



Enhancing Students' Engagement in Learning English Through Non-Digital Gamification

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Abstract The study investigates the use of non-digital gamification in junior high school English learning, involving seven graders in Jambi Province. The research used Classroom Action Research and two cycles of gamification. Results showed that students found the learning process more interesting and stimulating, with engagement levels significantly increasing. The implementation of each cycle resulted in a 22.5% overall increase in engagement.

Keywords: Classroom Action Research; English Learning; Game, Non-Digital Gamification; Student Engagement.

Abstrak Penelitian ini menyelidiki penggunaan gamifikasi non-digital dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di sekolah menengah pertama, yang melibatkan tujuh siswa kelas tujuh di Provinsi Jambi. Penelitian ini menggunakan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas dan dua siklus gamifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa merasa proses pembelajaran menjadi lebih menarik dan menstimulasi, dengan tingkat keterlibatan yang meningkat secara signifikan. Implementasi setiap siklus menghasilkan peningkatan keterlibatan sebesar 22,5% secara keseluruhan.

Kata Kunci: Penelitian Tindakan Kelas; Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris; Game; Gamifikasi Non-Digital; Keterlibatan Siswa.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of students' engagement in the learning process cannot be underestimated. Research shows that students engagement constitutes crucial precondition of optimal learning (Cents-Boonstra et. al, 2020). When students are actively engaged in the learning process, they become more focused, invested, and motivated in their learning. It has been found that learner engagement contributes to successful learning performance (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Klem & Connell, 2004; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Chen, Law & Huang, 2023). In other words, students' active participation plays a vital role in enhancing learning effectiveness. Hence, implementing a learning approach that enables students to actively participate and maintain their interest will have a significant impact on their learning outcomes. By providing students with chances to actively participate and develop an interest in the learning process, they are motivated to engage in critical thinking and actively pursue knowledge and understanding. This method fosters a deeper level of understanding and proficiency in the specific subject of study.

Teachers should be able to motivate students to learn a language and maintain their interest by offering communicative activities that are enjoyable, non-threatening, and conducted in a group setting (Orlick,2006). These activities should be meaningful and challenging in order to engage students and help them have better learning outcomes (Anwer, 2019). However, in English language learning where instruction is predominantly conducted in a foreign language that students have not yet mastered, implementing active student engagement in the classroom poses a challenge for teachers. Based on the observation process conducted in seventh grade students of a Junior High School in Jambi Province during teaching training of pre-service teacher professional program (PPG Prajabatan), it was found that seventh-grade students who are at a beginner level and have minimal prior knowledge in English, often face challenges due to limited vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and comprehension skills. As a result, actively participating in and understanding the subject being taught becomes challenging for them.

Moreover, the issue arises not solely from the students themselves, but also from the English teacher's inability to create an engaging learning process in the

classroom. In a learning environment where the teacher predominates and students are indirectly encouraged to be passive learners, comprehending concepts becomes challenging for students. One example of such a passive learning process is the use of lecture-style teaching followed by students simply completing worksheets. Those make English learning uninteresting and students get less engaged in learning English.

It is essential for teachers to create a student-centred environment that fosters active participation (St. Onge & Eitel, 2017; Sanders & Wong, 2020). It is necessary to find an alternative to create an exciting way to engage students in the learning process. Games have great potential to enhance student engagement and involvement in English language learning. Everybody likes playing games of some sort. Gamified learning has a positive effect on student confidence (Sarah, 2018). According to Daul (2014), a game encompasses elements such as a story, rules, instructions on how players engage with the content and interact with others, and feedback. Additionally, games are seen as activities that entertain and bring enjoyment to students while using English. Furthermore, games offer benefits, such as increasing student motivation, as happy students can attain success by enhancing their knowledge and improving their performance. The games enhance the fun, raise students' motivation, and boost the students' participation while helping their autonomous learning (Kaya & Zagne, 2022). This implies that games have the potential to enhance high school students' active participation in the learning process, particularly in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class.

The use of game element design in non-gaming context, gamification, is increasingly being used to increase students' engagement and learning (Qiao et al, 2022). The utilization of non-digital gamification in the context with limited resources and technological equipment of English learning is considered to be a promising approach that teachers can use as one of their teaching strategies (Zainuddin and Keumala, 2021). The development of more inclusive and engaging pedagogies that exploit the ubiquitous availability of gaming technologies for inclusion in more traditional course delivery methods were suggested (Chugh and Turnbull, 2023). Student engagement may look different

in each classroom and in each lesson, but fundamentally, it always involves the same principle – students wanting (and being able) to learn (Tatum, 2019).

By integrating the content of the learning topic with fun activities like games, teachers aim to enhance students' engagement, foster their language skills development, and improve overall learning outcomes. This strategy is believed to create a language learning style that can increase student's participation but at the same time is also fun for the students. Playing games is a classic method to activate the students thought and engage them in the topic (Nurnberger-Haag, 2023; Buckley, 2023). It is worth further improving the non-digital gamification approach in school settings, such as a junior high school where researcher taught. This approach is cost-effective and can be transferred between classrooms. Therefore, the researchers chose non-digital gamification as an intervention to enhance students' engagement in English learning.

METHOD

This research was conducted by using a classroom action research method. According to Sagor (2004) and Clark, Porath, Thiele, & Jobe (2020) classroom action research is an approach to research conducted by teachers and school teams to improve their teaching practices within the classroom directly. This method was regarded appropriate because the purpose of this study was to enhance student's engagement.

The research method involves systematic steps and collaborative processes to solve specific issues teachers found in the classroom in order to enhance students' learning process and achieve desired learning outcomes. According to Mills (2011) there are four steps in action research, those are planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The method involves action, evaluation, and reflection (Clark, Porath, Thiele, & Jobe; 2020), Moreover, the data used for this research are both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data were obtained based on students' learning outcomes in each particular activity or topic in the form of students' worksheets, meanwhile the qualitative data were obtained from the result of the observation instrument.

This study was conducted in VII C class in a state junior high school in Jambi province, Indonesia. There were 32 students in the population and 10 students were chosen purposively as the sample of low achiever students that during the teaching and learning observation phase showed lack of engagement. The researcher used the sample by considering their learning outcomes and activeness in the classroom.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings explain the entire process of the research including the observation and interview process, implementation of the study and the result of the study. Based on the observation result conducted in one of the middle schools in Jambi Province, it is found that there are several issues during the English learning process in the observed class. The identified issues include the following aspects: firstly, a noticeable lack of engagement and active participation in the learning activities; secondly, an evident gap in the students' proficiency levels in basic English, leading to a situation where students with a higher proficiency levels tend to be more engaged than those with lower proficiency level; and thirdly, a lack of self-confidence among students with lower proficiency levels, hindering their active engagement in the learning process due to their limited comprehension of the explanation by using English, consequently fostering fear of making mistakes.

Before implementing the strategy, the researchers collected data on student engagement and involvement in the classroom, considering four aspects: preparedness for learning, attentiveness to teacher explanations, active participation in asking and answering questions during instructional activities, and responsiveness to assignments. The engagement of the students can be described quantitatively as follows:

Table 1. Students' Engagement Average Percentage

Aspects	Percentage
Students preparedness	59.4
Students attentiveness	53.1
Participation during learning process	47.6
Responsiveness to assignment	59.3
Average	54.8

The data were collected by using an observation sheet with a scale from 1 to 4 to measure students' engagement on these four aspects. The result shows only 54,8% of the total students were engaged in the classroom with aspects of participation during the learning process as the lowest percentage.

The observation result was confirmed by interviewing the teacher and students. Students with lower proficiency levels acknowledged that they struggle to understand the questions posed by the teacher or grasp the overall lesson due to their limited understanding of the English language used by the teacher. Furthermore, these students expressed fear of actively engaging and participating due to their very low language abilities and their lack of prior exposure to English language learning, which makes it challenging for them to keep up with the classroom lessons. Additionally, teachers stated that the instructional methods implemented in the classroom align with the strategies and approaches recommended in the Merdeka curriculum, where English is recommended to be used extensively during lessons, employing a student-centred approach that empowers students to actively engage in the classroom. However, in achieving these objectives, teachers face several challenges, such as the low engagement and proficiency of the students, primarily because the majority of the students in the classroom have never learned English subject in elementary school, resulting in their limited knowledge of English

Therefore, teachers must make extra efforts to explain the lessons in the classroom. Another contributing factor to this passivity and low proficiency, as mentioned by the teachers interviewed, is the previous implementation of online learning systems for nearly two years during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has caused students to become accustomed to passive participation in online teaching and learning through digital media platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, or Google Classroom.

However, the interview revealed that not all students feel pressured; some students also show interest in learning English. When asked about their expectations for English language learning, students expressed a desire for a more enjoyable classroom experience, as they believe it would enhance their understanding of the subject. One of the suggested methods to make the learning

experience more enjoyable is through games. Therefore, based on the observations and interviews, the researchers determined to design an English language learning strategy that accommodates the need for enjoyable learning and facilitates active student engagement, regardless of their diverse abilities. The implemented learning strategy in the classroom involved using games that were integrated with the lesson topics.

Incorporating games into the classroom is a highly effective method for English language instruction (Kamra (2010); Anisa, Marmanto & Supriyadi (2020). This approach significantly influences students' motivation to learn, as games are considered to be enjoyable and provide a sense of pleasure and immersion during the learning process. In the context of English language learning, there are numerous game models that can be implemented within the classroom. For this study, the researcher utilized a range of non-digital games including Guessing Game and Simon Says.

Cycle 1

In the first cycle, the planning phase involved using the Guessing Game on the topic of Prepositions and Things at Home because they are interconnected. Guessing game is an activity in which the player withholds an information and demonstrates it by miming the information while the other tries to guess it (Hadfield, 2005; Klimova, 2015). This game is considered to be an effective way to enhance students' engagement as this game includes interaction between individuals or groups to work together in achieving something (Harmer 2001). The guessing game was played as a group activity after the class discussion about preposition topics were done in order to implement students' understanding of the topic.

In implementing this game, the students were divided into group consisting of 5-6 students and a student with higher proficiency level was chosen to be the player that described the object by making a gesture of miming. The player can describe its appearance, function, location, or any other relevant details. Before the game started, the researcher determines the category or theme of objects that will be used in the game, such as things found in the kitchen, bedroom, living room, or any other area of the home. The researcher assigned

points for each correct guess or track the number of rounds each player successfully guessed the object. This adds a competitive element to the game.

During the implementation phase, students showed an enthusiastic attitude towards the game and actively participated to guess the gesture of the player. However, from the observations and notes taken, low-proficiency students were not fully engaged as the game was dominated by high-proficiency students who were quicker at guessing and understanding instructions. This is due to the fact that high proficiency students have more prior knowledge of English to gather related information of what they already known (Brod, 2021) and this leads to them having more confidence at guessing. On the other hand, low proficiency students acknowledge that they find it difficult to guess as quickly as the high proficiency students. Students with lower proficiency levels may be reluctant to ask questions or provide answers during the guessing game due to its fast pace, which offered limited opportunities for them to participate actively and seek clarification. In terms of students' attentiveness, some students did not fully pay attention to the process as the researcher noticed the lack of involvement of some students during the group discussion about the topic. The result from teacher's observation scale document was below 75 %.

Table 2 Observation result of cycle I

Aspects	Percentage
Students preparedness	67.9
Students attentiveness	68.7
Participation during learning process	61.7
Responsiveness to assignment	72.6
Average	67.7

Although the students have not yet fully demonstrated improvement in their participation in asking and answering questions, the researcher observed an increase in their engagement of other aspects during the learning process. This was evident in their willingness to complete the tasks given at the end of the lesson and their proactive initiative to seek guidance from the teacher in order to complete the tasks. Based on increasing engagement results of cycle 1, it can be concluded that implementing topic-related games have a positive impact on

students' engagement. However, it has not significantly improved the overall aspect of engagements.

After carrying out those phases, the researcher analyzed the results of cycle one and identified several things that should be improved in implementing the game as part of classroom activities. Since the first cycle, it has been shown that many students were still not giving their contribution in English class. Even though the students who attended the learning process had done their task well, the students who focused and paid attention to the teacher during the learning process were still low. In addition, when it comes to their confidence and passion for participating in classroom activities, the researcher found they had not reached the target that had been set.

Therefore, the researcher concluded that there should be some upgrade or improvement of the gamification that would be carried out in the second cycle. The improvements including; creating a lesson plan that integrating a related game for imperative sentences topic for the next cycle; developing a clear instruction yet easy to understand by the students; teaching the students in slower pace so the low proficiency students do not encounter difficulties in keeping up with the learning process and give them chance to be more engaged; modifying the game in a way that can give opportunity for low proficiency students to be able to participate and show their ability individually without being overshadowed by the high proficiency students.

Cycle II

In the second cycle, the revised planning phase involved using the Simon Says Game on the topic of Imperative Sentences. Simon Says game is suitable for teaching imperative sentences as it provides clear instructions, encourages active engagement, offers contextualized learning, allows for repetition and reinforcement, and creates an enjoyable learning experience. In this game, student in charge gives instructions to the class, but the instructions are only followed when they start with the phrase "Simon says." For example, if the leader says, "Simon says touch your table!" the students touch the table. But if the leader says, "Jump!" without saying "Simon says," the students don't jump. The researcher changed the strategy of implementing this game. The strategy shifted

from group activities to individual activities to enhance the participation of low-proficiency students. Additionally, the game format was also changed from a competitive setting to a demonstration format, aiming to build the students' understanding of imperative sentences used in the Simon Says game.

During the implementation phase, the learning process began with a video presentation on imperative sentences. Students were engaged in discussions related to images depicting prohibitions and suggestions found in examples provided in the textbook. The researcher utilized the discussed images and sentences as a reference for the Simon Says game. The researcher acted as the leader or player, giving instructions while the students demonstrated the prohibitions and suggestions that had to be followed. The game was repeated with different instructions. This repetition aimed to reinforce the students' understanding of imperative sentence structures and expose them to a variety of relevant examples. Through repeated gameplay, the students had more opportunities to practice and internalize the use of imperative sentences.

Based on the observation of this implementation, the researcher found that students showed a more enthusiastic attitude towards this game since the focus of this game is not to compete but to deepen their understanding of the topic. Furthermore, both high-proficiency and low-proficiency students expressed greater enjoyment and fun while participating in this game. To confirm the result of the observation, the researcher interviewed the students about their thoughts on game implementation in their class.

Ten samples of students represent low proficiency students and high proficiency students. These students agreed that this kind of game helped them to understand the topic better. This finding is aligned with Giannakos's (2013) argument that learners reflecting high enjoyment are more likely to acquire knowledge through the game. In summary, research evidence shows that integrating games to a suitable topic has an impact on students' engagement in the learning process. The observation result can be seen through the table below.

Table 3 Observation result of cycle II 77.3Aspects

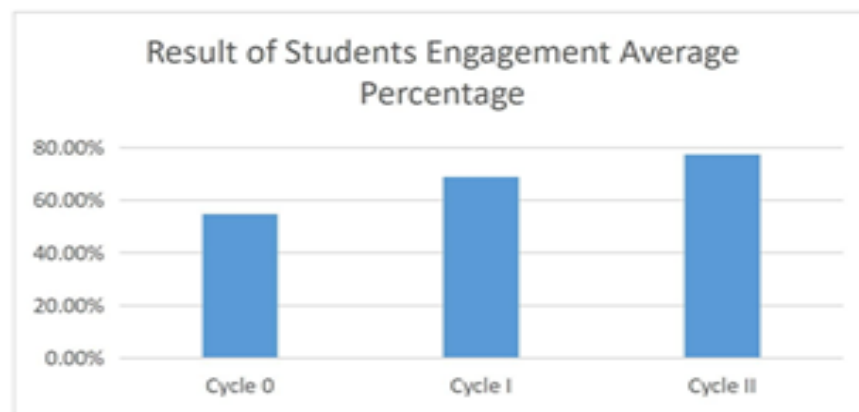
Average	Percentage
Students preparedness	77.3
Students attentiveness	78.9
Participation during learning process	76.5

Responsiveness to assignment	75.7
Average	77.3

The result above explains that integrating Simon Says game into the learning imperative sentences process enhanced the student's engagement in the classroom. Simon says game which are less competitive give more chances to students, especially the low proficiency students to keep up with the pace of the activity. Moreover, this game required students' attentiveness to the teacher's instructions so they could comprehend the teacher's words. Therefore, it explains the increase of students' attentiveness and participation during the learning process that the engagement percentage in this aspect almost reached 79%. It also found that the classroom environment became more conducive and less noisy.

During the game activity students showed an engagement in the classroom not only by asking or giving answers but also assisting each other as they progressed through the game. Those students with low proficiency can engage better with the help of high proficiency students through game assisting. The implementation of individual games that emphasize on demonstrating instead of competing was concluded to be able to make students more engaged in the lesson and give more chances for low proficiency students to involve themselves in the activity. The reason for this, according to the interview result, was students' pressure-free learning atmosphere as the result of integrating a relevant game into the lesson. It provided space for students to learn in a fun way and at a proper pace especially for students with low proficiency.

Table 4 Average Percentage of Students engagement



The chart above shows the comparison between the result of students' initial engagement percentage with the result of the other two cycles. The progression showed that student engagement presentation consistently shows improvement after two cycles of follow-up action research in enhancing the engagement of students with diverse abilities in English language learning through topic-related games implementations.

Throughout the research, it was observed that the implementation strategies applied were effective in promoting active student engagement. The activities and interventions implemented focused on creating an enjoyable and practical learning environment where students felt motivated to participate actively and understand the topic in a less pressure way. This was particularly important for students with varying levels of proficiency in English especially in middle school.

The results of the two cycles indicated a positive trend in the students' level of engagement. Initially, there have been variations in the level of participation among students with different abilities for various reasons such as students' prior knowledge, motivation, confidence, and experiences. However, with the implementation of non-digital gamification as the strategies, there was a noticeable improvement in the overall engagement levels of all students.

In summary, the implementation of topic-related games allowed students to connect the learning material to their own experiences. Therefore, it fostered an interest among the students, leading to increase active engagement. The use of interactive games also provided opportunities for students to express themselves, showcase their understanding of the topic and collaborate with peers.

CONCLUSION

The results of the two cycles of follow-up action research demonstrate a significant improvement in the level of student engagement among learners with diverse abilities in English language learning at one of junior high school in Jambi province. The implementation of non-digital gamification strategies and interventions has enhanced their active participation and involvement in the classroom. The improvement observed in student engagement not only positively impacted their language learning experience but also contributed to a

more conducive and focused classroom atmosphere. With increased attention to instruction and a greater emphasis on active participation, the noise level in the classroom decreased, enhancing the overall learning environment. Lastly, it is essential to continue exploring the long-term effects of using non-digital gamification in English classrooms. This can involve a larger sample size and a longer observation period to gather more comprehensive data.

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