

# EXPLORING STUDENTS' INTEREST IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE THROUGH TRADITIONAL GAMES IN 2nd GRADERS

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates students' interest in learning English as a foreign language through traditional games in primary school. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the research focuses on student interest based on classroom observations and interviews, applying Schiefele's (2009) indicators of student interest. The study population includes grades 2A, 2B, and 2C (87 students) at SDIT Permata Hati, Tebing Tinggi. A purposive sample of 29 students from grade 2B was selected. Data collection involved interviews and classroom observations. The findings indicate that a majority of students show high interest in learning English through traditional games. During game-based activities, 96% of students demonstrated positive emotional responses such as excitement and enthusiasm, reflecting key indicators of interest. These results suggest that traditional games can effectively enhance student motivation and engagement in English learning. The findings offer practical implications for English teachers in utilizing traditional games as instructional media. Moreover, the study recommends further research to explore the effectiveness of traditional games in secondary school contexts, particularly in enhancing interest and developing language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

**Keywords:** *Students' Interest, Traditional Games, Teacher Strategy.*

## Introduction

English has become a global lingua franca, and its mastery is increasingly seen as essential for academic, social, and professional advancement. In the Indonesian educational context, English is introduced as a foreign language (EFL) starting from primary to secondary education levels, particularly in private institutions (Gunantar, 2016). However, despite its official inclusion in early education, the process of English instruction at the elementary level is often met with challenges, especially in maintaining students' engagement and motivation. Many young learners find English lessons monotonous due to conventional teaching practices that heavily rely on textbooks and grammar drills, without integrating students' interests and developmental needs.

Research shows that young learners thrive in environments where learning is meaningful, interactive, and enjoyable (Wahyudin et al., 2024). Traditional, teacher-centered instruction fails to consider students' psychological readiness, learning preferences, and cognitive-emotional engagement, which are critical factors at the

primary level. In response, educators are increasingly urged to adopt pedagogical strategies that are developmentally appropriate such as scaffolding, differentiation, real-life tasks, and multimodal resources so that students not only gain knowledge but also develop positive attitudes toward the learning process.

One promising approach is the incorporation of traditional games into English instruction. Grounded in Krashen's Input Hypothesis (2009), the use of familiar, culturally embedded games creates comprehensible input and a low-anxiety environment where language acquisition occurs naturally. Krashen emphasizes that meaningful, low-stress, and enjoyable language input is key to successful acquisition. Traditional games offer such input by combining play, movement, social interaction, and emotional involvement all of which are critical for young learners' engagement. In this way, English becomes not just a subject to learn, but an experience to enjoy.

Supporting this view, Bazir (2021) highlights the importance of integrating interactive methods including games, storytelling, and digital

tools to increase student participation and promote authentic language use. When students are allowed to explore language through familiar cultural contexts, they are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and retain what they learn. Furthermore, learning through traditional games connects language acquisition with students' lived experiences, enabling better internalization of vocabulary, expressions, and communicative skills.

Despite these theoretical and pedagogical insights, the use of traditional games in formal English classrooms remains underexplored, especially in Indonesia. Most schools still favor conventional methods, neglecting culturally responsive and playful approaches that could enhance student engagement. In response to this gap, the current study aims to explore the effectiveness of traditional games in stimulating students' interest in learning English as a foreign language at the primary level. The study focuses on second-grade students at SDIT Permata Hati Kota Tebing Tinggi as its research context.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on *student interest* rather than merely linguistic achievement as the main variable of investigation. While existing research has often examined the impact of traditional games on vocabulary acquisition (Novitawati et al., 2022) or speaking accuracy (Hikmawan et al., 2023), limited attention has been given to how such games foster emotional and cognitive engagement in language learning. This research also expands previous works by implementing more than one traditional game (*engklek* and *congkak*) to examine variations in students' responses and levels of interest.

Several studies inform the foundation of this research. Rusiana and Nuraeningsih (2016) demonstrated the effectiveness of traditional games such as *gedrik* and *batangan* in promoting English learning among children. Novitawati et al. (2022) found that traditional South Kalimantan games could significantly enhance vocabulary mastery in early childhood education. Similarly, Hikmawan et al. (2023) revealed that traditional games improved speaking fluency in young learners. However, unlike these studies, the current research specifically investigates student interest as a core affective dimension that supports language learning while employing multiple traditional games in a formal classroom setting.

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method involving classroom observation and interviews with selected students to identify

indicators of student interest based on Schiefele's (2009) theoretical framework. The study explores how traditional games can elicit positive emotions, increase participation, and improve motivation in learning English. In conclusion, this paper presents a study that explores second-grade students' interest in learning English as a foreign language through traditional games. It seeks to contribute to the field of EFL instruction by offering pedagogical insights into the use of culturally relevant games to create meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences. The following sections will elaborate on the research design, data analysis, and key findings that inform the role of traditional games in enhancing student engagement in English classrooms.

## Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' interest in learning English as a foreign language through the use of traditional games. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of students' emotional and cognitive engagement during English learning activities that involve culturally relevant games (Martin & White, 2007). The design allowed researchers to capture subjective experiences, expressions, and behaviors that indicate student interest, based on Schiefele's (2009) framework of interest indicators.

The participants of this study were drawn from SDIT Permata Hati Kota Tebing Tinggi, which consisted of 179 students from Grade 1 to Grade 6. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, focusing on 29 second-grade students (Class 2B) as the primary participants. This particular group was chosen based on their developmental stage, level of English proficiency, and accessibility for observation. The sample represented both male and female students, aged 7 to 8 years, with diverse backgrounds in exposure to traditional games and English language instruction.

Data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews conducted before and after the traditional game sessions. The observational data were video-recorded during in-class activities involving two traditional Indonesian games *engklek* and *congkak*. These games were chosen for their popularity and relevance to the local cultural context, as well as their potential to stimulate collaborative interaction and excitement in the learning process.

The interviews were conducted in two phases. The first phase took place before the games were implemented, aiming to assess students' prior knowledge of traditional games, their interest in such games, and their general attitude toward English learning. The second phase was conducted after the classroom implementation, to evaluate students' perceptions and emotional responses toward the learning experience, including how the games influenced their interest in learning English. All interviews were recorded with consent and later transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis followed several systematic procedures, Pre-game interviews: Transcriptions were coded and categorized based on themes such as prior knowledge of traditional games, emotional attitudes, and baseline interest in English. Classroom observations: Video footage of game-based learning sessions was transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed using Schiefele's (2009) ten indicators of student interest, such as focused attention, emotional engagement, and willingness to participate. Post-game interviews: Transcriptions were categorized into emergent themes, including enjoyment, motivation, perceived benefits, and self-reported interest in

English learning. In all stages, data were compiled into tabular forms to facilitate comparison and interpretation, followed by narrative synthesis and conclusion drawing.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, multiple strategies were applied. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from three sources: pre-game interviews, classroom observations, and post-game interviews. Member checking was employed by confirming selected interpretations with the participants to verify the accuracy of their expressed experiences. Peer debriefing was also performed by involving fellow researchers to cross-examine the coding and interpretations. Furthermore, thick description was used in presenting the findings to provide a rich and contextualized account of student interest indicators.

## Findings and Discussion

Before the traditional games were implemented in the English classroom, the students were asked about their knowledge of traditional games, including their meaning, examples, and how to play them. The results are presented in the table below:

**Table 1**  
**Students' Knowledge about Traditional Games**

No	Knowledge Aspects	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Meaning of Traditional Games	96 %	4 %
2	Examples of Traditional Games	93 %	7 %
3	How to Play the Games	90 %	10 %

The data show that the majority of the students had a basic understanding of traditional games. A total of 96% of students understood the meaning of traditional games, 93% could mention examples, and 90% knew how to play them. These findings indicate a high level of familiarity with traditional games, which laid a strong foundation for their engagement during the learning process.

*"Ya tau, pengertian permainan tradisional adalah permainan yang dilakukan orang zaman dahulu hingga sekarang menggunakan peralatan sederhana."*

(Yes, I know, the meaning of traditional games is games that have been played from ancient times until now using simple tools.) – *Student 1*

*"Petak umpet, engklek, congkak."*

(Hide and seek, hopscotch, congkak.) – *Student 2*  
*"Ya, tau."*

(Yes, I know.) – *Student 3, when asked how to play the games*

These qualitative responses support the quantitative results, confirming that students were not only familiar with traditional games but could also relate them to their own experiences.

During the classroom observation of the traditional games (*engklek* and *congkak*), students were evaluated based on ten interest indicators from Schiefele's (2009) framework. The summarized results are shown in the table below:

**Table 2 Indicators of Students' Interest**

No	Indicator of Student Interest	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Active Participant	93 %	7 %
2	Focused Attention	93 %	7 %
3	Positive Emotional Responses	96 %	4 %
4	Willingness to Invest Time and Effort	90 %	10 %

5	Curiosity and Questioning	86 %	14 %
6	Persistence in Overcoming Challenges	83 %	17 %
7	Preference for Related Activities	72 %	17 %
8	Creative Output and Initiative	76 %	28 %
9	Engagement with Resources and Opportunities	79 %	24 %
10	Peer Influence and Collaboration	83 %	21 %

The data demonstrate that most students showed strong indicators of interest. Notably, 96% of students displayed positive emotional responses, while 93% were actively participating and paying focused attention during the games. These findings highlight the effectiveness of traditional games in creating engaging English learning environments.

*“Gambar tas, Pak Guru!”*

(The picture is a bag, Sir!) – *Student 4, showing active participation during the game*

*“Menyenangkan, Pak Guru.”*

(It was fun, Sir!) – *Student 5, expressing joy while jumping between boxes*

These expressions illustrate genuine emotional

**Table 3 Students’ Perceptions After Playing the Traditional Games**

No	Perception	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Interested in Learning	96 %	4 %
2	Feeling Happy	93 %	7 %

The results reveal that 96% of students reported being interested in learning English after the game, and 93% expressed happiness during the activity. These findings emphasize the emotional and motivational benefits of incorporating traditional games into language instruction.

*“Sangat berminat, Pak Guru.”*

(Very interested, Sir.) – *Student 6*

*“Permainannya menyenangkan, jadi belajar bahasa Inggris tidak membosankan.”*

(The game was fun, so learning English wasn’t boring.) – *Student 7*

These responses show how the emotional context created by the games influenced students’ attitudes positively. The traditional games served not only as instructional media but also as cultural and social tools that nurtured joy, interaction, and motivation.

The findings confirm that traditional games are highly effective in stimulating students’ interest in learning English. Students entered the lesson with existing cultural knowledge of the games, which facilitated immediate engagement. The games provided opportunities for meaningful interaction, peer collaboration, and emotional expression, all of which are essential components of language acquisition as proposed by Krashen (2009).

engagement and active involvement—key signs of interest according to Schiefele’s framework. Furthermore, students’ curiosity and initiative were observed when they asked questions or attempted new ways to play the game. This aligns with Krashen’s (2009) theory that enjoyable and meaningful input facilitates natural language acquisition.

To assess the overall impact of the games, post-activity interviews were conducted. The students were asked to reflect on their experiences and feelings after participating in the game-based English lesson.

This study also affirms previous research by Rusiana & Nuraeningsih (2016), Novitawati et al. (2022), and Hikmawan et al. (2023), while extending the scope by focusing on interest indicators rather than just language outcomes. The use of multiple traditional games in one study adds another layer of novelty and practical insight. In conclusion, integrating traditional games like *engklek* and *congkak* into English lessons offers a culturally grounded, emotionally enriching, and pedagogically sound method for increasing student interest and engagement in learning English as a foreign language.

## Conclusion

The findings revealed that most students were not only familiar with traditional games such as their meaning, examples, and how to play them but also expressed high levels of engagement and enjoyment during the learning process. This study offers valuable insights for educators seeking to create more engaging and culturally relevant English language learning experiences. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate traditional games such as *engklek*, *congkak*, or similar culturally familiar activities into their classroom routines. For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to assess the sustained impact of traditional games on student interest and English proficiency over time. Comparative

studies across different grade levels, regions, or cultural backgrounds would also be beneficial to explore how contextual factors influence students' responses to game-based learning. Furthermore, mixed-method approaches combining qualitative and quantitative data could provide a more comprehensive understanding of both emotional engagement and measurable language gains. In conclusion, traditional games represent a promising pedagogical tool for enhancing student interest in English as a foreign language. When implemented thoughtfully, they can bridge cultural heritage and modern language instruction, creating a learning environment that is both enjoyable and effective.

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