
Exploring Nuances of EFL Student Engagement in Game-Based English Learning: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

English language learning plays an important role in developing EFL students' competencies in the era of globalization, yet low student engagement remains a major challenge due to monotonous learning methods. This study aims to investigate how Game-Based Learning (GBL) enhances students' engagement as well as explore their experiences during the learning process. Using thematic analysis, the findings show that GBL encourages behavioural engagement through active participation, collaboration, and adherence to game rules; emotional engagement through fun, enthusiasm in group learning, and excitement during competition; and cognitive engagement through increased curiosity, use of strategies, and reflection on self-development. The implications of this study suggest that teachers need to integrate game elements that support peer teaching, emotional safety and strategic thinking - such as time-based group games or language puzzles - tailored to students' ability levels to create more inclusive, fun and meaningful learning.

Keywords: English language learning, game-based learning, student engagement, students' perception

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1. Introduction

English language learning has a very important role for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in the current era of globalization (Daqiq et al., 2024). However, despite its importance, English language learning in many EFL contexts still faces major challenges in terms of student engagement. Low motivation and active participation of students are often caused by the use of monotonous and uninteresting teaching methods (Beg, 2021). Learning processes that lack variety and are too teacher-centred tend to cause boredom, inhibit interaction, and result in low learning outcomes (Jiao et al., 2022).

In this context, student engagement is a key aspect that determines the success of language learning. Engagement includes behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions, all of which contribute to active participation, interest and deep understanding of the material (Fredricks et al., 2004). Therefore, more innovative and interactive learning approaches need to be implemented. One of them is the integration of game elements, which is proven to increase motivation, encourage social interaction, and create a more enjoyable and meaningful learning atmosphere (Özkaya & Baykal, 2025). With this kind of strategy, student engagement can be increased, making the learning process more effective and sustainable.

One approach that can increase student engagement in English language learning is Game-Based Learning (GBL) (Adipat et al., 2021). GBL integrates game elements into the learning process to create a more fun and interactive learning atmosphere. This approach involves not only competition, but also collaborative activities that encourage students' active participation (Nadeem et al., 2023). Various types of games in GBL have been used to support the acquisition of English language skills, such as Hot Seat for speaking, Bingo Vocabulary for listening, Guessing Songs for writing and spelling, and Fill-in-the-Blank Song Lyrics for listening skills. These games provide a dynamic learning experience and help reduce anxiety in language learning (Syahroni & Wahono, 2024; Perangin-Angin et al., 2022; Kurniawan & Nikmah, 2023).

Despite various studies demonstrating the benefits of GBL, most previous research in the EFL context is still dominated by quantitative approaches that focus on outcomes such as academic grades and learning motivation. Very few studies have qualitatively explored how students experience engagement during GBL activities. In particular, not many studies have examined student engagement based on the three main dimensions proposed by Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004): behavioural, emotional and cognitive. This leaves room for a deeper understanding of how students actively engage, feel emotionally involved, as well as in-depth thinking and processing of information in game-based activities. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap with a qualitative approach and thematic analysis to explore students' engagement holistically in a game-based English learning context.

As a conceptual framework, the student engagement theory by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) divides engagement into three main dimensions. Behavioural engagement reflects students' active participation in academic tasks and compliance with rules. Emotional engagement refers to students' affective responses to learning, such as interest, excitement, and sense of belonging. Meanwhile, cognitive engagement reflects the deep-thinking strategies students use in understanding and reflecting on the material. These three dimensions are used as the basis in assessing students' experience during game-based learning.

In the context of GBL, all three aspects of engagement have the potential to develop in a balanced way. Games that involve challenge and cooperation can encourage students to be physically and socially active, strengthening behavioural engagement (Chatzipanteli & Adamakis, 2022). Elements such as healthy competition and achievement have a positive effect on students' emotions, supporting emotional engagement (Stephanie et al., 2022). Meanwhile, activities that involve problem-solving and deep understanding of language materials promote cognitive engagement (Gulnoza, 2024). Thus, the main focus of this research is to uncover how GBL facilitates students' all-round engagement in learning English as a foreign language. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of learning strategies that are more responsive to students' needs, as well as encourage the wider application of GBL in the context of EFL education.

1.1. Research question

This study aims to analyze the effect of game-based learning method on EFL students' level of engagement in English classes, as well as to explore students' perceptions regarding the integration of the method in the learning process. In order to achieve these objectives, this research focuses on the following questions:

- (1) How does game-based learning affect EFL students' engagement in English language learning?
- (2) How do students experience game-based learning in their English learning process?

1.2. Theoretical framework

1.2.1. Game-based learning

1.2.1.1. Definition of game-based learning

Game-Based Learning (GBL) is a learning method that uses the principles of games to enhance student engagement in the learning process. According to Pho and Dinscore (2015), GBL refers to the application of game elements in an educational environment to create a more engaging and interactive learning experience. In the context of language learning, GBL helps students hone language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking through activities that incorporate challenges, rewards and collaboration. This approach makes

students more motivated to practice and interact with the language being learnt actively (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020).

One of the basic principles of GBL is the integration of game elements, such as gradual challenges, a point or reward system, and an engaging storyline (Plass et al., 2016). This principle aims to utilize the motivational psychology of games, such as a sense of achievement and healthy competition, to encourage student engagement in learning. In language learning, these elements can be applied through vocabulary games, interactive quizzes, or simulations of communication in real situations. Pho and Dinscore (2015) emphasize that these elements are not just for entertainment, but are also designed to be relevant to educational objectives, so that students can relate the play experience to the skills they want to master.

GBL is a fun and dynamic learning approach, which can increase students' intrinsic motivation (Eyupoglu & Nietfeld, 2019). With ability-appropriate challenges, immediate feedback and opportunities to retry, GBL creates a safe and supportive learning environment, encouraging students to experiment without fear of getting it wrong, especially in the context of language learning.

Eyupoglu and Nietfeld's findings on the importance of elements such as challenge, control and feedback in enhancing student engagement are highly relevant to this study. The application of such principles in the EFL classroom shows that student engagement increases when learning is associated with meaningful and non-burdensome play activities. This implies that GBL not only intrinsically motivates students, but also reinforces their active participation in language learning.

As an innovative method, GBL has great potential to increase the effectiveness of language learning. By integrating the principle of play, this method makes the learning process more interesting and helps the active development of language skills. In line with Pho and Dinscore (2015), the results of this study show that GBL is able to bridge students' needs for relevant and fun learning, especially in high school EFL classes.

1.2.2. Engagement in English language learning

1.2.2.1. Definition of student engagement

Student engagement is a multidimensional concept that covers the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of students in the learning process. Fredricks et al. (2004) define student engagement as a meta-construct that reflects the extent to which students are actively involved in learning through three main dimensions. Behavioural engagement includes students' concrete actions in learning activities, such as class attendance, participation in discussions, and completing assignments on time. The emotional dimension refers to students' relationship with their learning environment, including a sense of belonging to school, positive relationships with teachers and peers, and positive feelings towards academic

activities. Meanwhile, cognitive engagement involves students' intellectual efforts, such as the application of learning strategies, deep understanding of the material, and the ability to overcome challenges in learning.

Student engagement is an important element in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. In EFL learning, student engagement not only increases motivation to learn but also enriches their learning experience (Kashefian-Naeeni et al., 2024). For example, behavioural engagement helps EFL students to speak more actively in class, practicing the speaking and listening skills essential for language acquisition. Emotional engagement, such as confidence and comfort in using English, creates a more conducive learning atmosphere. Whereas cognitive engagement allows students to apply deep learning strategies, such as vocabulary memorization, understanding grammar, and applying that knowledge in meaningful contexts (Fredricks et al., 2004).

The importance of student engagement in EFL learning cannot be ignored as high engagement is directly correlated with better learning outcomes (Latifa et al., 2024). When students are fully engaged, they tend to be more motivated to learn, understand the material better, and are able to apply language skills in real situations. Moreover, engagement also helps students overcome learning barriers, such as anxiety or lack of confidence, which are often found in foreign language learning (Nguyen & Tran, 2023). Therefore, creating a learning environment that supports these three dimensions of engagement is crucial to maximizing EFL students' potential in achieving English language learning goals. With an approach that emphasizes engagement, students not only acquire knowledge, but also develop better communication skills and confidence in using English.

1.2.2.2. Factors influencing engagement in language learning

Students' engagement in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is influenced by various interrelated internal and external factors (Mahmoudi & Mahmoudi, 2015). Internal factors include motivation, interest in the material, and confidence. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is the main driver for students to be actively involved in learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Students who have intrinsic motivation tend to learn because they feel interested in English, while extrinsic motivation is often triggered by the desire to achieve good academic results or fulfil parental expectations. In addition, interest in the learning material plays an important role in improving student focus and engagement (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020). Relevant and interesting materials can make students feel more enthusiastic and eager to learn. Confidence is also a crucial element, as students who are confident tend to participate more actively in class activities, such as discussions and presentations, and feel more comfortable trying to use English without fear of making mistakes (Cao et al., 2024).

On the other hand, external factors such as teaching methods, peer support, and an interactive classroom environment also play a significant role (Ertesvåg et al., 2024).

Methods of interactive teaching techniques, such as the use of game-based learning, group discussions, or simulations, can create a dynamic and fun learning atmosphere, thereby increasing student engagement (Smiderle et al., 2020). Teachers who use this approach are able to bridge the gap between theory and practice, making it easier for students to understand the material. Peer support also has a positive influence on student engagement, as healthy social interactions encourage collaboration and exchange of ideas, and create a sense of mutual support among students (Shao et al., 2024). An interactive classroom environment, where students feel comfortable to express and participate, helps reduce language learning anxiety and boosts their confidence (Han et al., 2022).

The combination of these internal and external factors is crucial in creating an optimal English learning experience. When students are motivated, feel confident and supported by interactive teaching methods and learning environments, their engagement in learning will increase significantly (Xiani, 2023). As such, teachers and educational institutions need to pay attention to both types of factors to ensure that students have access to learning experiences that support the effective and thorough development of their language skills.

2. Method

2.1. Research method

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze the effect of GBL method on EFL students' engagement in English language learning. This approach was chosen to understand students' experiences, perceptions, and interactions during the learning process. Data collection was conducted through observation and semi-structured interviews, where observation was used to observe students' engagement directly in the classroom, in accordance with Angrosino (2007) who states that observation in qualitative research is very useful for understanding the social context and behaviour of participants. Semi-structured interviews provide space for students to explain their experiences, which allows researchers to dig deeper into relevant topics, as stated by Patton (2014). By using these two techniques, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the GBL method affects students' engagement in learning English.

2.2. Research participants

This study involved 35 students of grade 11.2 at Budhi Warman 1 High School, East Jakarta, who followed the learning process using the GBL method from August to November 2024. During this period, the researcher taught the class by integrating English materials into an interactive game. Student engagement was observed by the English teacher to ensure the objectivity of the data obtained. This school was chosen because the researcher was at that time undertaking an introduction to school field programme at the school for approximately four and a half months, which enabled the researcher to build a good relationship with the school and understand the classroom conditions more deeply. Therefore, the researcher

decided to simultaneously conduct research at this school as part of the preparation of the final project, with the hope that the research implementation can run more effectively and the results obtained are more relevant and in-depth.

Class 11.2 was selected from the four existing classes based on several strategic considerations. Firstly, this class had a diversity of student engagement levels, ranging from very active to passive, which allowed the researcher to explore the impact of GBL on diverse student participation. Secondly, information from the English teacher indicated that this class had a high interest in English learning, which supported data collection through interviews. Thirdly, the schedule of class 11.2 had fewer clashes with other school activities, such as national day celebrations, which usually result in the cancellation of English classes. Thus, the research process ran smoothly without any interruption due to these activities. Therefore, this class was considered representative and enabled relevant and in-depth findings to be obtained regarding the effect of GBL on students' engagement in learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

2.3. Ethical considerations

Prior to conducting the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The participants were also assured that their answers would be kept confidential and their identity would remain anonymous throughout the research process as well as in the publication of the findings. As part of the ethical considerations, this study also received official approval through a letter from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Indonesia, number 01/FKIP/KM/2025 dated 13 May 2025, approving the use of the research instruments.

2.4. Research instruments

The research instrument consisted of two main parts, namely classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, which were designed to measure students' engagement in learning English using the GBL method. The observation instrument was developed to assess three aspects of student engagement, namely Behavioural Engagement, Emotional Engagement, and Cognitive Engagement, which were measured based on the measurement framework proposed by (Fredricks et al., 2004).

In the research process, the researcher asked an English teacher at the school to observe and fill in the prepared observation instrument. The teacher was asked to give a judgement in yes/no format for each statement describing indicators of student engagement in various aspects of learning. A 'note' column was provided to record reasons or evidence that occurred during the observation related to each statement. Figure 1 is an example of the observation format:

No	Aspects of Engagement	Yes/no	Observer's Note
1	Students actively participate in group or individual tasks without distractions. (Behavioural Engagement)	Yes	The class remained conducive during the game.
2	Students manage emotions well, displaying persistence when facing difficulties or challenges in game-based learning activities. (Emotional Engagement)	Yes	When looking at the game media, students can recall the material that has been taught.
3	Students apply language learning strategies (e.g., practicing speaking) during the game. (Cognitive Engagement)	Yes	Students give each other instructions to group mates using English.

Figure 1. Observation Format

The purpose of this observation instrument was to collect objective and accurate data regarding student engagement, without being affected by the subjectivity of the researcher. Therefore, an English teacher was asked as the observer, as she has more objective knowledge of classroom dynamics. The completion of this instrument is expected to reflect the real situation that occurs in the classroom, in terms of student activeness in participating in activities (behaviour), emotions that arise during learning (emotional), and student involvement in thinking (cognitive).

After the observation was completed, the researcher selected five students using purposive sampling technique, namely three students who showed good involvement and two students who were more passive in learning with the GBL method. These five students were then interviewed using semi-structured interviews to explore their experiences in participating in English learning with the GBL approach. The interview questions focused on how the students felt their involvement in the learning process as well as the extent to which they felt more motivated, more active and more connected with their peers.

Through these two instruments, comprehensive data were collected to examine how the GBL method affects students' engagement in English language learning. The selection of observation and interview methods ensured a balanced and in-depth understanding of students' behavioural, emotional and cognitive responses to the GBL activities.

2.5. Data analysis procedure

Thematic analysis was chosen in this study because it is able to identify patterns of meaning from qualitative data in a systematic and flexible manner. This approach allows the researcher to explore students' experiences in depth based on relevant themes, particularly regarding their involvement in game-based learning. This method is suitable for exploring participants' subjective perceptions and experiences and interpreting data based on contextualized and meaningful categories.

According to Braun and Clarke (2021), thematic analysis can be conducted through inductive or deductive approaches. An inductive approach departs from the data without any initial theory, while deductive uses existing theories or frameworks. This research applied the deductive approach as it was analyzed based on Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris' (2004) theory of student engagement, which divides engagement into three dimensions: behavioural, emotional and cognitive. This theory guided the coding process based on predetermined themes and focused the analysis on how each dimension of engagement emerged during the implementation of GBL.

Data obtained through observations and interviews were then analyzed using this approach. The three main themes, behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement, were used as an analytical framework to understand student engagement in a more in-depth and purposeful manner, in accordance with the objectives of this study.

Data analysis began with transcribing the interviews. All conversations recorded during the interviews were typed and organized to facilitate the coding process. Next, codes corresponding to the three predefined main themes were created to categorize relevant data. For example, codes such as “active participation”, “task completion”, and “following rules” were used to categorize data relating to behavioural engagement. Codes related to emotions and motivation, such as “enjoyment” and “motivation boost”, were used for the theme of emotional engagement. Meanwhile, codes such as “effort in understanding” and “problem-solving skills” were used for the cognitive engagement theme.

Afterwards, the researcher narrated the findings by relating them to previous research to validate the results obtained. This process allows the researcher to assess whether the findings in this study are consistent or different from previous findings, while providing a deeper understanding of the application of GBL method in improving student engagement. This analysis is in line with the approach described by Braun and Clarke (2021), who stated that the purpose of thematic analysis is to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes contained in the data. To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, several strategies were applied. Firstly, data triangulation was conducted by combining the results of classroom observations and student interviews. Second, the researcher kept records of the data analysis process systematically as a form of audit trail, including the coding and theme development stages. Third, direct quotes from participants were included in the findings section as concrete evidence to support the transparency and credibility of interpretations. These steps helped strengthen the dependability, confirmability and credibility of this research in the context of qualitative studies. Ultimately, this analysis aims to provide a comprehensive picture and meaningful insights into how GBL affects students' engagement in behavioural, emotional and cognitive aspects.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings on how game-based learning (GBL) affects students' engagement in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The analysis is based on Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris' (2004) theory of student engagement, which divides engagement into three main dimensions: behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement. These three dimensions complement each other and become important indicators in assessing the extent to which students are actively, affectively, and intellectually engaged in the learning process. The results show that GBL is generally able to activate all these forms of engagement, although there are differences in intensity between individuals.

3.1. Behavioural engagement

Behavioural engagement refers to the extent to which students exhibit positive behaviours during the learning process, including adherence to class rules, active participation, as well as the absence of disruptive behaviours such as skipping class, talking out of context, or engaging in social conflict. In the explanation of Fredricks et al. (2004), behavioural engagement is not only about physical presence in class, but also about students' real contribution to academic and social norms in the learning environment.

Based on teacher observations, students showed high behavioural engagement during the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL). This is reflected in their active participation in individual and group tasks, on-time completion of tasks, and adherence to game rules and teacher instructions (see excerpt 1). Most students showed discipline, responsibility and active involvement in the learning process. They followed the set rules without the need for frequent reminders, and no deviant behaviour was found such as talking off topic or leaving the class during the activity (see excerpt 2). The observation sheet noted that *"all students obeyed the given rules well,"* indicating an awareness of the rules and a disciplined attitude during the activity. The classroom atmosphere also remained conducive without significant disruption, as noted in the observation: *"The class remained conducive throughout the game."* These findings suggest that the GBL approach is able to create a learning environment that is organized, purposeful and supports maximum engagement of student behaviour in a positive and collaborative atmosphere.

However, there is one important note regarding the use of language of instruction in learning. The full use of English in delivering instructions caused some students to experience confusion (see excerpt 3). Therefore, it is recommended to use Indonesian selectively to ensure equal understanding of instructions among all learners.

This finding is in line with Alshehri (2017) which states that selective use of first language (L1) in EFL learning can clarify meaning and improve students' understanding, especially at the beginner level. In his study, Alshehri found that EFL teachers used L1 to explain abstract vocabulary, build positive interpersonal relationships with students, and create a supportive

learning environment. Thus, the strategic use of L1 can be one of the pedagogical approaches that support learning effectiveness, as also reflected in the results of this study.

Here are some examples of a teacher's notes regarding students' behavioural engagement:

Excerpt 1.

"Kelas tetap kondusif selama permainan berlangsung." [The class remained conducive during the game.]

Excerpt 2.

"Semua siswa mematuhi aturan yang diberikan dengan baik." [Students obeyed the given rules properly.]

Excerpt 3.

"Saat memberikan instruksi permainan, sebaiknya menggunakan bahasa Indonesia juga, karena siswa terlihat bingung jika hanya menggunakan bahasa Inggris." [When delivering game instructions, it is best to use Indonesian as well, as students look confused if only using English.]

To strengthen the results of observation, interviews were conducted with some students to gain a deeper understanding of their behavioural engagement during GBL. The interview results showed that most students responded positively to this method and claimed to feel more focused, active and motivated during the activities (see excerpt 4).

Here are some of the interview results related to behavioural engagement:

Excerpt 4.

Student 1: "...permainan sering kali menghadirkan tantangan yang mengharuskan kita memahami materi untuk menyelesaikannya. Hal ini membantu saya lebih fokus dalam memahami pembelajaran." [...games often present challenges that require us to understand the material to solve them. This helps me focus more on understanding the learning.]

Excerpt 5.

Student 2: "...metode pembelajaran berbasis permainan membuat siswa lebih bersemangat." [...game-based learning methods make students more excited.]

The convergence between interview and observation data shows that students display a high level of behavioural engagement during game-based learning. Active participation, on-time completion of tasks, as well as a classroom atmosphere that remains conducive indicate that the GBL approach is able to create a learning environment that is structured and supports student engagement. This alignment can be explained through the interactive and competitive characteristics of GBL, which not only encourages students to follow rules and instructions,

but also triggers their intrinsic motivation to be actively involved. This is in line with Alotaibi's (2024) findings, which highlighted that educational game designs that present elements of challenge, reward and social interaction were shown to increase students' cognitive, social and emotional engagement. Such engagement does not solely arise due to the fun nature of the game, but rather because the activities built into GBL are able to fulfil students' basic psychological needs, such as autonomy and competence, thus encouraging deeper intrinsic engagement. This is also consistent with the concept of behavioural engagement according to Fredricks et al. (2004), which includes adherence to class norms, active participation, and minimal disruption during the learning process. Such a learning environment creates a classroom atmosphere that is both conducive and productive. However, the success of GBL cannot be separated from contextual factors such as the language of instruction used, some students may experience difficulties when instructions are only delivered in English. Therefore, it is important for teachers to tailor the implementation of GBL in an inclusive manner, for example with balanced language use or adequate visual support. The pedagogical implication of these findings is the need for continuous evaluation and adaptation of GBL strategies, so that they are not only visually appealing, but also effective in reaching the diverse abilities and needs of students.

3.2. Emotional engagement

Emotional engagement in the context of learning refers to students' affective reactions to teachers, classmates, academic activities and the school environment in general. Fredricks et al. (2004) define emotional engagement as the extent to which students feel belonging, valued, and experience positive and negative emotions during the learning process. Based on the data collected, it was found that the GBL was able to foster various forms of emotional engagement, from fun, enthusiasm and social closeness, to anxiety and frustration.

The use of Game-Based Learning method in English learning appears to be successful in increasing students' emotional engagement. During the activity, students showed positive reactions to the learning process, whether towards the teacher, classmates, and the learning material itself (see excerpt 6). Enthusiasm was evident when all students from each group eagerly wanted to move forward first, showing high interest in the activities given.

In addition, students seemed comfortable in interacting with classmates, especially when working in groups with their seatmates or close friends (see excerpt 7). This creates a pleasant atmosphere and supports the creation of positive social relationships in the classroom. Students' emotional engagement is also reflected in the enjoyment they show when learning through games, as well as the appreciation of success achieved, both individually and in groups.

Furthermore, students demonstrated the ability to manage their emotions when facing challenges. When confronted with the game media, students were able to recall material that

had been taught previously, indicating an emotional attachment that supports learning. Overall, students not only enjoyed the learning process, but also felt valued and motivated to continue being actively involved, which is a strong indicator of positive emotional engagement.

Here are some examples of a teacher's notes regarding students' emotional engagement:

Excerpt 6.

“Belajar sambil bermain membuat siswa lebih menikmati pembelajaran.” [Learning through games makes students enjoy the lesson more.]

Excerpt 7.

“Karena bermain dengan teman akrab atau teman sebangku, siswa merasa lebih nyaman berinteraksi.” [By playing with close friends or seatmates, students feel more comfortable interacting.]

To strengthen the observation, interviews were conducted with some students to gain a deeper understanding of their emotional engagement during GBL. The interview results show that learning activities feel more fun, less boring, and able to create a relaxed classroom atmosphere while still encouraging understanding of the material (see excerpt 8). GBL also generates motivation through the element of competition and improves social connectedness among students through group cooperation. In addition, this method provides confidence in using English spontaneously in a more natural context.

However, there were also responses that indicated negative emotional engagement. Some students felt insecure when they had to speak in English, experienced panic when facing game challenges, and felt uncomfortable working in groups due to limited social relations (see excerpt 9). There were also students who claimed that the method had no significant impact on their interest in English, due to difficulties in understanding the material and low personal interest in the subject.

Here are some of the interview results related to emotional engagement:

Excerpt 8.

Student 1: “Saya sangat menikmati metode Game-Based Learning karena menyenangkan, tidak membosankan, dan tetap memberikan pengetahuan baru.” [I really enjoy the Game-Based Learning method because it is fun, not boring, and still provides new knowledge.]

Excerpt 9.

Student 4: “Meskipun saya menikmati aktivitas dalam pembelajaran berbasis permainan, saya sering merasa panik karena keterbatasan kemampuan saya dalam

bahasa Inggris.” [Although I enjoyed the activities in the game-based learning, I often felt panicked due to my limited proficiency in English.]

Overall, the results of this study indicate that GBL is able to evoke students' emotional engagement in various forms, both positive and negative, as described by Fredricks et al. (2004) in the emotional engagement framework which includes affective responses to learning activities. Most students showed positive responses such as enthusiasm, enjoyment, a sense of belonging, and pride in academic achievement gained through fun and collaborative activities. Social interaction within the group also helped to strengthen the connection between students and create a more inclusive and interactive classroom atmosphere. This finding is in line with the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as proposed by (Al-Khayat et al., 2023), which emphasizes that motivation and engagement increase when basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness, are met in the learning process. GBL naturally provides space to fulfil these needs, especially through the provision of choice, appropriate challenge, and social interaction. However, if these needs are not optimally met, for example when students feel less competent due to limitations in English, then negative emotional responses such as anxiety, insecurity and frustration could potentially arise. This suggests that the successful implementation of GBL relies heavily on teachers' sensitivity in detecting students' emotional states and providing appropriate support so that all students feel valued and able to participate equally in learning.

3.3. Cognitive engagement

The final dimension is cognitive engagement, which Fredricks et al. (2004) defined as the level of students' mental investment in learning. It involves a reflective, strategic attitude and a desire to understand complex concepts and master skills through deep thinking. In this study, the findings show that the GBL method is very effective in fostering students' cognitive engagement.

In English learning activities using the GBL method, students show high cognitive engagement. This is reflected in their willingness to understand the material more deeply through active interaction in the group. One student stated, *“The integration of the material into the game encourages me to better understand the English material. I am also encouraged to ask my friends if there are things I don't understand, so I can get new knowledge from them”* (Interview, Student 4). In addition, the observation results show that group games allow students to become peer tutors, so that their understanding deepens through the activity of helping each other and explaining the material in the group (see excerpt 10).

Students also appear to demonstrate effective learning strategies, such as practicing speaking English when giving instructions to teammates (see excerpt 11). They did not just passively follow the activities, but also engaged in efforts to master the language concepts

presented in the game media. The use of English in the context of the game encourages students to think critically and actively in constructing sentences and understanding the linguistic elements used.

More importantly, students are able to manage their learning process independently without having to always rely on teacher intervention. They stay focused even when the game becomes increasingly complex or competitive, such as when the opposing group's time is the decider. This perseverance and focus show that students have invested cognitively in the learning activities, with a readiness to face challenges to achieve better understanding.

Here are some examples of a teacher's notes regarding students' emotional engagement:

Excerpt 10.

“Permainan berkelompok memungkinkan siswa menjadi tutor sebaya, sehingga pemahaman mereka semakin mendalam.” [Playing in groups allows students to become peer tutors, which deepens their understanding.]

Excerpt 11.

“Siswa saling memberikan instruksi kepada teman kelompok menggunakan bahasa Inggris.” [Students give each other instructions to group mates using English.]

To strengthen the observation results, interviews were conducted with some students to gain a deeper understanding of their cognitive engagement during GBL. The interview results showed that most students responded positively to this method and felt more involved in the understanding of the material. They recognized that the game encouraged them to better understand the language concepts being taught, especially since the game integrated conversational exercises in English. The method also helped students to try harder in understanding the material in order to complete the challenges in the game well (see excerpt 12). In addition, some students stated that they felt more active and motivated to learn because they could see their own development through interaction with their friends in the group.

However, there were also some negative responses that reflected challenges in cognitive engagement. Although the material provided was appropriate for their level, some students found it difficult to understand the English material being taught. They admitted that they tended to feel overwhelmed or even give up when the challenges in the game became difficult (see excerpt 13). This was due to their disinterest in the English language as well as limited skills that hindered their comprehension of the material. Despite this, most students still tried to understand the material, especially when they had the opportunity to discuss with their group mates or seek help to deepen their understanding. This shows that although challenges remain, students try to stay engaged in the learning process if encouraged with the right approach.

This is in line with Cents-Boonstra et al. (2020) who showed that student engagement in learning is influenced by motivating teaching, such as providing autonomy-related support, clear structure, and positive relationships with students. The research shows that emotional support and caring interactions can motivate students to stay engaged in learning despite challenges. This implies that even if challenges remain, students will be more engaged if they are encouraged by appropriate and motivating approaches.

Here are some of the interview results related to cognitive engagement:

Excerpt 12.

Student 3: “Metode ini mendorong saya untuk memahami materi karena saya merasa tertantang untuk menyelesaikan permainan dan menjadi pemenang. Hal ini membuat saya lebih termotivasi dalam belajar.” [This method encourages me to understand the material because I feel challenged to complete the game and be the winner. This makes me more motivated in learning.]

Excerpt 13.

Student 4: “Karena saya sering kesulitan memahami materi bahasa Inggris, ketika tantangan dalam permainan menjadi terlalu sulit, saya cenderung menyerah dan tidak melanjutkan usaha untuk menyelesaikannya.” [Because I often have difficulty understanding English materials, when the challenges in the game become too difficult, I tend to give up and not continue trying to complete them.]

Overall, the findings of this study show that GBL is able to significantly encourage students' cognitive engagement. Students not only show high interest in learning, but are also actively involved in understanding the material, applying higher order thinking strategies and developing metacognitive skills in the learning process. They are reflective, strategic and willing to try harder to understand complex concepts and master English language skills contextually. This is in line with the definition of cognitive engagement by Fredricks et al. (2004), which includes student investment in learning through deep thinking, strategic planning and willingness to take on intellectual challenges. In addition, this engagement is reinforced by students' social interaction and mental endurance in the face of adversity, which not only enriches their understanding, but also reflects the quality of meaningful and sustainable learning.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that the application of GBL method in EFL learning can effectively increase students' engagement in three main dimensions: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. The most effective types of game elements are group-based competitive games, which encourage students to actively participate, cooperate in teams, and show higher focus

than individual games. For example, the Word Group Race game with time challenges proved to be very effective in increasing student participation and concentration.

Emotional and cognitive support is key in maximizing the benefits of GBL, especially in response to anxiety and language barriers. Teachers can provide written or oral answering options, as well as use bilingual prompts during the game to help students with language difficulties. In addition, students naturally utilize peers as a source of support by asking questions and discussing during play activities, which helps to reduce anxiety and increase self-confidence. Another form of cognitive support found was the provision of structured feedback from peers and opportunities to repeat and reflect on language use during the game.

The fun and collaborative learning atmosphere helps to build positive emotional engagement in the form of fun, enthusiasm, and strengthen social relationships between students. This is in line with Fredricks et al.'s engagement theory which emphasizes the importance of social and emotional support in maintaining overall student engagement. Cognitive engagement can be seen from students' ability to invest mentally in understanding the material, applying critical thinking strategies, and developing learning independence.

However, the language barrier remains a challenge, especially for students with limited English proficiency who sometimes experience confusion due to instructions that are entirely in English. This study is also limited by a relatively small sample size and a specific learning context, so the results may not be widely generalizable. Individual factors such as language proficiency level, personal interests and social dynamics among students also influenced different levels of engagement.

As recommendations, future research is suggested to broaden the scope by involving more diverse educational contexts, a wider age range, as well as variations in students' language proficiency levels. Hybrid approaches that strategically combine the use of English and first language are also important to implement for helping students' comprehension without compromising language learning goals. In addition, further research could explore how the GBL method is adapted to various learning situations, such as online learning, cross-cultural and inclusive education, to ensure its relevance and effectiveness across different conditions and learners' needs.

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