

# **Exploring the Use of Interactive Game to Support Students' Engagement among Young Learners in English Classroom**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the use of interactive games in supporting student engagement among young learners in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The study addresses the issue of inconsistent student participation during English learning activities, particularly among elementary students who often feel less confident in using English during classroom interaction. Rather than focusing on learning achievement, this research emphasizes how students participate, respond, and interact during the implementation of interactive games in classroom activities.

This study employed a classroom-based qualitative design with an exploratory orientation. The participants were 11 sixth-grade students in one of the public elementary schools in Tonduhan. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The collected data were analyzed interpretively to identify patterns related to students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during the learning process.

The findings revealed that the use of interactive games contributed to a more interactive and engaging classroom atmosphere. Students appeared more attentive, enthusiastic, and willing to participate in English learning activities. The games also created a more enjoyable and less pressured environment, encouraging students to interact more actively with both learning materials and peers.

In conclusion, interactive games have the potential to support student engagement in EFL learning among young learners. The findings suggest that simple and accessible ICT tools can help teachers create more meaningful, interactive, and student-centered learning experiences.

**Keywords:** interactive games, student engagement, young learners, EFL, classroom interaction

## **INTRODUCTION**

In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, student participation during learning activities does not always occur as expected. Young learners often perceive English as something unfamiliar and distant from their daily experiences, which may influence their confidence and willingness to participate in classroom interaction. As a result, some students actively engage in learning activities, while others tend to remain passive, especially when they feel uncertain about using the language. In elementary classrooms, this

situation becomes more noticeable because young learners generally require learning experiences that are enjoyable, interactive, and emotionally supportive in order to stay actively involved during the lesson. When students feel uncomfortable or unmotivated, they may become less responsive and less willing to participate in classroom activities.

One common situation found in English classrooms is related to reading and vocabulary activities. Students are

frequently asked to read short texts, identify meanings, and answer questions, yet not all students appear fully involved during the process. In many cases, engagement is not only reflected through students' understanding of the material, but also through how they respond to classroom activities, show attention, interact with peers, and participate during the lesson. This indicates that engagement is dynamic and may change depending on how learning experiences are designed and implemented. Some students may participate actively when they feel interested in the activity, while others may lose attention if the classroom atmosphere feels monotonous or overly teacher-centered.

For young learners, classroom interaction plays an important role in supporting language learning because they tend to learn more effectively through participation and direct experience. In EFL contexts, students often have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Therefore, classroom activities become an essential space where students can interact with the language and practice communication skills. Learning activities that encourage interaction and participation may help students become more confident and more comfortable during English learning activities. As a result, teachers need to create classroom environments that support active learning and meaningful participation among students.

In recent years, teachers have increasingly integrated digital tools into classroom instruction to create more engaging learning environments. One approach that has gained attention is the use of interactive games in language learning. Interactive games introduce elements of challenge, feedback, participation, and interaction that may help create a more enjoyable and

student-centered learning atmosphere. Through these activities, students are encouraged to participate more actively and interact more frequently with both the learning materials and their classmates. The use of games may also help reduce students' boredom during classroom activities because the learning process becomes more varied and interactive.

In addition, the integration of ICT in language learning has become increasingly relevant in elementary classrooms because technology can provide learning experiences that are more visually attractive and interactive for young learners. Through digital learning tools, students are able to participate in activities that involve direct responses, collaboration, and immediate feedback. These learning experiences may help students maintain attention and increase their willingness to participate during classroom interaction. Therefore, the use of interactive games is considered relevant not only as a teaching strategy but also as a medium that may support student engagement in English learning activities.

The integration of interactive games may also create opportunities for students to participate in a less pressured learning environment. In many classroom situations, young learners may hesitate to answer questions because they are afraid of making mistakes. Through game-based activities, students may feel more relaxed because the learning atmosphere becomes more enjoyable and less formal. As a result, students may become more willing to try answering questions, respond to classroom tasks, and interact with peers during the lesson. This condition suggests that classroom atmosphere may influence how students engage during the learning process.

However, despite the increasing use of interactive games in education, many classroom practices still focus mainly on completing learning materials and achieving academic targets. As a result, students' emotional responses, participation patterns, and interaction during learning activities are sometimes overlooked. In fact, understanding how students experience the learning process is important because engagement is closely related to students' motivation, confidence, and classroom participation. This issue becomes particularly important among young learners who require supportive and enjoyable learning environments to stay actively involved during classroom activities.

However, many previous studies mainly focus on the effectiveness of game-based learning in improving achievement or test results. While these findings are important, they often provide limited understanding of how engagement actually appears during the learning process. Small but meaningful classroom interactions, such as students' enthusiasm, attention, emotional responses, and peer interaction, are often overlooked when the focus is placed only on measurable outcomes. In addition, engagement among young learners may appear differently depending on classroom atmosphere, interaction patterns, and the way learning activities are implemented. Therefore, examining engagement through classroom interaction may provide a deeper understanding of students' learning experiences.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on exploring how interactive games are implemented in English learning activities and how students respond to these activities in classroom situations. This research also aims to examine how student engagement is reflected during the use of interactive games among young

learners in an EFL classroom. Rather than focusing on learning achievement or test scores, this study emphasizes the learning process itself, particularly how students participate, interact, and respond during classroom activities involving interactive games.

The research questions of this study are: (1) How are interactive games implemented in English learning activities for young learners in the classroom? (2) How do students respond to the use of interactive games during the learning process? and (3) How is student engagement reflected during the use of interactive games in classroom activities?

Based on these research questions, this study aims to describe the implementation of interactive games in English learning activities, explore students' responses toward the use of interactive games, and examine how student engagement is reflected during classroom interaction.

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study contributes to the discussion of student engagement by presenting engagement as a dynamic classroom process that can be observed through interaction, participation, and students' responses during learning activities. This study also contributes to the understanding that engagement is not only related to academic performance but also connected to students' emotional involvement and classroom experiences during the learning process. Practically, this study may provide insights for teachers, especially in EFL contexts, on how simple and accessible ICT tools can be integrated into classroom learning to create more interactive and meaningful learning experiences for young learners. In addition, this study may encourage teachers to pay greater attention to students' classroom

participation, interaction, and emotional responses during English learning activities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a classroom-based qualitative design by case study approaches with an exploratory orientation to investigate how student engagement emerged during the implementation of interactive games in English learning activities. The study focused on understanding the learning process rather than measuring learning outcomes. Through this qualitative approach, the researcher explored how students interacted with learning activities, responded to the use of interactive games, and demonstrated engagement throughout classroom interaction. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to understand classroom phenomena in a natural and contextualized way. Instead of emphasizing numerical measurement, this study focused on interpreting students' experiences, participation, and responses during the learning process. This approach also enabled the researcher to observe how engagement developed dynamically during classroom activities among young learners in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

The use of a qualitative design in this study was intended to provide a deeper understanding of classroom interaction during the implementation of interactive games. Student engagement is often reflected through subtle classroom behaviors, emotional responses, and interaction patterns that may not be fully captured through numerical data alone. Therefore, this study emphasized direct observation and interpretive understanding of students' experiences during the learning process. Through this approach,

the researcher was able to examine how students participated in activities, interacted with peers, responded to classroom tasks, and expressed involvement during the implementation of interactive games.

This study was conducted in a natural classroom setting where English learning activities occurred as part of regular classroom instruction. The researcher did not manipulate the classroom situation or provide experimental treatment during the learning activities. Instead, the researcher focused on observing how students naturally responded to interactive game-based learning activities during classroom interaction. This naturalistic setting allowed the researcher to capture authentic classroom experiences and observe how engagement emerged throughout the lesson.

The subjects of this study were 11 sixth-grade students in one of the public elementary schools in Tonduhan. The participants were selected because they were directly involved in English learning activities that integrated interactive games as part of classroom instruction. As young learners in an EFL context, the students had relatively limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Therefore, the classroom became an important setting for observing how students interacted with the language and responded to game-based learning activities during the learning process.

The participants in this study represented young learners who were still developing their confidence and participation during

English learning activities. In classroom situations, students demonstrated different levels of participation and interaction depending on the learning atmosphere and the type of activities implemented by the teacher. Some students tended to participate actively during classroom interaction, while others required more encouragement before becoming involved in the activities. These classroom characteristics made the participants relevant to the focus of this study, particularly in exploring how engagement emerged during the implementation of interactive games.

The data in this study were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observation was used as the primary data collection technique to capture students' participation, classroom interaction, responses, attention, and involvement during the implementation of interactive games. Observation was considered important because engagement among young learners is often reflected through visible classroom behaviors such as participation, interaction, enthusiasm, and attention during learning activities.

The observations were conducted during English learning activities involving reading and vocabulary exercises supported by interactive game platforms. During the activities, students participated in tasks that required them to answer questions, identify vocabulary meanings, respond to instructions, and interact with peers during classroom activities. The researcher observed how students reacted during these activities, how they maintained attention throughout the lesson, and how they participated during classroom interaction. The observation process also allowed the researcher to identify changes in students' participation

patterns before and during the implementation of interactive games.

During the observation process, the researcher used field notes to record important classroom events, students' expressions, participation patterns, peer interaction, and classroom atmosphere throughout the learning activities. The field notes included descriptions of students' reactions, classroom situations, and interaction patterns observed during the lesson. These observations helped the researcher identify how student engagement emerged naturally during classroom interaction. In addition, the field notes enabled the researcher to review and reflect on classroom situations repeatedly during the data analysis process.

Particular attention was given to students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during the observations. Behavioral engagement was observed through students' participation, involvement, and responsiveness during the activities. Emotional engagement was identified through students' enthusiasm, enjoyment, curiosity, and emotional reactions during classroom interaction. Meanwhile, cognitive engagement was reflected through students' efforts to understand instructions, answer questions, and participate in problem-solving activities during the games. These aspects became important indicators in understanding how engagement appeared during the learning process.

In addition to observation, short semi-structured interviews were conducted with several students after the learning activities to gain deeper insights into their experiences and responses toward the use of interactive games in English learning. The interviews allowed students to express their opinions, feelings, and experiences regarding the classroom activities.

Through these interviews, the researcher obtained additional information about how students perceived the use of interactive games and how the activities influenced their participation and classroom involvement.

The interviews were conducted in a flexible manner to allow students to respond more comfortably during the conversation. The researcher used simple and understandable questions appropriate for young learners. Some interview questions focused on students' feelings during the activities, their participation during classroom interaction, and their opinions regarding the use of interactive games in English learning. This interview process helped the researcher gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences beyond what could be directly observed during classroom interaction.

Documentation such as photographs, lesson materials, and classroom activity records was also collected to support and strengthen the observation data. Documentation was used as supporting evidence to provide additional descriptions of classroom activities during the implementation of interactive games. The photographs and classroom records also helped the researcher review important classroom events and confirm findings obtained through observations and interviews.

The use of multiple data collection techniques in this study was intended to support data credibility and provide a more comprehensive understanding of classroom interaction. Observations, interviews, and documentation complemented each other in capturing students' engagement during the learning process. Through these different sources of data, the researcher was able to compare information and identify recurring patterns

related to students' participation, responses, and classroom interaction.

In this study, the researcher acted as the main research instrument in collecting and interpreting the data. Several supporting instruments were also used, including observation field notes, interview guidelines, and documentation records. These instruments helped the researcher organize and capture detailed information related to students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during the learning process.

As the main instrument, the researcher was directly involved in observing classroom interaction, recording important classroom events, conducting interviews, and interpreting the collected data. The researcher also played an important role in identifying patterns and meanings related to student engagement throughout the learning activities. This role is important in qualitative research because the interpretation of classroom situations depends greatly on the researcher's observations and understanding of the learning context.

The research procedure was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher identified the classroom context and selected the participants based on the relevance of the study focus. The researcher observed the general classroom situation and identified learning activities that integrated interactive games as part of English instruction. This stage was important to ensure that the classroom setting matched the objectives of the study.

Second, classroom observations were conducted during the teaching and learning process involving interactive games. During the observations, the researcher focused on students' classroom participation, interaction patterns,

responses toward learning activities, and classroom atmosphere throughout the lesson. The researcher carefully recorded students' behaviors and reactions during the implementation of game-based activities.

Third, interviews and documentation were carried out to obtain additional information regarding students' experiences and classroom interaction. The interviews provided deeper insights into students' perspectives regarding the learning activities, while documentation supported the observation findings by providing visual and written records of classroom situations.

Finally, all collected data were organized and analyzed interpretively to identify recurring patterns related to student engagement during the implementation of interactive games. The researcher reviewed the collected data repeatedly in order to gain a deeper understanding of classroom interaction and students' responses during the learning process.

The data analysis in this study employed interpretive qualitative analysis. The collected data from observations, interviews, and documentation were read and reviewed repeatedly to gain a deeper understanding of the classroom situation. The researcher then identified and categorized patterns related to students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive

**FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study were obtained through classroom observations, interviews, and documentation conducted during the implementation of interactive games in English learning activities. The data analysis focused on identifying patterns related to students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement throughout the learning process. Since this

engagement during the learning activities. Similar classroom responses and participation patterns were grouped into categories representing different dimensions of engagement.

After categorizing the data, the researcher interpreted the findings descriptively by connecting them with the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review. The interpretation focused on understanding how engagement emerged during classroom interaction and how students responded to the implementation of interactive games during English learning activities. Through this analysis process, the researcher was able to identify meaningful classroom experiences related to students' participation, emotional involvement, and interaction during the learning process.

In addition, the analysis process emphasized the importance of understanding engagement as a dynamic classroom experience. Rather than viewing engagement only through students' task completion or academic achievement, this study interpreted engagement through students' classroom participation, peer interaction, emotional responses, and willingness to participate during learning activities. Therefore, the analysis focused on how engagement appeared naturally throughout classroom interaction during the implementation of interactive games.

study employed a qualitative approach, the findings were interpreted descriptively based on students' classroom participation, interactions, responses, and involvement during the activities.

During the classroom observations, students showed different participation patterns before and during the

implementation of interactive games. At the beginning of the lesson, several students appeared passive and less responsive during regular classroom instruction. Some students tended to wait for instructions and showed limited interaction with both the teacher and their peers. However, after the interactive games were introduced, students gradually became more involved in answering questions, responding to tasks, and participating in classroom interaction. The classroom atmosphere became more active, and students appeared more motivated to participate throughout the learning activities.

The findings also revealed that the implementation of interactive games created a more interactive and engaging classroom atmosphere. During the activities, students appeared more attentive and responsive when game-based learning was introduced. Compared to conventional classroom instruction, students participated more actively in responding to questions, completing tasks, and interacting with classmates. The use of immediate feedback and interactive elements within the games appeared to help maintain students' attention during the lesson. In several situations, students also showed enthusiasm by reacting spontaneously to the activities and encouraging their peers during classroom interaction.

Another observation during the learning activities showed that the use of interactive games influenced the overall classroom atmosphere positively. During regular classroom instruction, several students tended to remain quiet and waited for direct instructions from the teacher before participating. However, during the implementation of interactive games, students appeared more spontaneous in responding to questions and classroom

tasks. Some students voluntarily raised their hands and attempted to answer questions without being directly appointed by the teacher. This change indicates that interactive learning activities may help students feel more confident and comfortable during English learning activities.

In addition, the findings indicate that students generally responded positively to the use of interactive games in English learning activities. Based on the interview results, several students stated that the activities felt more enjoyable and less stressful compared to regular classroom learning. Students appeared more confident in participating because the games created a more relaxed and supportive classroom environment. Some students who were usually passive during ordinary lessons gradually became more willing to participate when the learning activities were presented through interactive games.

Another important finding was related to peer interaction during the learning activities. During the implementation of interactive games, students frequently discussed possible answers, responded collaboratively to tasks, and interacted more actively with classmates. The classroom interaction became more collaborative because students attempted to help each other understand the instructions and solve the tasks together. In several situations, students laughed, reacted emotionally to the games, and showed excitement when they successfully completed the activities. These responses suggest that interactive games may create not only cognitive involvement but also emotional and social engagement during the learning process.

The observations also showed that the implementation of interactive games

appeared to reduce students' fear of making mistakes during English learning activities. During ordinary classroom instruction, some students tended to avoid answering questions because they were afraid of giving incorrect responses. However, when the activities were presented through games, students appeared more willing to try answering even when they were unsure about the correct answer. The game environment seemed to create a less formal and less intimidating atmosphere, allowing students to participate more naturally during classroom interaction.

Another important aspect observed during the implementation of interactive games was students' attention span during the lesson. Young learners generally have limited attention spans, especially during activities involving reading and vocabulary learning. However, during the game-based activities, students appeared able to maintain their focus for longer periods. The interactive elements, immediate feedback, and competitive aspects within the games seemed to help students remain engaged throughout the activities. Students also showed curiosity and anticipation while waiting for the next questions and tasks during the learning process.

However, the observations also revealed that not all students responded in the same way. A few students initially required more time and encouragement before fully participating in the activities. Some students appeared hesitant at the beginning of the lesson and preferred observing their classmates before becoming involved in the activities. Nevertheless, their participation gradually increased as the lesson continued and as they became more familiar with the game-based learning environment. This finding suggests that engagement among young learners may

develop gradually depending on students' confidence and classroom experiences.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that student engagement was reflected through behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement was visible through students' active participation, attention, and involvement during classroom interaction. Emotional engagement appeared through students' enthusiasm, enjoyment, curiosity, and positive reactions toward the activities. Meanwhile, cognitive engagement could be observed through students' efforts to understand the tasks, think about possible answers, and participate in problem-solving activities during the games. These dimensions appeared simultaneously throughout the learning process, indicating that engagement among young learners is dynamic and interconnected.

The findings also indicate that the teacher's role remained important during the implementation of interactive games. Although the games encouraged students' active participation, teacher guidance was still necessary to manage classroom interaction, explain instructions, and encourage less active students to participate. In several situations, the teacher provided additional support and motivation for students who initially appeared hesitant during the activities. This suggests that interactive games function more effectively when combined with supportive classroom facilitation from the teacher.

The findings of this study support the research problem stating that student engagement among young learners may shift depending on how classroom activities are designed and implemented. The use of interactive games appeared to create learning experiences that encouraged students to become more

involved during English learning activities. This finding is consistent with Deterding et al. (2011) and Hamari et al. (2014), who explain that game-based learning and gamification may increase students' motivation and participation through interactive and enjoyable learning experiences.

Similarly, the findings align with Reinders and Wattana (2015), who found that digital game-based learning can reduce students' anxiety and encourage more active participation in English learning contexts. In this study, students appeared more comfortable and confident during classroom interaction when learning activities were presented in the form of interactive games. The activities created a less pressured learning environment, allowing students to participate more naturally during the lesson.

In relation to the theoretical framework, the findings reinforce Fredricks et al.'s (2004) theory of student engagement, particularly the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement. However, this study also extends the existing understanding by showing that engagement among young learners in EFL classrooms is closely connected to classroom atmosphere, peer interaction, emotional comfort, and meaningful participation during learning activities. The findings suggest that engagement should not only be understood through academic performance or task completion, but also through students' emotional involvement, social interaction, and willingness to participate during classroom activities.

Furthermore, this study suggests that the integration of simple and accessible ICT tools can support a more interaction-centered approach to English learning among young learners. Rather than functioning only as a medium for

delivering instructional content, interactive games may also serve as social and emotional learning spaces where students feel safer, more motivated, and more actively involved in the learning process. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by emphasizing that student engagement in EFL classrooms should be understood as a dynamic classroom experience shaped by interaction, participation, emotional comfort, and meaningful learning activities.

The findings of this study also imply that the use of simple ICT tools in EFL classrooms may provide meaningful learning opportunities even in limited educational settings. The implementation of interactive games in this study did not rely on complex technology or advanced digital facilities. However, the activities were still able to create interactive learning experiences that encouraged students' participation and classroom involvement. This suggests that meaningful technology integration in education does not always require sophisticated resources, but rather depends on how learning activities are designed to support interaction and engagement.

In addition, this study highlights the importance of designing learning environments that are emotionally supportive for young learners. Students tend to participate more actively when they feel comfortable, appreciated, and less afraid of making mistakes during classroom interaction. Therefore, teachers need to consider not only the instructional content of learning activities but also the emotional and social experiences students encounter during the learning process.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the use of interactive games in supporting student engagement among young learners in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Based on the findings obtained through classroom observations, interviews, and documentation, the study revealed that the implementation of interactive games contributed to the creation of a more interactive, engaging, and student-centered learning atmosphere during English learning activities. Students appeared more attentive, responsive, and willing to participate when the learning activities were presented through game-based interaction. Compared to conventional classroom instruction, the use of interactive games encouraged students to become more actively involved in classroom participation and peer interaction throughout the learning process.

The findings also showed that students generally responded positively to the use of interactive games in English learning activities. The activities created a learning environment that was perceived as more enjoyable, supportive, and less pressured, allowing students to interact more comfortably with both the learning materials and their classmates. In addition, the implementation of interactive games encouraged collaborative interaction among students, as they frequently discussed answers, responded to tasks together, and supported one another during classroom activities. Although several students initially showed hesitation or limited participation, their engagement gradually increased as they became more familiar and comfortable with the learning activities.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that student engagement was reflected

through behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement was visible through students' active participation, classroom involvement, and attention during learning activities. Emotional engagement appeared through students' enthusiasm, enjoyment, curiosity, and positive responses toward the activities. Meanwhile, cognitive engagement was reflected in students' efforts to understand instructions, think about possible answers, solve problems, and respond actively during the implementation of interactive games. These dimensions appeared simultaneously during the learning process, indicating that engagement among young learners is dynamic and closely connected to classroom interaction and learning experiences.

Overall, this study highlights the potential of interactive games and accessible ICT tools in supporting student engagement in English learning among young learners in EFL classrooms. The findings suggest that interactive learning activities can help create more meaningful, interactive, and supportive classroom experiences, particularly for students who have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. In addition, this study contributes to the understanding that student engagement should not only be viewed through academic achievement or task completion, but also through students' participation, emotional involvement, social interaction, and classroom experiences during the learning process. Finally, this study may serve as an initial reference for future research exploring the relationship between interactive learning, student motivation, and language development in broader educational contexts.

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