used the English version of the Word Connect game. The questionnaire included both general and Likert-scale items, while interviews were used to gain deeper insights into students' thoughts and experiences.

The findings of the study indicate that the majority of students have a positive perception of the Word Connect game application. Most of them stated that the game is enjoyable, user-friendly, and helpful in acquiring new English vocabulary. Students also reported that the game motivates them to memorize new words and enhances their interest in learning English. In addition, the application is perceived to support cognitive development by encouraging critical and analytical thinking, creativity, and spelling accuracy. Students expressed to traditional methods, as it allows them to play and learn simultaneously. Despite these benefits, some challenges were also reported. Several students experienced difficulty recognizing unfamiliar vocabulary, especially those with a limited prior knowledge of English. Others found it hard to identify correct answers from the given letter combinations. However, rather than giving up, students demonstrated persistence by trying multiple times, asking for help, or searching for word meaning on their own. These behaviors reflect the development of self-directed learning strategies and intrinsic motivation.

In conclusion, this research highlights the potential of the Word Connect game application an effective and engaging tool for vocabulary acquisition. It contributes to the growing body of literature on game-based language learning and supports the integration of educational technology. The study suggests that consider utilizing digital word games as supplementary learning resources to enhance students' vocabulary mastery and learning experience.

ABSTRAK

Fairisa, Amelia Zahwa Kumala. 2025. Play and Learn: Student's Perceptions on *Word Connect* Game Application for Vocabulary Acquisition. Tesis, Program Studi Magister Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Pascasarjana Universitas Islam Malang. Pembimbing: (1) Dr. Dzul Fikri, S.S., M.Pd., (2) Prof. Drs. H. Junaidi, M.Pd. Ph.D.

Kata kunci: word connect, pembelajaran berbasis permainan, pengembangan kosakata, persepsi siswa

Tesis ini menyelidiki persepsi siswa sekolah menengah pertama terhadap penggunaan aplikasi game Word Connect sebagai alat untuk meningkatkan perolehan kosakata bahasa Inggris mereka. Dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, kosakata memainkan peran penting sebagai dasar keterampilan menyimak, berbicara, membaca, dan menulis. Namun, pembelajaran kosakata konvensional kurang menarik dan melibatkan siswa. Sebagai respons terhadap tantangan ini, pembelajaran berbasis game muncul sebagai alternatif yang menjanjikan, menawarkan nilai pendidikan sekaligus hiburan. Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti bagaimana siswa memandang aplikasi game Word Connect, manfaat apa yang mereka rasakan dalam proses pembelajaran kosakata mereka, dan tantangan apa yang mereka hadapi saat menggunakannya.

Penelitian ini dilakukan di SMPN 3 Singosari, Malang, menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara yang melibatkan siswa kelas delapan yang telah menggunakan versi bahasa Inggris dari permainan Word Connect. Kuesioner tersebut mencakup item umum dan skala Likert, sementara wawancara digunakan untuk mendapatkan wawasan yang lebih mendalam tentang pikiran dan pengalaman siswa.

Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas siswa memiliki persepsi positif terhadap aplikasi permainan Word Connect. Sebagian besar dari mereka menyatakan bahwa permainan ini menyenangkan, mudah digunakan, dan membantu dalam memperoleh kosakata bahasa Inggris baru. Siswa juga melaporkan bahwa permainan tersebut memotivasi mereka untuk menghafal kata-kata baru dan meningkatkan minat mereka untuk belajar bahasa Inggris. Selain itu, aplikasi ini dianggap mendukung perkembangan kognitif dengan mendorong pemikiran kritis dan analitis, kreativitas, dan akurasi ejaan. Siswa lebih menyukai metode tradisional karena memungkinkan mereka bermain dan belajar secara bersamaan. Meskipun ada manfaat ini, beberapa tantangan juga dilaporkan. Beberapa siswa mengalami kesulitan mengenali kosakata yang tidak dikenal, terutama mereka yang memiliki pengetahuan bahasa Inggris terbatas sebelumnya. Yang lain kesulitan mengidentifikasi jawaban yang benar dari kombinasi huruf yang diberikan. Namun, alih-alih menyerah, siswa menunjukkan ketekunan dengan mencoba berkali-kali, meminta bantuan, atau mencari arti kata sendiri. Perilaku ini mencerminkan perkembangan strategi pembelajaran mandiri dan motivasi intrinsik.

Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini menyoroti potensi aplikasi game Word Connect sebagai alat yang efektif dan menarik untuk pemerolehan kosakata. Ini berkontribusi pada semakin banyaknya literatur tentang pembelajaran bahasa berbasis permainan dan mendukung integrasi teknologi pendidikan. Studi ini menyarankan untuk mempertimbangkan penggunaan permainan kata digital sebagai sumber belajar tambahan untuk meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata dan pengalaman belajar siswa.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study, research question, research objectives, significance of the study, theoretical and practical significance, scope and delimitation, and definition of key terms are included in this chapter.

1.1 Background of the study

Vocabulary is an essential component of language mastering since it provides the foundation for understanding, speaking, reading, and writing in the language. According to Nation (2001), having a diverse vocabulary allows people to communicate more effectively and comprehend both written and spoken information. In the academic setting, vocabulary mastery is important for students' learning achievement, particularly in disciplines that involve reading and critical analysis skills. Despite its importance, teaching vocabulary remains a difficulty. One of the most challenging tasks for students is remembering new vocabulary over time, especially if it is provided without context or through passive learning (Schmitt, 2010). In traditional schooling, vocabulary acquisition methods frequently focus on memorization and repetition, which are less effective in establishing meaningful learning experiences. As a result, it is critical to create novel ways to help children understand and utilize vocabulary efficiently, such as through technology-based and game-based methods.

Traditional vocabulary acquisition methods frequently rely on memorization and the usage of textbooks as their primary strategies. This method

asks students to memorize extensive lists of words with little context, which can lead to boredom and difficulty in long-term memory (Brown, 2001). Furthermore, this method is generally less participatory, which causes students to become bored and lose motivation to learn. According to Nation (2001), while memory is useful for vocabulary learning, it does not allow students to understand how these terms are employed in real-world circumstances. Another shortcoming of this method is a lack of customization and contextualization in learning, which makes it difficult for students to connect new words to their everyday experiences or needs (Schmitt, 2010). Thus, although being utilized for decades, this old technique is becoming less effective in satisfying students' learning demands in a more dynamic and technology-driven society.

In recent decades, technology has altered many parts of life, including education. Game-based learning is an innovative strategy that is always evolving. Game-based learning is the use of interactive games as a technique to improve the learning process. According to research, this technique can boost student enthusiasm, increase engagement, and help students grasp subjects more effectively. Game-based learning helps students to learn through active experiences, as opposed to traditional techniques, which are frequently inert and uninteresting. Furthermore, the aspects of competition and challenge in games give additional incentives for students to continue learning and developing their skills (Anderson 2020). Game-based learning is highly effective in language learning because it can incorporate vocabulary and linguistic structures into real-world scenarios, allowing students to apply their knowledge in relevant contexts (Brown

et al., 2001). Educational games like Duolingo, Kahoot!, and Word Connect are becoming increasingly popular, indicating that educators and students are interested in this technique. As a result, game-based learning is viewed as one of the most promising approaches to addressing the issues of traditional learning and paving the way for more participatory and engaging education.

Word Connect was chosen as the subject of this study because it focuses on vocabulary acquisition. This game encourages players to construct English words from a limited set of letters, pushing them to memorize, recognize, and apply vocabulary knowledge in the context of problem solving. This method reinforces previously taught vocabulary while also introducing new words through repeated exposure. Furthermore, Word Connect uses a level system with gradually increasing complexity, similar to the scaffolding approach in language learning, to allow students to gradually acquire competency. This game's intuitive user interface, mobile device accessibility, and gamification aspects such as achievements, points, and constantly increasing difficulties make it incredibly entertaining and simple to use for middle school children. These traits make Word Connect a relevant and successful vocabulary acquisition medium, particularly in educational settings that value student engagement and motivation in utilizing Word Connect to acquire English vocabulary. This game provides a fun learning experience by mixing gaming components like word puzzles, challenge levels, and virtual awards. One of the most notable aspects of Word Connect is the word visualization, which helps students to connect words dynamically and learn their meanings and contexts effectively. Word Connect also offers a variety of

challenges, ranging from easy to challenging, with the goal of gradually improving students' skills. This game also gives players immediate feedback, allowing them to assess their mistakes and enhance their understanding in real time. This feature makes Word Connect a useful tool for increasing students' learning motivation, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, which is sometimes a barrier in language learning using traditional techniques. Previous research indicates that interactive games such as Word Connect can improve vocabulary recall by up to 40% compared to traditional techniques, owing to increased student involvement and a more individualized learning experience (Smith & Johnson, 2021). Furthermore, game-based approaches like this cater to the requirements of the digital generation, which is more responsive to interactive technology (Lee et al., 2020).

Although the Word Connect gaming application offers numerous benefits for vocabulary acquisition, it is not commonly known or used by students. This was confirmed by a preliminary survey conducted before to the main study, which questioned students if they had ever used the Word Connect application. The findings found that only 44% of respondents had utilized the English version of the game, while the majority (56%) claimed to having never used it in a learning setting. These findings show the disparity between the availability of potential digital vocabulary tools and their actual exposure or use by students. This also stresses the importance of investigating how students view this game when used as a learning resource. As a result, one of the primary goals for doing this research is to learn about students' opinions and experiences with Word Connect as a vocabulary learning medium.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the role of games in vocabulary acquisition. Wulandari (2021) discovered that playing games helps the brain become fresh while learning new terms. Yulianti (2024) exposed that games have the potential to be a tool for vocabulary acquisition since they increase student enjoyment of learning and enhance autonomous learning. Tumboimbela et al., (2024) revealed that board racing games had a significant impact on children's language acquisition. Hazizah et al., (2024) discovered that miming games assist kids acquire and internalize new words, resulting in a larger vocabulary. Qotrunnada et al., (2024) show that employing memrise games in vocabulary learning enhances students' vocabulary comprehension greatly. Dzulfikri (2016) found that app-based crossword games were both academically and emotionally beneficial. Cognitively, the game assists students in expanding their vocabulary and can considerably increase student enthusiasm in language learning, particularly vocabulary development. According to the findings of Wefi et al., (2023) crossword puzzle games have been shown to help students improve their vocabulary. Students in the Zakiyah et al., (2022) indicated that the Word Wall game may help them acquire particular vocabulary, that it allowed them to retain language more quickly and easily, and that it made them joyful when learning vocabulary because it was not tough.

However, although these findings provide insights into the effectiveness of gamification in language learning, they do not investigate specific impacts such as the advantages and challenges of using Word Connect on English vocabulary proficiency, and the uniqueness of Word Connect that requires further research,

especially from the students' perception. The uniqueness lies in the features present in Word Connect, such as thousands of levels with increasing difficulty and coins or rewards that can assist players when they encounter difficulties. Therefore, the aim of this research is to bridge this gap by investigating the extent to which Word Connect contributes to students' English vocabulary acquisition.

1.2 Research question

The background of the study raises the following research question:

1. How do students perceive toward Word Connect in their vocabulary acquisition?
2. How does Word Connect benefit students in acquiring vocabulary?
3. What challenges do students face in integrating Word Connect in acquiring vocabulary?

1.3 Research objectives

Related to the research question above, this study aims to:

1. To investigate how students perceive the use of Word Connect for vocabulary acquisition.
2. To identify the benefits of Word Connect for students in acquiring vocabulary.
3. To investigate the challenges faced by students in integrating Word Connect to acquire vocabulary.

1.4 Significance of the study

1.4.1 Theoretical significance

This study is theoretically noteworthy because it adds to the growing body of knowledge about the use of digital game-based apps for vocabulary acquisition. By concentrating on students' views, this study sheds light on Word Connect's position as a dynamic and engaging learning aid for improving vocabulary knowledge. The study's goal is to investigate how students perceive the benefits and obstacles of utilizing Word Connect in their learning process, offering information on its efficacy as a supplemental approach in modern language education. If the application proves successful, the findings are expected to motivate educators and curriculum creators to include comparable game-based learning aids into their instructional techniques. On the other hand, if difficulties are uncovered, the study can be used as a basis to resolve them and enhance the incorporation of gamified learning resources to better meet the requirements and preferences of students when learning vocabulary.

1.4.2 Practical significance

By investigating students' opinions regarding the usage of Word Connect for vocabulary learning, this study seeks to offer insightful information to teachers, especially those instructing English as a second language. The results of this study should help teachers successfully include Word Connect into their lesson plans by revealing how students view the advantages and difficulties of this gamified method. This study aims to further the field of language education by providing

useful suggestions for improving vocabulary acquisition using cutting-edge and entertaining resources such as Word Connect.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

The scope of this research is limited to eight grade students at junior high schools 3 Singosari. Especially those who have played the Word Connect game. As a limitation, this study focuses on the students' impressions of using Word Connect in acquiring their vocabulary, as well as the benefits and challenges that arise during the use of Word Connect. Another limitation of this study is the number of participants involved. Due to time constraints and the availability of students who had experience using the application, the sample size was relatively small. As a result, the findings may not represent the broader student population and should be interpreted within the context of this limited group. Furthermore, this study did not include classroom instruction or examine the incorporation of Word Connect into formal teaching procedures. As a result, the findings are primarily based on students' independent use and perceptions of the application outside of a structured classroom environment.

1.6 Definition of key terms

This section covers various key points related to the title. These phrases must be known by the readers because they relate to participant criteria and the scope of the research.

1. Games-Based Learning (GBL)

GBL is a pedagogical strategy that uses games to attain learning objectives. In the context of language learning, GBL employs gaming aspects to teach vocabulary, grammar, and speaking abilities (Gee, 2007). GBL games can be traditional games, digital games, or educational software that enable students to learn through interaction and challenges in a pleasant and engaging environment.

2. Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary acquisition is the process by which individuals learn, understand, and remember new words and their meanings. This process involves both explicit and implicit learning mechanisms, including repeated exposure, contextual use, and cognitive engagement. Effective vocabulary acquisition requires not only recognizing word forms but also the ability to use them appropriately in relevant contexts. One of the engaging tools that supports vocabulary acquisition is the Word Connect game. This mobile-based word puzzle game challenges users to form words from a set of scrambled letters, promoting both recall and recognition of vocabulary. Through repeated exposure and word construction in a playful setting, students can develop their word knowledge more naturally. Word Connect also encourages learners to think critically and enhances memory retention, making it a practical supplementary medium for vocabulary acquisition in language learning.

3. Word Connect

Word Connect is an app that helps you train your brain and learn new words while having fun. The game requires players to build words from scrambled letters, which improves vocabulary abilities, cognitive processing, and memory retention through interactive gameplay. Its gamified design encourages intrinsic motivation by adding levels, prizes, and progression, keeping users engaged and wanting to learn more (Johnson, 2018; Smith & Taylor, 2020). Furthermore, Word Connect is consistent with recent language learning theories that emphasize the value of active involvement and contextual learning in vocabulary development (Brown, 2017).

4. Benefits

Referring to the benefits or favourable effects that students experience when they use the Word Connect game application to learn new words. Increased learning motivation, vocabulary growth, improved learning efficiency, or a more pleasurable learning environment are a few examples. Benefits are determined in this study based on students' first-hand experiences with the application.

5. Challenges

Referring to the challenges or issues that students had when learning vocabulary with the Word Connect game application. These difficulties may be non-technical, such not understanding the features of the application, the difficulty of the game, or a mismatch with personal learning preferences, or they may be technical, like problems with the device or internet connection.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this section, the researcher describes the study's conclusion, and suggestions. The conclusion summarizes the key findings of students' perceptions of the Word Connect game in acquiring English vocabulary, emphasizing the educational benefits and problems encountered during its use. Meanwhile, the suggestions provide guidance for future study as well as practical tips for educators and developers seeking to improve the effectiveness of game-based vocabulary acquisition aids. These observations are intended to contribute to the continued development of creative, engaging, and student-centered methods to English language instruction.

6.1 Conclusions

In response to the first research question, the findings revealed that students generally had positive perceptions toward the use of Word Connect in their vocabulary acquisition. Regarding the second research question, Word Connect was found to be beneficial in various ways. It contributed to students' vocabulary acquisition by introducing new words in a repetitive and meaningful manner. The game also supported the cognitive skills such as word recognition, spelling, and logical thinking, as students were required to form words from scrambled letters. Furthermore, the students reported improved memory retention and increased awareness of word structures, especially for basic vocabulary used in daily contexts. As for the third research question, several challenges were noted by students during

the use of Word Connect. Some found it difficult to identify unfamiliar words or struggled when encountering vocabulary they had not previously learned. Others felt confused when multiple similar word options existed. In conclusion, the Word Connect application is perceived positively by students and proves to be a helpful tool in supporting vocabulary acquisition.

6.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher propose several suggestions for student, teacher, and future research:

6.2.1 Students

Students are recommended to take certain steps to maximize the benefits of digital learning tools such as the Word Connect application in acquiring their English vocabulary. To achieve this, several recommendations can be followed, 1) they are advised to engage with the application regularly and reflectively, paying attention to the discovery of new vocabulary, the recognition of word construction patterns, and the contextual themes presented within the game, 2) students should make it a consistent practice to consult dictionaries or rather reliable sources to understand the meanings and usage of unfamiliar words, which will help deepen their comprehension and promote the long-term retention and integration of new vocabulary into their general language use.

6.2.1 Teachers

Teachers are encouraged to use game apps such as Word Connect as an additional media for vocabulary acquisition. This application offers a contextual, visual, and interactive learning experience, making it an appealing choice for

students who are unmotivated by traditional approaches. Nonetheless, teachers continue to play a vital role in giving early direction and support, particularly for students with limited vocabulary skills, to ensure that the application is used effectively. To support this effort, several practical recommendations can be considered, 1) teachers should provide clear guidance and scaffolding during the initial stages of implementation, helping students navigate the application's features and set learning goals, 2) they are encouraged to promote collaborative learning by initiating class discussions about the new vocabulary encountered during gameplay, thereby fostering deeper understanding and meaningful interaction among students.

6.2.1 Future Research

Future research should investigate the use of game application such as Word Connect in broader context, including educational backgrounds, and changes in students' English proficiency levels. In order to expand current understanding and address existing gaps, several directions for future research are proposed, 1) future studies should examine the long-term impacts of using this game on students' vocabulary development by employing quasi-experimental or longitudinal methodologies to obtain more comprehensive data regarding its effectiveness over time, 2) researchers are encouraged to compare the efficiency of Word Connect with other digital vocabulary learning tools methodologies to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of each platform, 3) future research may also explore how game-based media influence students' learning motivation, vocabulary retention, and broader language competencies, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

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