



## Integrating English Games to Enhance Intrinsic Motivation in Young Learners' Classroom

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### Abstract

*This study investigated students' perception of the integrating English games to strengthen intrinsic motivation among young English learners in West Aceh. Using a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 27 fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 12 Meulaboh, followed by semi-structured interviews with six participants. The findings indicated that, in term of enjoyment, 100% of students reported that learning English through games was enjoyable and helped them understand the lessons more easily, while 92.5% felt more confident and motivated during the activities. Regarding interest, students showed strong engagement, with all respondents stating that games increased their focus, and over 96% agreeing that games reduced boredom and improved their confidence in responding to teachers' questions. The results also demonstrate a strong desire to continue learning English using games, as 100% agreed that games increased their liking for English, and more than 96% hoped for similar activities in future lessons. Additionally, students displayed high enthusiasm, with 96.2% feeling closer to their peers and more motivated to continue learning English, while 92.5% stated that games boosted their courage to speak without fear of mistakes.*

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini menginvestigasi persepsi siswa terhadap penerapan permainan Bahasa Inggris untuk memperkuat motivasi intrinsik pada pembelajar muda di Aceh Barat. Dengan menggunakan desain metode campuran sequential explanatory, data kuantitatif dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang diberikan kepada 27 siswa kelas V di SD Negeri 12 Meulaboh, kemudian dilanjutkan dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan enam partisipan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, dalam aspek kesenangan, 100% siswa melaporkan bahwa belajar Bahasa Inggris melalui permainan menyenangkan dan membantu mereka memahami pelajaran dengan lebih mudah, sementara 92,5% merasa lebih percaya diri dan termotivasi selama kegiatan berlangsung. Terkait minat, siswa menunjukkan keterlibatan yang kuat, dengan seluruh responden menyatakan bahwa permainan*



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*meningkatkan fokus mereka, dan lebih dari 96% menyatakan bahwa permainan mengurangi kebosanan dan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri mereka dalam merespons pertanyaan guru. Hasil penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa penerapan permainan dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris meningkatkan minat siswa terhadap Bahasa Inggris, dan lebih dari 96% berharap dapat melakukan kegiatan serupa pada pembelajaran di masa depan. Selain itu, siswa menunjukkan antusiasme yang tinggi, dengan 96,2% merasa lebih dekat dengan teman sebaya mereka dan lebih termotivasi untuk terus belajar Bahasa Inggris, sementara 92,5% menyatakan bahwa permainan meningkatkan keberanian mereka untuk berbicara tanpa takut membuat kesalahan.*

## Introduction

Motivation in learning is a crucial element that significantly influences both the quality of the learning process and its outcomes, particularly for young learners who possess distinct learning characteristics such as limited attention span, a strong need for movement, and a tendency to learn through enjoyable and experiential activities. Strong motivation encourages children to fully engage, participate actively, and demonstrate enthusiasm during lessons, including in English language learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In the field of educational psychology, learning motivation is typically divided into two primary categories: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation stems from an individual's internal inclination to participate in an activity, fueled by curiosity, personal interest, or a sense of psychological satisfaction derived from the activity itself, whereas extrinsic motivation is prompted by external incentives, such as rewards, grades, or societal expectations, which compel learners to engage not out of genuine interest but to meet specific demands (Nurishlah et al., 2023). This differentiation is vital for comprehending how students react to diverse educational tasks, particularly in the context of English language acquisition (Littlewood, n.d.).

Intrinsic motivation involves a natural urge to learn, where students derive enjoyment, engagement, or significance from the activity itself. When this type of motivation is present, learners often show greater involvement, sustain their efforts over time, and exhibit genuine excitement in the process without any coercion. This aspect is especially important for younger students, who frequently absorb material more efficiently through fun, hands-on experiences. Essentially, intrinsic motivation flourishes when the learning task is viewed as inherently pleasurable and gratifying (Valerio, 2012).

Moreover, intrinsic motivation is intimately linked to the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. As learners perceive themselves as capable, gain chances to exercise choice, and form meaningful bonds with classmates and instructors, their intrinsic drive tends to grow organically. In

English language education, activities that create positive emotional experiences such as physical movement, collaboration, creativity, and playful exploration can significantly strengthen students' intrinsic motivation, particularly for young learners (Asih & Halisiana, 2022).

Building on this idea, English games prove particularly potent in cultivating intrinsic motivation, as they deliver pleasurable, interactive, and empowering learning opportunities that draw students more deeply into the educational journey (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, incorporating English games yields numerous advantages for language acquisition. They establish a comfortable learning atmosphere, alleviate tension, and assist learners in concentrating on the subject matter. Research indicates that games can improve vocabulary retention, boost student involvement, and render classroom exercises more lively and appealing (Raihan et al., n.d.). By integrating visual aids, bodily motion, and collaborative exchanges, games allow younger students to assimilate linguistic ideas with greater ease (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Furthermore, games facilitate repeated encounters with linguistic input in a manner that avoids tedium, enabling learners to assimilate grammatical structures and vocabulary through purposeful reiteration. This enjoyable form of repetition bolsters memory consolidation and solidifies key language concepts. The integration of games into language instruction has been demonstrated to elevate motivation and facilitate deeper comprehension, as they enable educational content to be revisited within relevant and captivating frameworks (YolageldiLi & Arikan, n.d.). Consequently, English games are exceptionally well-suited for young learners, who thrive on tangible, participatory, and pleasurable educational encounters.

In the context of English language learning, educational games or English games have emerged as an effective method for enhancing student motivation. Numerous studies have shown that applying games in the classroom can create an enjoyable learning atmosphere, reduce anxiety, and increase students' confidence in using English (Cahya Susaniari & Santosa, 2024). They also assert that game-based learning can significantly enhance motivation, engagement, and learners' willingness to communicate in a foreign language. This demonstrates that games are not merely tools for entertainment but pedagogical components that contribute to improving learning quality.

Furthermore, English games have been widely recognized as effective tools for enhancing students' motivation and active participation in EFL classrooms, as these games offer meaningful challenges, rewards, and interactive learning experiences (Munawarah et al., 2024a). These findings are strengthened by Alotaibi, (2024) whose meta-analysis reveals that the use of games in early childhood enthusiasm for learning English, as such activities foster group interaction, collaboration, and active participation in task

completion (Sain & Nasrullah, 2021). Vocabulary-based games help young learners comprehend and retain new words more effectively because game-based methods are repetitive, enjoyable, and stimulating. The consistency of these findings confirms that the use of English games is a relevant approach aligned with learners' needs and contributes significantly to the development of motivation and language skills (Bakhsh, 2016).

Game-based learning a crucial role in fostering English language development among young learners, as it fosters meaningful, interactive, and pleasurable educational experiences that sustain student engagement. Studies indicate that incorporating English games can sustain learners' focus, boost involvement, and enable children to rehearse vocabulary and basic phrases within a relaxed, low-stress setting. Moreover, such games promote teamwork and authentic language application, rendering the learning journey more vibrant and in harmony with the demands of modern classrooms. Consequently, embedding English games into initial language instruction represents a potent strategy for enhancing motivation and elevating language acquisition results for young students (Ningsih, 2023).

Beyond enhancing motivation, games also positively contribute to the improvement of students' language abilities. (Munawarah et al., 2024b) highlight that games can improve learners' productive skills, such as speaking and writing, because they encourage confidence, collaboration, and the use of language in communicative situations. Thus, the combination of motivation, game-based learning, and the characteristics of young learners positions English games as an efficient and relevant instructional strategy for early-grade classrooms.

Despite the growing body of literature supporting the effectiveness of English games, most previous studies have focused on experimental outcomes or general classroom implementation, with limited attention to how young learners themselves perceive the use of English games and how these perceptions relate to their learning motivation in specific local school contexts. This gap highlights the need for context-based investigations that connect game-based instruction with students' motivational experiences.

Preliminary observations at SDN 12 Meulaboh revealed that English, which is taught as a local content subject, is still delivered using traditional methods that rely heavily on the textbook. Although the teacher works hard to explain the material, the lack of varied teaching resources makes the classroom atmosphere dull and repetitive. Because of this, many students appeared to lose interest and motivation during English lessons. This situation raises an important pedagogical problem: how instructional strategies can be redesigned to better support young learners' motivation and engagement in English learning.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on young learners' perceptions of English games in relation to intrinsic motivation, using a mixed-methods sequential explanatory approach in an Indonesian primary school setting. This study is expected to contribute empirical evidence and provide pedagogical implications for English teachers in designing motivating game-based learning activities.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the use of English games and to examine how such games influence their motivation to learn English at SDN 12 Meulaboh. To guide the investigation, the study addresses the following research question: How do students perceive the use of English games, and in what ways do these games influence their motivation to learn English?

## **Method**

The present investigation adopted a mixed-methods framework employing a sequential explanatory strategy. In the initial stage, quantitative data were gathered via a questionnaire, subsequently followed by the acquisition of qualitative data through interviews to elaborate on and reinforce the quantitative outcomes. This methodology was chosen to attain a thorough insight into learners' drive for acquiring English proficiency through activities centered on games (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The study took place at SD Negeri 12 Meulaboh from October 25 to November 15, 2025. Participants comprised 27 fifth-grade pupils, consisting of 11 boys and 16 girls. Beyond the questionnaire respondents, six students were deliberately chosen as interviewees to offer more profound insights into their survey replies.

Data were amassed employing two primary tools: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consists of four indicators: (1) enjoyment toward English learning, (2) interest in game-based learning activities, (3) desire to learn English, and (4) enthusiasm during learning activities, with each indicator containing five statements. Additionally, the semi-structured interviews encompassed 20 inquiries designed to delve into students' encounters, their viewpoints on game-based education, and the rationales behind their questionnaire feedback.

The questionnaire data were analyzed by referring directly to the established indicators, in which each item was classified and interpreted through the percentage of students' responses to identify trends in their learning motivation. Meanwhile, the interview results were transcribed and reviewed through thematic interpretation, allowing recurring statements to form supporting themes. These qualitative themes were then used to complement and deepen the understanding of the questionnaire findings, providing a stronger overall interpretation of students' motivation.

## Results and Discussion

### Result

#### A. Enjoyment toward English learning.

This indicator measures the degree of students' enjoyment during the process of learning English. Enjoyment is reflected through positive emotional responses such as feeling happy, relaxed, and comfortable when engaging in English learning activities. Five statement items were used to assess how far students perceive English lessons as enjoyable and pleasant learning experiences.

**Table 1.** Students' Enjoyment toward English Learning

No.	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1.	I enjoy learning English with games.	100%	0%
2.	The game makes me more enthusiastic about learning English.	100%	0%
3.	I find it easier to understand English lessons through games.	100%	0%
4.	I feel more confident speaking English after playing	92,5%	7,5%
5.	I try harder to understand the lessons while playing	92,5%	7,5%

Based on the results of the questionnaire, students demonstrated a very high level of enjoyment toward learning English through games. All respondents (100%) stated that they enjoyed learning English through games and felt more enthusiastic about the lesson when game-based activities were implemented. Additionally, 100% of students agreed that games helped them understand English lessons more easily, indicating that the learning atmosphere became more relaxed, interactive, and supportive for comprehension.

Furthermore, 92.5% of respondents reported increased confidence when speaking English after playing games, and the same percentage stated that they were more motivated to try harder in understanding the lesson while playing. Only 7.5% responded negatively to these two items, showing that resistance to game-based learning was minimal. Overall, these results strongly indicate that the implementation of games in English learning successfully fosters positive emotional engagement, increases motivation, and enhances students' comfort and confidence during the learning process.

#### B. Interest in Game-Based Learning Activities.

This indicator examines students' level of interest in learning English through game-based learning approaches. Interest is represented through their willingness to participate, curiosity, and active involvement during educational games. Five statement

items were developed to determine the extent to which games capture students' attention and stimulate learning motivation.

**Table 2.** Students' Interest in Learning English

No.	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1.	I focus more on paying attention to lessons when there are games.	100%	0%
2.	games keep me from getting bored quickly in class.	96,2%	3,8%
3.	I feel more confident answering the teacher's questions after playing.	96,2%	3,8%
4.	I remember English vocabulary faster after playing	92,5%	7,5%
5.	I am happy when I succeed in answering or winning in the game	100%	0%

The questionnaire results for this indicator reveal that students showed a strong level of interest in English learning when games were incorporated into classroom activities. All respondents (100%) reported that they were more focused and attentive during lessons involving games, indicating that game-based activities were effective in maintaining concentration and shaping active engagement. Furthermore, 96.2% of the students stated that games helped reduce boredom during class and made learning more enjoyable. A similar percentage also felt more confident in answering the teacher's questions after participating in game-based tasks, suggesting that games do not only increase interest but also encourage verbal participation.

In addition, 92.5% of the respondents agreed that they were able to remember English vocabulary more quickly after playing, and the same proportion expressed happiness when they succeeded in answering or winning a game. Only 3.8% to 7.5% of students responded negatively to some items, showing very minimal resistance to this learning method. Overall, these findings highlight that the use of games in English lessons plays a significant role in enhancing students' interest, sustaining their focus, and creating a more meaningful and enjoyable learning environment.

### **C. Desire to Learn English.**

This indicator focuses on students' internal desire or drive to learn English. The desire is reflected in their willingness to improve, consistent efforts to understand lessons, and persistence when facing learning challenges. Five statement items were provided to identify how strong students' intentions are to develop their English skills as part of their academic growth.

**Table 3.** Students' Desire to Continue Learning English Using Games

No.	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1.	I feel like learning time goes by quickly when there are games.	92,5%	7,5%
2.	I want to learn English more often by playing	96,2%	3,8%
3.	I like English more because of playing activities	100%	0%
4.	I feel games make learning easier	96,2%	3,8%
5.	I would like the teacher to use the game again in the next lesson.	96,2%	3,8%

The data for the third indicator illustrates that students possess a notably high desire to learn English when games are integrated into classroom activities. Most students (92.5%) reported that class time felt shorter and more enjoyable when games were used, which suggests that learning became more engaging and less tiring for them. Meanwhile, 96.2% stated that they would prefer to learn English more frequently through game-based activities. This response shows that games not only entertain, but also stimulate curiosity and motivate students to continue learning beyond routine classroom work.

The findings also reveal that all respondents (100%) enjoyed English more because of the game-based activities implemented during lessons. In addition, 96.2% of students agreed that games helped make the learning process easier to follow, and the same percentage expressed hope that similar activities would be used again in future lessons. Only a small proportion of students (3.8%) answered negatively, which indicates that resistance toward game-based learning was minimal. From these results, it is clear that games play a significant role in strengthening students' willingness to learn English by creating a learning environment that is enjoyable, motivating, and supportive of language development.

#### **D. Enthusiasm during Learning Activities.**

This indicator assesses the level of enthusiasm demonstrated by students during English learning activities. Enthusiasm is manifested through active participation, energetic responses, and positive engagement throughout instructional interaction. Five statement items were included to measure the intensity of students' enthusiasm while taking part in English classroom activities.

**Table 4.** Students' Enthusiasm in Learning English

No.	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1.	I feel closer to my friends when playing in English class	96,2%	3,8%
2.	I am more courageous in trying to speak English without fear of making mistakes.	92,5%	7,5%

3.	I became more interested in learning English at home after playing	85,1%	14,9%
4.	The game made me try to understand the meaning of English words myself	96,2%	3,8%
5.	learning by making me more motivated to continue learning English	96,2%	3,8%

The results of the fourth indicator show that students demonstrated strong enthusiasm throughout the learning process when English games were applied. A total of 96.2% of respondents felt closer to their classmates while playing, indicating that games also contributed to building social interaction and classroom bonding. In addition, 92.5% of students stated that they became more courageous in speaking English without worrying about making mistakes. This suggests that games help reduce anxiety, allowing students to practice the language more freely and confidently.

Another notable finding is that 85.1% of students reported increased interest in learning English at home after participating in game-based activities, which means that motivation continued beyond the classroom setting. Meanwhile, 96.2% agreed that the game encouraged them to discover the meaning of English vocabulary independently, and an equal percentage felt more motivated to keep learning English in the future. Only a small proportion of students (3.8%–14.9%) responded negatively, showing relatively low resistance toward this method. Overall, these results indicate that games foster not only enjoyment but also active enthusiasm, confidence, and sustained motivation in learning English.

### **E. Sense of Competence**

From data interview, the students felt more capable when learning through games. This sense of competence encouraged them to keep trying, even when the tasks were difficult.

- (1) "I could spell the word "cat" while playing, so I felt that I could do it." (Student 5)
- (2) "When I try it in the game, I feel more confident with my answer." (Student 3)
- (3) "I feel smart when I can win the game." (Student 2)

### **F. Social Connection and Peer Support**

The students enjoyed games because they felt closer to their classmates. This social connection did not appear explicitly in the questionnaire results. Games allowed them to cooperate, cheer for each other, and feel accepted in the group.

- (1) "When we play together, I feel closer to my friends." (Student 1)
- (2) "My friends help me when I make a mistake." (Student 6)
- (3) "When we play in a group, I feel braver." (Student 4)

## G. The Impact of Games on Understanding the Material

Most students explained that the games helped them understand the material in a more concrete and memorable way. Through activities such as the Spinner, Spelling Game, and Profession Game, the students felt they could recognize new vocabulary, spell words, and understand certain concepts more quickly.

- (1) "I only learned that 'tentara' means *soldier* from the game."
- (2) "When playing the spelling game, I could spell 'cat'."
- (3) "The game *spinner* helped me remember job names faster."

These findings showed that the students felt that games helped them understand the lessons more easily.

## Discussion

This study explored how English games influence young learners' motivation by examining enjoyment, interest, desire to learn, enthusiasm, competence, social connection, and understanding of the material. Overall, the findings show that game-based learning did not only entertain students but also created a learning environment where they felt motivated, confident, and emotionally comfortable. English games supported motivation in several ways at the same time, including emotional engagement, active participation, and social interaction.

The results related to enjoyment show that English games created a positive emotional atmosphere in the classroom. According to Self-Determination Theory, enjoyment is an important sign of intrinsic motivation because students participate in learning for personal satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The very high percentage of positive responses suggests that students did not see English lessons as stressful but as enjoyable experiences. This emotional comfort is important for young learners because they are strongly influenced by classroom feelings. When students feel relaxed, they are more willing to participate and communicate. Previous research also shows that enjoyable activities reduce anxiety and increase student participation in language learning (Cahya Susaniari & Santosa, 2024). The present study adds to this research by showing that enjoyment was connected to better understanding and stronger effort, not only fun.

Students' strong interest in game-based learning shows that games successfully captured their attention. Interest is linked to active engagement, where students feel curious and involved in the activity (Alotaibi, 2024). This is especially important for young learners who often lose focus quickly. The findings confirm earlier studies that interactive activities help maintain attention and prevent boredom (Raihan et al., n.d.). In this study, interest also increased students' confidence to answer questions. This means that attention, confidence, and participation worked together, creating a positive learning cycle.

The high desire to continue learning English through games indicates that students developed internal motivation. When learners want to repeat an activity voluntarily, it shows that learning is driven by personal interest, not only teacher instruction. Previous research states that games can support long-term engagement in learning (Ningsih, 2023), and this study supports that claim. Students looked forward to future English lessons, which suggests that games influenced their attitude toward learning itself, not just one lesson.

Enthusiasm during classroom activities shows that students felt emotionally safe while learning. A playful environment reduces fear of making mistakes and encourages students to try speaking English (Ahmed et al., 2022). Many students reported that they were more interested in learning English even at home after the games. This shows motivational transfer, where positive classroom experiences continue outside school. This is an important finding because it suggests that games can influence long-term learning behavior.

Interview data show that games increased students' sense of competence. Feeling capable is a key element of intrinsic motivation. When students succeeded in games, they believed they could perform well in English. Previous research explains that structured challenges in games help build self-confidence (Bakhsh, 2016). Students in this study described feeling "smart" after winning, which suggests that games supported positive academic identity. This early confidence may influence their future willingness to use English.

Social connection also appeared as an important motivational factor. Games helped students cooperate, support each other, and feel closer to their classmates. This matches the psychological need for relatedness described in motivation theory. Earlier studies report that cooperative games reduce anxiety and strengthen peer relationships (Sain & Nasrullah, 2021). In this study, peer support made students braver to speak English. The classroom became a safe social space where mistakes were accepted as part of learning.

Students also believed that games improved their understanding of the material. Games combine repetition, movement, and visual support, which are effective learning methods for children. Previous research confirms that playful repetition improves vocabulary memory (Ahmed et al., 2022). An important finding is that students recognized this benefit themselves. When learners understand why an activity helps them learn, they are more likely to value it and stay motivated.

Overall, English games acted as a complete motivational system that combined enjoyment, interest, competence, and social belonging. These elements supported each other and created a stable learning environment. This explains why motivation was high in all indicators. The study contributes to previous research by providing evidence from

an Indonesian primary school and by combining questionnaire and interview data to show students' real experiences. The findings suggest that game-based learning should be seen as an important teaching strategy, not only as extra classroom entertainment.

## Conclusion

Based on the research objectives, it can be concluded that the use of English games in English language learning positively influences the learning motivation of fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 12 Meulaboh. The integration of games creates an enjoyable and interactive learning environment that encourages students to participate actively, maintain focus, and show greater enthusiasm during English lessons. Through game-based activities, students demonstrate increased intrinsic motivation, as they engage in learning out of interest, enjoyment, and a sense of comfort rather than external pressure. This approach also helps build students' confidence in using English and supports their willingness to continue learning. Therefore, English games can be considered an effective and relevant instructional strategy for enhancing students' motivation in English language learning, particularly for young learners at the primary school level.

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