

Engaging Students With Game-Based Learning: A Case Study of English Motivation at The Fifth Grade Students of SD Islam Al-Azhar 51 Kota Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the limited research on the use of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in supporting English motivation and engagement at the elementary school level. It aims to investigate how the implementation of GBL supports students' learning motivation and the factors influencing their engagement. A mixed-method design was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches involving 29 fifth-grade students at SD Islam Al Azhar 51 Kota Bengkulu. The findings indicate that the implementation of GBL supports students' motivation in learning English, as reflected in their enthusiasm, attention, and active participation through interactive games, collaborative activities, and teacher guidance. In addition, students' engagement in GBL-based learning is influenced by internal factors such as enjoyment, interest, self-confidence, and awareness of the importance of English, as well as external factors including the types of games used, their alignment with lesson content, teacher strategies, peer collaboration, and the overall classroom environment. These elements together contribute to a dynamic, student-centered environment that strengthens positive attitudes toward English learning.

Keywords: *Game-Based Learning, motivation, engagement, English learning*

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INTRODUCTION

Motivation is a key factor in language learning as it drives effort, sustains enthusiasm, and enhances learning effectiveness (Irkinovich, 2021; Bosch & Spinath, 2023). Without motivation, students tend to become passive, easily bored, and struggle to achieve optimal outcomes, while high motivation makes the learning process more meaningful and enjoyable (Schweder & Raufelder, 2024). For this reason, motivation is often regarded as a central determinant of success in language acquisition.

Previous studies have highlighted the significant role of motivation in English language learning. Factors such as learning strategies, teacher leadership, technology integration, and interaction with native speakers have been shown to influence students' motivation (Soto et al., 2025; Igwe & Ligaya, 2025; Teng & Wu, 2024). In addition, innovative pedagogical approaches such as gamification have been found to increase student engagement and positively impact academic

achievement (Huseinović, 2024). However, most of these studies have been conducted in higher education contexts, while research on motivation at the elementary school level remains limited, particularly regarding the use of *game-based learning* approaches.

Preliminary observations at SD Islam Al-Azhar 51 Kota Bengkulu revealed that conventional teaching methods often reduce students' motivation. Many students appeared passive, easily lost focus, and merely followed instructions with minimal interaction. In contrast, when lessons involved games, collaborative activities, or interactive media, students demonstrated higher enthusiasm, active participation, and better understanding of the material. Interviews with students further confirmed that activities such as word guessing, singing, role-playing, and the use of visual aids were perceived as the most enjoyable and effective learning experiences.

These findings highlight the urgency of exploring the integration of game-based learning in elementary English education. By addressing the gap between traditional methods and the needs of young learners, this study seeks to demonstrate how game elements can create more engaging and interactive learning environments, thereby enhancing both motivation and learning experiences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a case study design with a mixed-methods approach to examine the influence of game-based learning on students' motivation in learning English. The case study design was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore a specific phenomenon in a real-life educational setting with clear boundaries of time and activity. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, the study seeks not only to capture measurable outcomes but also to understand the perceptions, experiences, and classroom dynamics related to the implementation of game-based learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The population of this research includes all fifth-grade students at SD Islam Al-Azhar 51 Kota Bengkulu, totaling 88 students across three classes: Shafa, Marwah, and Mekkah. From this population, the sample was determined using a purposive sampling technique, selecting class Marwah as the subject of the study. This class was chosen because of its relatively balanced gender distribution and the higher number of students (29 in total), which provides richer data for analysis. In addition, preliminary observations suggested that students in this class displayed varied levels of participation in English learning, making it suitable for exploring how game-based learning can enhance motivation across different learner profiles.

Data were collected through four primary instruments: questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The questionnaire, developed using a Likert scale, was designed to measure students' motivation and engagement in English learning. Semi-structured interviews with students and teachers were conducted to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions of game-based learning. Classroom observations and field notes were used to record real-time interactions, enthusiasm, and participation during learning activities. Documentation, including lesson plans, photos, and supporting materials, was also collected to provide additional evidence and strengthen data triangulation.

The process of data collection was carried out systematically in several steps: initial classroom observations to understand the context, distribution of motivation questionnaires after the learning sessions, interviews with selected students and teachers, and documentation of classroom activities. These multiple instruments ensured that the research findings would be comprehensive and credible.

Data analysis was conducted through both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate frequencies, percentages, and overall trends in motivation levels. Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed thematically by applying coding, categorization, and

interpretation to identify recurring themes and patterns. Following Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) approach, the qualitative analysis emphasized an iterative and reflective process, ensuring that the researcher captured both the observable classroom dynamics and the underlying factors influencing students' motivation.

RESULTS

The implementation of game-based learning in English classes for fifth-grade students at SD Islam Al-Azhar 51 Kota Bengkulu was analyzed to examine both the effect on students' motivation and engagement, as well as the factors influencing their engagement. This approach aimed to enhance students' motivation by integrating fun game elements with English lesson materials while also creating a supportive classroom environment that encourages active participation. Students' engagement was influenced by internal factors such as enjoyment, motivation, self-confidence, and awareness of the importance of learning English, as well as external factors including the types of games, alignment with lesson materials, peer collaboration, classroom conduciveness, and teacher strategies in managing game-based learning activities.

Table 1. Observation on Student Motivation and Engagement

Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Score (1–4)
Student Learning Motivation	Enthusiasm while playing games	4
	Excited to complete tasks through games	4
	Interest in material	4
Student Engagement	Actively answer/ask questions	3
	Collaborate with peers	4
	Remain focused	4
Implementation of GBL	Teacher explains game rules	4
	Students follow rules	4
	Game tools/media available	4
Supporting/Inhibiting Factors	Student responses to teacher instructions	3
	Classroom conduciveness	4

Interviews with the teacher revealed that games were not used in every lesson but introduced when the classroom atmosphere became less engaging. The teacher explained that games such as Class of Champions (CoC), Scrabble, and Cambridge digital activities were adapted to English materials to maintain focus on learning objectives. Students responded positively to game-based learning, showing enthusiasm, motivation, and eagerness to participate. The teacher emphasized that game-based learning improved participation, collaboration, and made lessons more efficient.

Table 2. Teacher Interview

No.	Cycle	Question/Answer
1.	<i>Q1</i>	What types of games do you usually use in English language learning?
	<i>A1</i>	I don't use games very often. However, when the classroom atmosphere becomes monotonous or students seem bored, I implement games. I

		usually use the currently popular Class of Champions (CoC) game, as well as Scrabble to expand vocabulary. Additionally, in the Cambridge curriculum we use, there is a digital book containing many games accessible to both teachers and students.
2	<i>Q2</i>	How do you implement game-based learning in English language teaching in the classroom?
	<i>A2</i>	I implement it when the classroom atmosphere lacks enthusiasm. Games like CoC are adapted to English language materials so students can learn while playing.
3	<i>Q3</i>	How do students respond when participating in game-based learning activities?
	<i>A3</i>	The majority of students respond positively. Since they are already familiar with CoC, they feel enthusiastic and motivated to participate in the learning.
4	<i>Q4</i>	Is there a noticeable increase in student enthusiasm when game-based methods are used?
	<i>A4</i>	Yes, it is clearly visible. When game-based methods are used, students become more excited and actively engaged in the learning process.
5	<i>Q5</i>	To what extent do you think game-based learning affects students' motivation?
	<i>A5</i>	In my opinion, this method significantly affects students' motivation. They feel happy, the learning atmosphere becomes more enjoyable, and thus students become more enthusiastic about learning.
6	<i>Q6</i>	What indicates that students become more interested in learning English after using the game-based approach?
	<i>A6</i>	The indicators include increased enthusiasm and motivation among students. They understand the taught material more quickly and find learning English enjoyable.
7	<i>Q7</i>	How is the level of student participation during game-based learning activities?
	<i>A7</i>	Almost all students participate actively. Since game-based learning is student-centered, students are directly involved in the learning process.
8	<i>Q8</i>	Do students appear more active and cooperative during game sessions compared to conventional methods?
	<i>A8</i>	Yes, students are more active and cooperative. In group games, they help each other to win the game.
9.	<i>Q9</i>	What factors, in your opinion, make students more interested in participating in learning using this method?
	<i>A9</i>	Children generally enjoy playing. When learning is packaged in the form of a game, they feel more engaged and not only play but also learn.
10.	<i>Q10</i>	Have you ever encountered any difficulties in implementing game-based learning in the classroom?
	<i>A10</i>	The challenges include the time required to design games and align them with the material. In addition, forming heterogeneous groups is necessary so that all students can participate. Differences in students' interest in types

		of games also pose a challenge.
11.	<i>Q11</i>	In your opinion, what are the main benefits of using game-based learning in the classroom?
	<i>A11</i>	The benefits include making the learning atmosphere more enjoyable, increasing students' interest in English, and encouraging active student participation. However, not all materials are suitable to be turned into games.
12.	<i>Q12</i>	Do you have any suggestions to make the use of games in learning more effective?
	<i>A12</i>	Teachers need to follow current popular game trends and find game references that align with the material. Integrating games that are relevant to the learning content will make students more interested and engaged.

Students' interviews further confirmed that game-based learning made English lessons enjoyable and interactive. Students reported higher enthusiasm, increased motivation, more confidence in answering questions, and better collaboration with peers during games. Most students preferred games such as CoC and Math-related ice-breaking games. Some noted that limited time, fear of making mistakes, or shyness could slightly reduce motivation, but these factors rarely hindered engagement.

Table 2. Student Interview

No	Cycle	Question/Answer
1	<i>Q1</i>	Do you like learning English when it is integrated with games?
	<i>S1</i>	Yes, I really like it because it feels fun.
	<i>S2</i>	Yes, I really like it because it's fun and enjoyable.
	<i>S3</i>	Yes, I like it, because it's fun.
	<i>S4</i>	I like it a lot, because it's fun.
	<i>S5</i>	I really like it.
2	<i>Q2</i>	Of all the games you have played in class, which one do you prefer the most?
	<i>S1</i>	I like the game Class of Champions (CoC) the most.
	<i>S2</i>	I like Class of Champions (CoC) the most, because I think it's something new.
	<i>S3</i>	I like a Math game the most, but I forgot the name. It's like rock-paper-scissors then multiplied.
	<i>S4</i>	Yes, like ice breaking to practice focus.
	<i>S5</i>	The one we played yesterday, CoC, to strengthen memorization.
3	<i>Q3</i>	How do you feel when the teacher incorporates games during the lesson?

	<i>S1</i>	I feel happy, because it becomes more fun.
	<i>S2</i>	I feel really happy when the teacher asks us to play.
	<i>S3</i>	I feel happy, because there's entertainment and it's not boring.
	<i>S4</i>	Very happy.
	<i>S5</i>	Very happy.
4	<i>Q4</i>	Do you feel more motivated to learn when games are included in the lesson?
	<i>S1</i>	Yes, I become more enthusiastic.
	<i>S2</i>	Yes, I become more enthusiastic, because it's fun and easier to understand.
	<i>S3</i>	Not really.
	<i>S4</i>	It makes me closer with my friends.
	<i>S5</i>	Just fun.
5	<i>Q5</i>	In your opinion, does the use of games in learning make the lesson more engaging? Why?
	<i>S1</i>	Yes, because the atmosphere becomes more enjoyable.
	<i>S2</i>	Yes, more interesting.
	<i>S3</i>	No, because if we keep playing games, we don't focus on learning.
	<i>S4</i>	Yes, learning becomes more fun.
	<i>S5</i>	Learning becomes enjoyable and exciting.
6	<i>Q6</i>	When games are applied in class, do you feel more confident to answer or participate in the learning activities?
	<i>S1</i>	Yes, I become braver and like it more when there are games.
	<i>S2</i>	Yes, I feel it's easier to answer.
	<i>S3</i>	Yes, I become braver to answer, because if I rarely answer, I get punished.
	<i>S4</i>	Yes, I'm braver to answer, because the teacher rarely gets angry when I'm wrong.
	<i>S5</i>	Yes, by joining the game I become braver.
7	<i>Q7</i>	Do you frequently collaborate with your classmates while playing games in class?

	<i>S1</i>	Yes, often. Usually while discussing with friends.
	<i>S2</i>	Yes, often.
	<i>S3</i>	Yes, when playing CoC yesterday we helped each other to remember.
	<i>S4</i>	Often helped each other answer with friends.
	<i>S5</i>	Yes, my group and I often work together.
8	<i>Q8</i>	Do you find the lesson easier to comprehend when learning through games?
	<i>S1</i>	Yes, it becomes easier to understand.
	<i>S2</i>	Yes, it becomes easier.
	<i>S3</i>	Not really, because it doesn't help me focus.
	<i>S4</i>	The lesson becomes easier to understand.
	<i>S5</i>	The lesson is easier to understand if we enjoy it.
9.	<i>Q9</i>	What makes you excited when playing games in English lessons?
	<i>S1</i>	Yes, I really like it because it feels fun.
	<i>S2</i>	Yes, I really like it because it's exciting and enjoyable.
	<i>S3</i>	Yes, I like it because it's fun.
	<i>S4</i>	I really like it because it's fun.
	<i>S5</i>	Yes, I really like it because it's exciting.
10	<i>Q10</i>	What can make you feel less motivated to learn, even though there is a game?
	<i>S1</i>	If the time is limited, I feel less motivated.
	<i>S2</i>	Nothing, as long as there is a game, I will be happy.
	<i>S3</i>	Sometimes I feel less motivated because if I make a mistake, I'm afraid of getting scolded.
	<i>S4</i>	Nothing, I'm happy as long as there is a game.
	<i>S5</i>	Sometimes I feel tired because I feel uncomfortable to speak up.
11.	<i>Q11</i>	In your opinion, what is the best thing about learning English using games?
	<i>S1</i>	Because it's just more enjoyable.
	<i>S2</i>	Because it makes learning easier to understand.
	<i>S3</i>	When playing games, the teacher becomes friendlier.

	S4	I really enjoy it when learning becomes more fun.
	S5	It's just fun.
12.	Q12	If you could give suggestions to the teacher, what advice would you like to give when learning with games?
	S1	I want to try other games, like Impostor, to make it more fun and different.
	S2	Currently, I have no suggestions.
	S3	I want the teacher to find new references from Google, like CoC yesterday, it was fun.
	S4	I've seen fun games on TikTok, but I forgot the name.
	S5	I want to try playing a word-guessing game.

The results of the questionnaire further reinforced these findings. Most students showed strong motivation in learning English: 73% stated they like learning English, 76% considered English interesting, 73% reported feeling happy in class, and 63% looked forward to English lessons weekly. The highest motivation appeared when games were incorporated: 95% felt excited, 86% less bored, 85% more focused, and 89% happier during games. Games also made learning easier to understand for 84% of students, motivated 78% to compete to win, and encouraged 83% to be more active in class. Moreover, 72% acknowledged the importance of learning English after playing games, and 74% felt more confident. Students also reported enjoyment in collaboration with peers, supportive interactions, and appreciation for the teacher's strategies. Overall, the questionnaire indicated that both **internal factors** (motivation, enjoyment, confidence) and **external factors** (peer collaboration, classroom atmosphere, teacher strategies, relevance of games) significantly influenced engagement in English learning through game-based activities.

Overall, the findings indicate that game-based learning effectively supports students' motivation and engagement. The combination of interactive games, structured teacher guidance, and collaborative group activities fostered enthusiasm, active participation, focus, confidence, and peer cooperation. Both internal factors (motivation, enjoyment, self-confidence, awareness of the importance of learning English) and external factors (types of games, alignment with material, classroom atmosphere, teacher strategies) contributed to creating a dynamic and student-centered learning environment.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine how game-based learning (GBL) enhances students' motivation and identify the factors influencing their engagement in English learning among fifth-grade students at SD Islam Al-Azhar 51 Kota Bengkulu. Unlike previous studies that focus mainly on conventional teaching methods, this research emphasizes the integration of interactive games, collaborative group activities, and structured teacher guidance to foster both cognitive and affective engagement.

Qualitative findings from classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews support the effectiveness of this approach. Observation results showed that students demonstrated high enthusiasm, active participation, and sustained attention during game-based activities. Questionnaire

results indicated that most students felt motivated, confident, and eager to engage in lessons through games, with 95% reporting excitement and 84% stating that games made learning easier to understand. Interviews further revealed that students enjoyed collaborative elements and peer interaction, while the teacher confirmed that game-based methods increased classroom engagement and learning efficiency.

An unexpected and compelling finding was that students' engagement depended on both familiarity and balance in game use. While excessive or unfamiliar games could distract, games that students already knew, such as Class of Champions (CoC), generated higher enthusiasm, confidence, and peer collaboration. Beyond enjoyment, these activities strengthened students' awareness of the importance of learning English and fostered supportive social dynamics, including collaboration and healthy competition, which played a key role in sustaining motivation.

These results align with prior research. Studies by Ahmed et al. (2022), Eltahir et al. (2021), and Liao et al. (2024) confirm that GBL increases motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes, while Huseinović (2024) highlights improvements in language skills and academic performance. Regarding factors influencing engagement, Tuan et al. (2024) and Adipat et al. (2021) emphasized enjoyment, active participation, peer collaboration, and interaction with learning content as critical elements, while Nadeem et al. (2023) noted the role of motivation, competition, and classroom dynamics.

However, not all studies reported consistent results. Ratinho and Martins (2023) and Leonardou et al. (2022) found that motivation may decline after initial novelty, and Zhang and Yu (2022) suggested that simple gamification sometimes outperforms full GBL. Similarly, Rodrigues et al. (2022), Li et al. (2023), Sun (2023), and Kratochvil et al. (2023) highlighted that engagement can be highly context-dependent and influenced by design, duration, and learner characteristics, indicating the need for careful planning to sustain effectiveness.

Overall, GBL proved effective not only in increasing students' motivation and engagement but also in fostering cognitive understanding, social collaboration, and affective awareness, creating a dynamic, student-centered learning environment that reinforces positive attitudes toward English learning.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in English lessons for fifth-grade students at SD Islam Al-Azhar 51 Bengkulu effectively supports students' motivation and engagement. The findings reveal that students became more enthusiastic, confident, and focused during lessons, while the classroom atmosphere became interactive, collaborative, and enjoyable. Engagement is influenced by both internal factors, such as enjoyment, interest, self-confidence, learning motivation, and awareness of English importance, and external factors, including game types, alignment with lesson content, teacher guidance, peer collaboration, and classroom environment. Games like Class of Champions and Scrabble proved particularly effective in enhancing comprehension, reducing boredom, and fostering meaningful learning.

Recommendations Based on the Research Findings:

1. For Schools: Provide facilities, resources, and institutional support to systematically implement GBL in English teaching, enabling a more engaging learning process.
2. For Teachers: Use GBL as a pedagogical tool, selecting or designing games aligned with lesson objectives, managing classroom time effectively, and promoting collaboration to enhance motivation, participation, and comprehension.

3. For Students: Actively participate in GBL activities with a positive mindset, using games as opportunities to practice English, collaborate with peers, and build self-confidence to strengthen both motivation and language skills.
4. For Future Researchers: Examine the balance and familiarity of games in English learning, as familiar games like Class of Champions increase enthusiasm but excessive games can be distracting. Future studies should also explore affective and social dimensions, such as students' awareness of English importance, peer collaboration, and healthy competition in sustaining motivation.

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