

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Problem

English is one of the most widely spoken languages globally and is crucial for communication, education, and access to information in a rapidly globalizing world. English learning is one important subject of students in junior high school that is very important because it is the foundation for their future academic and professional success. Mastering English means that students have high proficiency that they already have the background knowledge (Armea et al., 2022).

Students' capacity to understand and remember new material is greatly influenced by their background knowledge when learning a language. Background knowledge refers to the information students already know about a particular subject, which helps them relate new concepts to existing mental frameworks. In English language learning, this knowledge includes vocabulary, grammar, cultural contexts, and prior experiences with language use. Students with stronger background knowledge can understand and apply new language concepts more easily, leading to better language acquisition outcomes (Green, 2023; McNamara).

This stage, students are expected having English skills according to the *Kurikulum Merdeka* standards. There are four stages are carried to improving student understanding in text-based approach, including the following: 1) Building Knowledge of Field (BKOF), 2) Text Modeling (MOT), 3) Joint Construction of Text (JCOT), 4) Independent Construction of Text (ICOT). Building Field Knowledge (BKOF) involves the teacher developing the students' background knowledge to understand the topic to be written about or discussed (BSKAP, 2022). This means that students must have background knowledge and then the teacher will play a role in enhancing this background knowledge. In addition, according to the Permendikbud (2022), one of the key goals in English language education is to equip students with the competencies necessary for real-world communication, such as fluency in speaking and writing, and the ability to understand and analyze texts. The student-centered approach of *Kurikulum Merdeka* also suggests that teachers should help activate and expand students'

existing knowledge to foster deeper understanding and enhance learning outcomes.

However, based on the results of observations in the preliminary study at SMP Negeri 7 Gunungsitoli revealed a significant difference between expectations and reality. There are several problems experienced by these students in learning English, namely: 1) Students have low background knowledge in English. 2) Low mastery of vocabulary. 3) Low achievement of English learning competencies; listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, stating.

According to constructivist theories of learning that emphasize the importance of construct new knowledge on prior understanding, highlighting the need for tools such as concept mapping to organize and connect information effectively (Efgivia et al., 2021). Novak and Cañas in Dwi & Hirashima (2022) emphasize that concept mapping is a powerful tool for facilitating meaningful learning by helping students organize and integrate new knowledge into their existing background knowledge. They argue that concept mapping serve as external representations of a learner's cognitive structure, enabling them to visualize relationships between concepts, which is crucial for effective learning. So, to overcome the problems above, there is a tool is needed to help mastering English learning especially to enhance English background knowledge.

There are several previous research implementation of using the concept mapping. (Prasetya et al., 2022) et al. (2022) emphasized the value of structured concept mapping strategy in enhancing both educational outcomes and student engagement in learning. Their study revealed that the experimental group achieved significantly better results in terms of proposition quality and structural mapping scores compared to the control group. Similarly (Trang, 2023) demonstrated that concept mapping is a promising pedagogical tool in EFL contexts, effectively improving reading comprehension, fostering positive attitudes toward learning, and developing critical thinking skills. By using concept mapping, students are encouraged to integrate their existing background knowledge with new information, forming a cohesive visual representation of their learning. Constructing these mapping enables students to identify

relationships between prior knowledge and newly acquired information within specific content areas.

Additionally, a study by Walden University (2019) explored the use of concept mapping in self-paced, digitally supported STEM learning environments. The findings addressed a gap in existing literature, highlighting concept mapping's potential to enhance student engagement and understanding, especially in distance learning settings. Zheng and Dahl (2020) further support the application of concept mapping as a technique to decrease cognitive load, enhance understanding, information retention, and knowledge transfer, and link new ideas with existing knowledge. Finally, (Obaid Ullah, 2021) found that concept mapping was highly effective in boosting academic performance among international students, demonstrating its usefulness as a strategy for active learning and improved pedagogical practices.

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of concept mapping in enhancing educational outcomes, student engagement, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills across various disciplines and learning environments. However, significant gaps remain regarding its application to develop English background knowledge, particularly for middle school students in rural contexts such as SMP Negeri 7 Gunungsitoli. Existing research has largely focused on general or advanced educational settings, leaving a lack of practical, scalable models tailored to students with limited English proficiency and constrained resources.

Furthermore, little attention has been given to integrate concept mapping techniques with Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum standards to address specific educational challenges in these contexts. This research aims to bridge these gaps by developing a context-specific concept mapping model that enhances students' English background knowledge, aligns with curriculum goals, and addresses the unique needs of rural learners, contributing to a more inclusive and effective pedagogical approach.

Research highlights the crucial role of background knowledge in language acquisition. According to VanPatten and Smith (2022), background knowledge allows learners to connect new language input with existing mental frameworks,

fostering deeper comprehension and retention. This underscores the importance of background knowledge in facilitating effective second-language learning process.

Ausubel (1963) argues that the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. His theory emphasizes the importance of connecting new knowledge to an individual's existing cognitive structure, which directly relates to the role of concept mapping in enhancing students' background knowledge. Concept mapping operationalizes this idea by helping students organize and visualize what they already know and how it relates to new concepts.

Based on literature study, there is an old version of the concept mapping product on students' English background knowledge developed based on stages by (Kripa, 2022) which includes three elements, namely, 1) meaning is conveyed through concept space, concept structures, such as hierarchies or cycles are clear, and relationships between concepts are explicit and purposeful. This model emphasizes the importance of organizing concepts in a way that enhances students' comprehension and retention of knowledge. Additionally, the structured representation of concepts allows students to establish meaningful connections, facilitating deeper understanding and critical thinking in language learning.

However, based on the theory stated by Novak in Silva (2021), focusing questions on the mapping concept is the most important and primary thing that aims to take background knowledge. In addition, in concept mapping, ordering these concepts from general (above) to specific (below) in a hierarchical structure is important. By integrating focused questions, students are encouraged to think critically and actively retrieve relevant knowledge, making the learning process more dynamic and meaningful.

According to research conducted by Rahmawati (2021), teachers must have effective teaching strategies in teaching English, especially in dealing with challenges related to differences in students' knowledge backgrounds. In line with Rahmawati's opinion, in research conducted by Setiawan (2021), it is important for teachers to integrate approaches that encourage students to think critically and independently, as well as provide constructive feedback that can increase their learning motivation.

Based on the problem above, researcher developing Concept Mapping as a strategy that must have the elements put forward by the experts above, especially focused questions to address this issue with research title **Developing Concept Mapping Strategy to Enhance Eight-Grade Students' English Background Knowledge at SMP Negeri 7 Gunungsitoli**. Through concept mapping allows students to organize and relate linguistic elements visually as their background knowledge, thereby strengthening their competence in English. This approach is expected to improve vocabulary retention and overall comprehension, while increasing confidence and participation in English learning.

1.2 Formulation of the Problem

In conducting this research, it is essential to define the specific issues that need to be addressed. The formulation of the problem serves as a guide in identifying the key aspects that require further investigation. Therefore, this section presents the research problems based on the background and previous discussions. The formulation of the problem as follows:

1. How is concept mapping strategy developed to enhance eighth-grade students' English background knowledge at SMP Negeri 7 Gunungsitoli? ?
2. What is the quality of the developed concept mapping strategy in terms of effectiveness?
3. What is the quality of the developed concept mapping in terms of feasibility?
4. What is the quality of the developed concept mapping in terms of practicality?

1.3 Objective of the Research

In line with the formulation of the problem, this research aims to achieve specific objectives that contribute to addressing the identified issues. The objectives serve as a guideline to ensure that the study remains focused and regularly structured. Therefore, this section outlines the objectives of the research as follows:

1. To develop the Concept Mapping Strategy in Student's English Background Knowledge
2. To examine the quality of the developed concept mapping strategy in terms of effectiveness?
3. To examine the quality of the developed concept mapping strategy in terms of feasibility?
4. To examine the quality of the developed concept mapping strategy in terms of practicality?

1.4 Product Specifications

This research focuses on the developing of concept mapping products on students' English knowledge background. The content of this product development adjusts the flow of English learning objectives for grade 8 of SMP Negeri 7 Gunungsitoli based on the Merdeka Curriculum used by the school. This following the specification of product:

1. User Target: 8th grade students at SMP Negeri 7 Gunungsitoli
2. Product title: Concept Mapping Stratetgy in Background Knowledge
3. The product developed is concept mapping as a strategy or English learning tool that contains material about background knowledge, concept mapping templates, and steps for making concept mapping.
4. Purpose:
 - To enhance students' English background knowledge by integrating concept mapping as strategy
 - To facilitate understanding and retention of linguistic, vocabulary and concepts in English.
 - To develop students' critical thinking
5. The initial prototype or old version of the concept mapping product on students' English language background knowledge was developed based on stages by (Kripa, 2022) which include 3 elements:
 - a) Meaning is conveyed by the spacing of concepts.
 - b) The structure of the concepts, such as a hierarchy or cycle is clear.
 - c) Connections between concepts are explicit and purposeful.

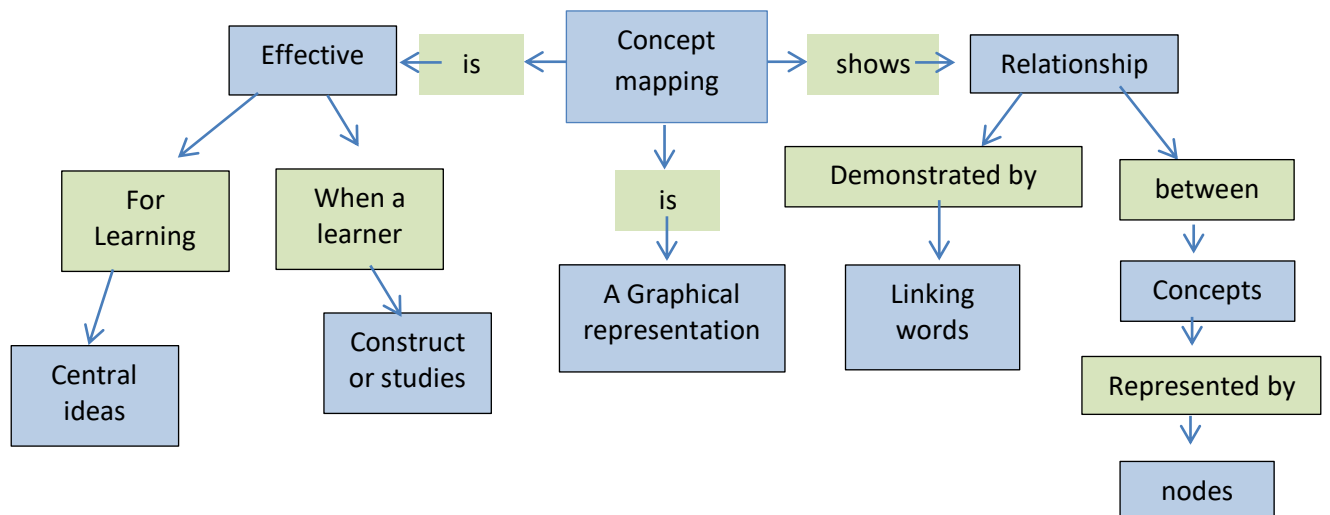


Figure 1.1 Initial Prototype of Concept Mapping by Kripa (2022)

7. The new version developed has 4 elements as follows:

- a) Focus questions to retrieving background knowledge
- b) Meaning is conveyed by the spacing of concepts.
- c) The structure of the concepts, such as a hierarchy or cycle is clear.
- d) Connect to new concepts that explicit and purposeful.

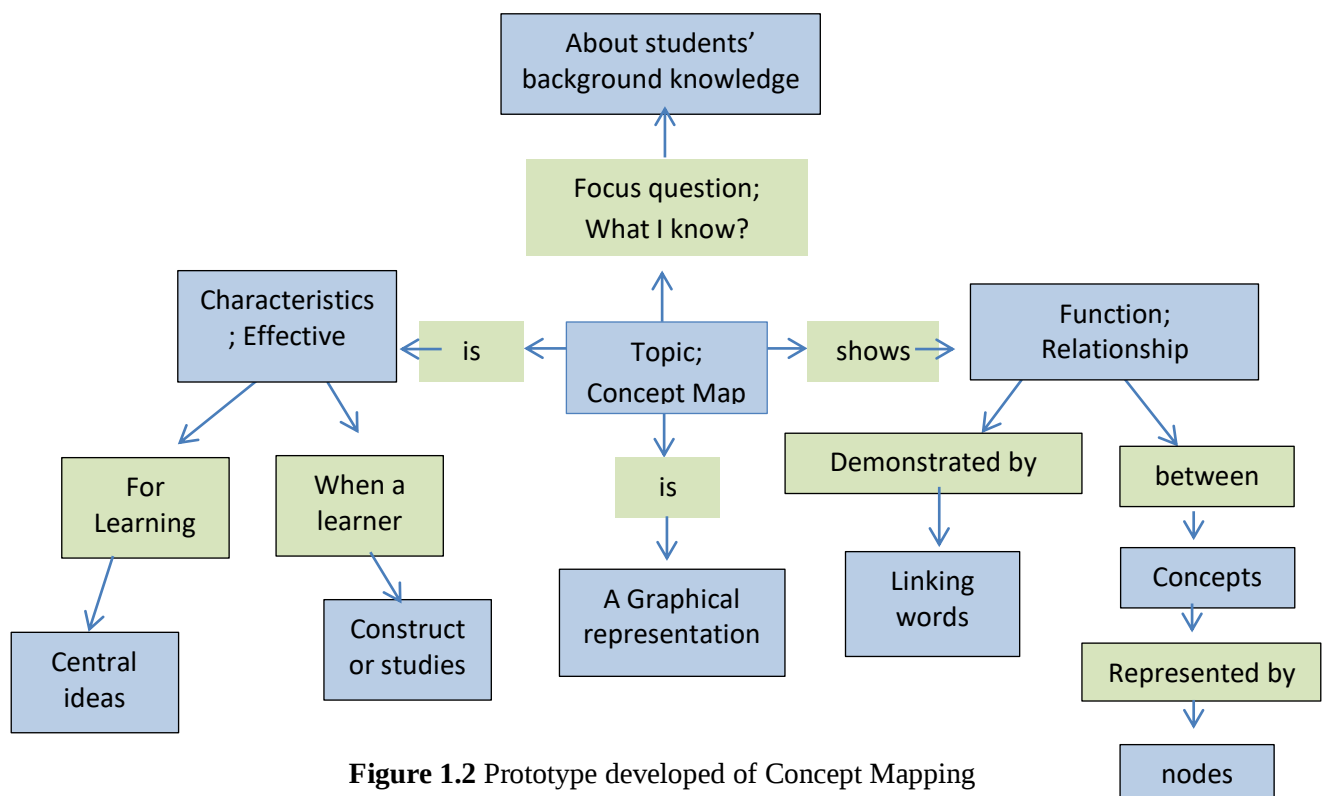


Figure 1.2 Prototype developed of Concept Mapping