



Game-based Learning in Improving Junior High School Students' Classroom Participation

Wildatuzzahrany¹, Ade Hidayat^{2*}

¹Universitas Terbuka, ²Universitas Jambi

*Corresponding Author:  adehidayat@unja.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 19 September 2025</p> <p>Revised: 8 October 2025</p> <p>Accepted: 12 October 2025</p> <p>Keywords: game-based learning, participation, junior high school</p>	<p>English has been a subject taught in various schools in Indonesia for several years. However, in the learning process, many students still face challenges, particularly in classroom participation. This difficulty is further exacerbated if teachers still apply traditional methods such as lectures that lack active student participation. Therefore, it is important to use appropriate learning methods to create an effective and enjoyable learning atmosphere. One innovative approach that can be used is Game-Based Learning, a method that combines game elements into teaching and learning activities to create a more interactive and engaging learning experience. This approach is believed to improve student understanding, including vocabulary enrichment. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of the Game-Based Learning method in improving classroom participation of eighth-grade students at MTs Nurul Qur'an. The study was conducted using the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method, consisting of two cycles, and involving 25 students as research subjects. Data collection was conducted through observations administered during the Game-Based Learning implementation. The results showed a significant increase in students' participation after the implementation of Game-Based Learning. Therefore, it can be concluded that this method is effective in improving English vocabulary mastery while encouraging active student engagement in class.</p> <p>How to Cite: Wildatuzzahrany, & Hidayat, A. (2025). Game-based Learning in Improving Junior High School Students' Classroom Participation. <i>Indonesian Language Education and Applied Linguistics Reviews</i>, 1(2), 90-96.</p>

Published by:
Media Akademika Publisher
 mediaakademikapublisher@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

English language learning in junior high school level always has its own challenge, especially in Indonesia where the language serves as a foreign language. Normally, teacher will found students who have problems in learning English including skills mastery like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, one challenge that have to be considered by the teacher is improving the learning participation as it will also improve other language skills. In fact, conventional teaching methods is still dominant there in the classroom where it might make students feel bored and demotivated to participated in the learning process. This case is found in the observation of eighth grade students in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) Nurul Qur'an in Probolinggo Indonesia which shows that the students' learning participation is low. Therefore, further investigation on this matter is important to be done.

English language learning at the MTs Nurul Qur'an faces various challenges, particularly in developing students' active participation. Students' participation is a crucial language learning because it will push students to develop other skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Harmer, 2007). However, the conventional learning methods still dominant in many schools often leave students bored and unmotivated to participate actively in the learning process (Amirova, 2025). The observation shows that students tend to be passive in the classroom which

might also related to anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). This challenge and problem need to be resolved by creating variation of classroom activities that suit students learning style so that they can participate actively.

Technological developments and the current digital era provide a significant opportunity to integrate more engaging and effective learning approaches. Game-based learning (henceforth GBL) has emerged as an alternative learning method that combines game elements with learning objectives (Chowdhury et al., 2023). This method is considered capable of increasing student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes because it creates a fun learning environment while remaining focused on achieving learning objectives. Game-based learning has several advantages in vocabulary learning, including providing meaningful context for vocabulary use, providing non-boring repetition through gameplay, providing immediate feedback, and creating a healthy competitive environment to motivate students (Sitohang & Simanjuntak, 2025). Furthermore, this approach is also in line with constructivist learning theory, where students actively construct their knowledge through direct experience.

GBL integrates game elements into educational activities to create a more engaging and effective learning experience. It can be categorized into several types: digital GBL and traditional GBL. Digital GBL involves the use of computer technology or mobile devices in the learning process, while traditional GBL uses conventional games without the aid of digital technology. Both approaches have their own advantages in the context of learning English vocabulary. Recent research has shown that GBL has emerged as an effective approach to improving English language skills integrating game elements into educational activities, leading to increased engagement, motivation, and improved learning outcomes (Hafiza & Pratolo, 2024). These findings of GBL implementation also reveal various potential on how learning process can be fun and improve students' participation.

Studies on GBL has been done quite some times. Research by Chen et al. (2019) on the effects of GBL on Taiwanese EFL students' perceptions and learning performance yielded interesting results where participants reported that students were more engaged in language activities, allowing them to process and absorb more information. Other research by Nurjiah & Marna (2025) and Alfares (2025) on GBL with Wordwall application also further strengthen that GBL can improve students' participation in classroom activities. The implementation of GBL also improve classroom environment as Samartin (2020) states it creates conducive learning environment for the students during the classroom activities. Based on those research findings, it can be concluded that GBL is very important learning method to be considered and implemented for improving students learning participations.

Students at Mts Nurul Qur'an, especially the eighth-grade students, show that they are lacking participations which lead to slow learning process. This case might be related to various factors, but the highlighted note from the observation is the classroom activities is still done in traditional way. Traditional method in teaching and learning process might be the cause of student's low participation, because it tends to be boring and monotonous (Amirova, 2025; Arjomandi et al., 2018). In this case, teacher need to improve the learning process by developing different learning activities. As GBL already proven to be able to improve learning participation, it is then considered as a solution to overcome students' low participations during the learning process.

Based on the problems found in MTs Nurul Qur'an on students' low participation in classroom activities, this research aims to solve the problems by integrating GBL in the classroom activities. This research focus on one classroom of eighth-grade students in MTs Nurul Qur'an which by observation have the lowest participation score and need to be improved. Further result of this research is hoped to broaden the insight on how GBL is used to push teacher to create engaging classroom activities which also lead students learning participations

2. METHODS

This research is designed as classroom action research to solve student's problem in participating actively during the learning process in the classroom. Stringer (2007) explained action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives. Unlike traditional experimental research that looks for generalize explanations that might be applied to all contexts, action research focuses on specific situations and localized solutions. Further, the classroom action research was done following the action research steps by Kemmis et al. (2014) that consist of four main steps: planning, acting, observing, and evaluating.

Subjects of this research are the eighth-grade students of MTs Nurul Qur'an at Krasan, Probolinggo, East Java Province. The class consist of 25 students that are lacking in participation during classroom activities in language learning. The students are given GBL classroom activities which are different to their old traditional learning method. The classroom activities are done in two cycles where the first is to test the student's improvement after GBL activities, and the second is to confirm the first cycle's improvement.

Data was collected during the observation steps of the classroom action research. An observation checklist was used to collect the participation data of the students. The checklist categorized students into four categories which are low, fairly low, fairly high, and high. The categorization of the students can be seen in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Students Participation Category

Category	Description
High	Actively and enthusiastically participates the classroom activities. Giving ideas, engage in discussion, and collaborates with peers.
Fairly High	Participates regularly and positively. Responds when called upon, contributes to groupwork, and sometimes initiates interaction or share ideas
Fairly Low	Participates infrequently or with minimal engagement. May respond when asked but rarely contributes.
Low	Rarely participates in the classroom activities. Often passive, disengaged, or reluctant to respond.

Based on author's judgement

The GBL implemented was traditional gamification with matching words activities. The teacher prepared printed paper or write text in the classroom board. Teacher tried to implement technological media, but students' limitation resists the researcher in involving the technology into the classroom. Therefore, due on the limitation of students and school environment, researcher chose to implement the traditional gamification method.

This research has one indicator to measure the successful of the research which is the implementation of GBL strategy can improve students' participation during the classroom activities. The improvement will be shown by the number of students that are categorized as high and fairly high regarding their participation. This research can be concluded as success if there 80% (20 students) are in those categories. This indicator is designed by researchers' judgement which aim to set improvement goal for the GBL activities implemented.

3. RESULTS

This research was conducted in two cycles: Cycle I and Cycle II, each consisting of one meeting. The data obtained in each cycle served as a reflection to evaluate the success of the learning improvement efforts undertaken and as a basis for designing improvement measures in the next

cycle. The data was taken from student observation checklist, which reflected their participation and engagement in the learning process.

Before implementing learning improvements in Cycle I, the researcher first conducted observations and discussions with the eighth-grade English teacher at MTs Nurul-Qur'an. This activity aimed to assess the initial state of students' vocabulary mastery during the learning process. From the observations, the researcher identified several problems that affected students' vocabulary mastery. First, the use of the traditional lecturing method tended to make students feel bored and had difficulty concentrating. Second, the limited use of engaging learning media resulted in students being less actively involved in the learning process. After collecting this basis data, the researcher continued to prepare Cycle 1 including its learning materials and learning activities.

Cycle 1

In implementing learning improvement for students in Cycle I, the researcher applied the Game-Based Learning method. In this cycle, one type of group game was used, namely "Word Puzzle/Matching Game." The researcher awarded points to each group for correct answers, thus creating a competitive atmosphere in the game. During the activity, students appeared enthusiastic and actively participated. Learning in Cycle I showed improvements on students' active participation during the classroom activities. The result shows that there are 10 students with high participation and 14 students with fairly high participation. Only one student is in fairly low category and no students in low participation category. Data on student engagement in learning can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Students Participation in Cycle 1

Category	Total Students
High	10
Fairly High	14
Fairly Low	1
Low	-
Total	25

Reflections on the implementation of learning in Cycle I showed that collaboration in the "Word Puzzle/Matching Game" game still needs to be improved, because interaction and cooperation between students in groups were not optimal. Furthermore, classroom management is also an aspect that requires attention, especially during the game implementation. It was found that some students from other groups were involved in irrelevant activities, such as joking with friends, while other groups were playing. This problem needs to be fixed so that students can concentrate more and be fully involved in the learning process.

Cycle 2

In implementing the learning improvement cycle II, the researchers continued to use the same method, namely Game-Based Learning. However, several improvements were made to address the shortcomings that emerged in Cycle I, resulting in improved student engagement, with 15 students demonstrating high participation and 10 students engaging well in fairly high participation. Observation data regarding student vocabulary mastery can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Students Participation in Cycle 3

Category	Total Students
High	15
Fairly High	10
Fairly Low	-
Low	-
Total	25

Based on Table 3, it is shown that all students are active during the implementation of GBL in classroom activities. The result of cycle 2 also confirm and strengthen result from cycle 1 where GBL can improve students' participation. Therefore, it can be concluded that GBL is suitable for eighth-grade students of MTs Nurul Qur'an especially in improving their participation in classroom activities.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The result once again shows that GBL has proven to be able to improve students' participation during the classroom activities in language learning. Positive changes began to appear in some students who previously lacked confidence or were passive. They began to show courage in attempting to answer questions, both individually and in groups. This aligns with Adipat et al.'s (2021) opinion that games can encourage students to combine information from various sources to make decisions, which in this context applies to selecting the correct answer in a game. This result also confirms and strengthens research findings of Nurjiah & Marna (2025) and Alfares (2025) about improvement in participation after implementing GBL. By this result, also from similar previous findings, GBL can be considered as a teaching method that need to be implemented in language learning classroom.

Based on observations from cycles I and II, there was a significant improvement in students' vocabulary skills. The number of students categorized as "high" increased from 10 to 15. This indicates that the use of Matching Games has proven effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery. This method makes the learning process more enjoyable, dynamic, and stress-free, encouraging active student engagement and creativity (Sugianto, 2023). The application of the Game-Based Learning method creates an engaging learning environment, motivates students to be more active, and helps them understand and use vocabulary in various contexts. This aligns with research by Saptawulan (2012) who states that playing while learning can create a fun, natural, and effective learning environment in helping students grasp concepts.

The use of GBL in language learning is very effective in increasing students' engagement which lead to active participation of eighth-grade students at MTs Nurul Qur'an. In addition to improving understanding of the meaning and use of vocabulary, this method also provides opportunities for students to learn collaboratively, express their understanding, and build confidence in using English.

Limitation of the study

This research was designed as classroom action research which only focus on single classroom problem. The findings of this research are proven to be suitable for that classroom, but might not relevant to others. This research also only implements traditional classroom gamification activities because of limitation in accessible technology for the students. It might be more relevant to implement technological-based gamification like Hidayat (2024) ideas in maximizing the use of mobile phones. Therefore, further research might be needed to complement this research.

5. CONCLUSION

The use of the Game-Based Learning method has proven effective in improving participation of eighth-grade students at MTs Nurul Qur'an. Through the implementation of various types of interactive educational games that are relevant to the learning material, students showed increased engagement in the learning process. The learning environment created became more enjoyable, communicative, and supported the development of students' English language skills, especially in the vocabulary aspect. The results showed that most engage in the classroom activities in high and fairly high categories. This indicates that the Game-Based Learning method can be used as an alternative, innovative and effective learning strategy in developing students' language skills, especially in English learning.



In addition, students demonstrated greater confidence when using new vocabulary in both spoken and written tasks. Teachers also reported a noticeable improvement in classroom dynamics, with more peer collaboration and spontaneous participation. These findings suggest that integrating game-based strategies can foster not only academic growth but also social interaction and learner autonomy.

6. REFERENCES

- Adipat, S., Laksana, K., Busayanon, K., Asawasowan, A., & Adipat, B. (2021). Engaging students in the learning process with game-based learning: The fundamental concepts. *International Journal of Technology in Education (IJTE)*, 4(3), 542-552. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijte.169>
- Alfares, N. S. (2025). Investigating the Efficacy of Wordwall Platform in Enhancing Vocabulary Learning in Saudi EFL Classroom. *International Journal of Game-Based Learning*, 15(1), 1-12. doi:10.4018/IJGBL.367870
- Amirova, N. (2025). Traditional vs. Non-Traditional Teaching in Secondary Education: A Comparative Analysis. *Porta Universorum*, 1(3), 101-109. <https://doi.org/10.69760/portuni.010309>
- Arjomandi, A., Seufert, J., O'Brien, M., & Anwar, S. (2018). Active Teaching Strategies and Student Engagement: A Comparison of Traditional and Non-traditional Business Students. *e-Journal of Business Education & Scholarship of Teaching*, 12(2), 120-140.
- Chen, C.-M., Liu, H., & Huang, H.-B. (2019). Effects of a mobile game-based English vocabulary learning app on learners' perceptions and learning performance: A case study of Taiwanese EFL learners. *ReCALL*, 31(2), 170-188. doi:10.1017/S0958344018000228
- Chowdhury, M., Bart, M., & Donaldson, J. P. (2023). The Digital Game-Based Language Learning Experience for Vocabulary Learning. *International Society of the Learning Sciences*, 878-881.
- Hafiza, A., & Pratolo, B. (2024). A systematic review of the effectiveness of game-based learning in English language teaching. *International Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(2), 56-64. <https://doi.org/10.31763/ijele.v6i2.1312>
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th ed.)*. Pearson Longman.
- Hidayat, A. (2024). Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) to Enhance English Language Learning: Ideas and Constraints. *Jurnal Pendidikan Vokasi Raflesia*, 4(1), 46-56.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*. Springer.
- Nurjiah, M., & Marna, J. E. (2025). Pengaruh Game-Based Learning Berbantu Wordwall terhadap Hasil Belajar Siswa. *Andragogi Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 5(2). 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.31538/adrg.v5i2.2355>
- Samortin, M. (2020). Effects of Gamified Learning Activities in Enhancing Junior High School Students' English Vocabulary Retention. *Asian Journal on Perspectives in Education*, 1(1), 71-85.
- Saptawulan, A. (2012). Belajar Biologi yang Menyenangkan dengan Permainan Kuartet dan Pementapan Konsep Secara Mandiri Melalui Blog. *Jurnal Pendidikan Penabur*, 18, 28-35.
- Sitohang, C. S., & Simanjuntak, D. C. (2025). Empowering Vocabulary Growth: A Comprehensive Study on Collaborative Game-Based Learning and Digital Integration. *TELL-US Journal*, 11(1), 149-176.
- Stevenson, B. (2003). *Understanding Action Research*. Florida: MALT 2002 – 2B.

Stringer, E. T. (2007). *Action Research Third Edition*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Sugianto, H. (2023). Game-based learning in enhancing learning motivation. *International Journal of Instructional Technology (IJIT)*, 2(1), 22-33.

