

Game-based Learning in Indonesian Language Instruction: A Qualitative Study of Student Engagement and Cultural Integration at an Islamic Elementary School

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Abstract: This qualitative study examines the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in Indonesian language instruction at a third-grade classroom of an integrated Islamic elementary school in Bengkulu City, Indonesia. The research addressed low student engagement and limited concentration on text- and grammar-based materials. Data were collected through classroom observations (six sessions), semi-structured interviews (eight students, one teacher, one principal), and documentation over one semester. Findings reveal that GBL transformed passive learning into active, participatory experiences. Specific games Word Detective (vocabulary and sentence construction), Character Bingo (listening comprehension using the Malin Kundang folktale), and Sentence Dice (creative writing) enhanced behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Students reported increased motivation (seven of eight students), confidence (six of eight), and collaboration. The teacher's role shifted from knowledge transmitter to facilitator, creating an inclusive, psychologically safe environment. A "Star Points" gamification system fostered healthy competition and collective responsibility. This study contributes empirical evidence on integrating local cultural content into GBL, demonstrating that well-designed game-based activities can serve as natural classroom management strategies while supporting holistic language development. We recommend that primary teachers adopt structured, curriculum-aligned GBL approaches and that future research examine GBL across multiple schools and age groups using mixed methods.

Keywords: Elementary Education; Game-Based Learning; Indonesian Language Learning; Learning Motivation; Student-Centered Learning

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A. Introduction

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also possess strong moral and spiritual character. Within the Indonesian context, Law Number 22 of 2020 on Culture and Language emphasizes the strategic role of the Ministry of Education and Culture in advancing national language and cultural governance, as reflected in measurable outcomes such as the Cultural Development Index (CDI). These national initiatives are systematically structured into three primary domains: (a) cultural preservation and development, (b) language development, and (c) character strengthening. Collectively, these pillars highlight the integral role of education in fostering linguistic competence alongside cultural identity and character formation in the contemporary educational landscape ([Law Number 22 of 2020](#)).

Despite the government's policy initiatives, the expected outcomes have not been fully realized in classroom practice. Empirical evidence from the latest OECD report on the Programme for International Student Assessment highlights persistent challenges in students' reading literacy in Indonesia. Over the past five years, a comparative analysis of the 2018 and 2022 cycles reveals a decline in reading literacy scores from 371 to 359 points. Although Indonesia's absolute score decreased by 12 points, its relative global ranking improved due to sharper declines observed in many other countries following the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the magnitude of Indonesia's decline remains below the OECD average decrease of 18 points during the same period. However, a critical concern persists: approximately 75% of Indonesian students perform below Level 2, the minimum proficiency threshold. This indicates that while most students can identify the main idea in short texts, they continue to struggle with interpreting and analyzing more complex reading materials ([PISA, 2022](#)).

Preliminary classroom observations indicate that Indonesian language instruction in primary schools remains predominantly conventional and heavily oriented toward rote memorization, rendering it less engaging for students. Supporting this observation, interview data with eight students revealed that six participants perceived Indonesian language lessons as monotonous and uninteresting. This condition contributes to low levels of student interest and engagement in classroom learning. Ideally, Indonesian language instruction should be designed using innovative and contextualized approaches that facilitate the comprehensive development of language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, a major challenge lies in students' perception that text-based and grammar-focused materials are rigid and unappealing. This issue is further evidenced by a noticeable decline in students' concentration after the first 15 minutes of instruction when traditional lecture-based methods are employed. In response to these challenges, the Grade III teacher introduced Game-Based Learning (GBL) as an alternative instructional strategy. Accordingly, there is a critical need for pedagogical approaches that not only accommodate students' learning needs but also create meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

In response to these challenges, the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in Indonesian language instruction emerges as a relevant and promising pedagogical alternative. This approach shifts the focus of learning from mere content delivery to the active engagement of students in meaningful, creative, and enjoyable learning experiences through educational games ([Hartt et al., 2020](#)). By integrating play-based elements into instructional practice, GBL facilitates not only increased student participation but also enhanced motivation and learning outcomes. Consequently, this approach holds substantial potential to transform Indonesian language learning into a more engaging and effective process that aligns with students' cognitive and affective needs.

A growing body of research has examined the effectiveness of Game-Based Learning (GBL) across Indonesian language instruction and other educational domains. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that GBL significantly enhances students' learning motivation and academic achievement ([Balaskas et al., 2023](#); [Eltahir et al., 2021](#); [Shakroum et al., 2018](#)). In addition, prior studies highlight that GBL fosters interactive and enjoyable learning environments, thereby increasing student engagement ([Nadeem et al., 2023](#); [Sabourin & Lester, 2013](#)). Furthermore, the integration of digital-based GBL has been shown to improve students' comprehension and retention ([Iia et al., 2025](#); [Okasha, 2025](#); [Risla et al., 2026](#)). The use of platforms such as Quizizz and Wordwall within GBL contexts also contributes to higher levels of student participation and motivation ([Sitepu & Kemba, 2025](#); [Zahara et al., 2025](#)). Moreover, [Efendi \(2022\)](#) emphasizes that educational games play a crucial role in enhancing students' critical thinking skills. Collectively, these studies underscore the effectiveness of GBL as a pedagogical approach for improving the overall quality of learning. However, despite this growing evidence, limited research has specifically explored how GBL is implemented in Indonesian language learning at the primary school level, particularly within contextual classroom settings.

Despite extensive evidence supporting the effectiveness of Game-Based Learning (GBL), several critical research gaps remain. Previous studies have predominantly focused on improving students' learning outcomes and motivation, with limited attention given to a comprehensive examination of GBL within the context of Indonesian language instruction. In particular, the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in GBL-based learning remains underexplored. Moreover, there is a scarcity of research investigating the alignment between game design and the specific characteristics of Indonesian language materials, as well as their adaptation to local cultural contexts. This limitation highlights the need for more context-sensitive and pedagogically grounded investigations. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in Indonesian language learning among third-grade students in Islamic primary education. Specifically, it aims to explore how GBL can enhance both the quality of the learning process and students' learning outcomes through a holistic and contextually relevant instructional approach. This study addresses the following research questions (RQ): 1) How is GBL implemented in Indonesian language instruction at the primary school level? 2) What are the impacts of GBL on students' engagement, motivation, and

language competence? 3) How does the integration of local cultural content (folktales) into GBL influence student learning experiences?

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which aims to systematically describe and interpret phenomena as they naturally occur without manipulating the studied variables (Sugiyono, 2019). The research was conducted in a third-grade classroom at Mutiara Assyifa Integrated Islamic Elementary School, Bengkulu City, Indonesia. Participants were determined using purposive sampling techniques. The participants consisted of the third-grade classroom teacher and third-grade students, who were selected as primary data sources. Data were collected through multiple techniques, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, to ensure data triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings. Data validity techniques are carried out by triangulating sources, techniques and time (Meijer et al., 2002). Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which involves three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This analytical framework enabled a systematic organization and interpretation of the data to generate meaningful insights into the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in Indonesian language instruction. The following is a grid of interview guide instruments.

Table 1. Interview Guide Instrument GBL Method in Indonesian Language Learning

Indicator	Informant	Interview Questions
School policy toward instructional innovation (GBL)	School Principal	Does the school support the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in classroom instruction?
	Grade III Teacher	What steps do you take in implementing Game-Based Learning (GBL) in Indonesian language instruction in your classroom?
Enjoyment	Fathir	How do you feel when participating in Indonesian language learning through games?
	Aisyah	Does learning through games help you understand the material? Why?
Motivation	Nabila	What is your experience of learning with classmates using game-based activities?
	Dimas	Does learning through games help you stay more focused? Why?
	Zahra	How do you feel when learning through games? Do you feel more confident?
Active Student Engagement	Rizky	Do you become more active during learning when games are used? Could you explain?

C. Results and Discussion

Results

Mutiara Assyifa Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Bengkulu City, Indonesia, an institution recognized for its integrated educational approach that combines Islamic values with modern pedagogical innovation. The focus of the study was on third-grade students, who are in a critical stage of cognitive development characterized by the need for enhanced visual and kinesthetic stimulation in the learning process, particularly in Indonesian language instruction. This developmental phase necessitates the use of engaging and interactive instructional strategies to support effective language acquisition.

In response to the issues identified during the preliminary study, the school – through the Grade III teacher began integrating Game-Based Learning (GBL) into classroom instruction. In this context, GBL is not merely understood as play, but as the strategic use of game mechanics to achieve formal curricular objectives. The initial phase of this study focused on examining the planning stage of GBL implementation. Interview findings revealed that the planning process began with the alignment of instructional design with the targeted Learning Outcomes. The teacher emphasized that the integration of GBL must remain pedagogically purposeful rather than recreational. As stated by the teacher: “I must ensure that the game is not merely a time-filler, but a bridge that helps students understand sentence construction and vocabulary development.”

The Grade III teacher further elaborated on the instructional procedures for implementing Game-Based Learning (GBL) in the classroom. The process begins with the identification of clear learning objectives, such as improving students’ reading and writing skills or expanding their vocabulary. Subsequently, the teacher selects or designs games that align with both the instructional content and students’ characteristics, including activities such as word-guessing games, vocabulary cards, and sentence construction tasks. Prior to the activity, the teacher explains the rules of the game to ensure that students understand the structure and flow of the learning process. During the implementation phase, students actively participate in the games, either individually or collaboratively, while the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator who guides and ensures that learning remains aligned with the intended objectives. Throughout the activity, students directly practice language skills, including reading instructions, verbal communication, and sentence construction. Following the activity, the teacher engages students in reflection and discussion to review the outcomes of the game and address any misunderstandings. The final stage involves evaluation, in which students’ learning achievements are assessed through observation, task performance, or short quizzes. Based on the results, the teacher provides follow-up actions, such as reinforcement, remedial instruction, or enrichment activities, to ensure that all students achieve the expected competencies. Overall, the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in Indonesian language instruction at the primary school level emphasizes the structured use of game-based

activities to achieve specific learning objectives. The process encompasses a systematic sequence, beginning with careful instructional planning, followed by the execution of interactive game-based activities that actively engage students, and concluding with reflection and evaluation to ensure students' comprehension of the material. These findings suggest that GBL is not merely a tool for increasing enjoyment in the classroom, but a pedagogically grounded approach that enhances the effectiveness of language learning. By fostering active, interactive, and meaningful learning experiences, GBL contributes significantly to the development of students' language skills.

The instructional media prepared by the Grade III teacher at Mutiara Assyifa Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Bengkulu City were notably diverse, ranging from physical materials such as "*Mystery Cards*" to simple digital tools utilizing interactive quizzes. Although the preparation of these materials required additional time and effort, the teacher perceived it as a strategic investment to enhance the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Classroom observation during the first meeting, which focused on the theme "*Healthy Environment*," revealed the practical implementation of GBL through an activity titled "*Word Detective*." In this activity, the classroom was transformed into an interactive exploration space where students were tasked with locating hidden word fragments and assembling them into complete sentences.

Classroom observations revealed a significant shift in classroom dynamics, with the learning environment becoming highly active and participatory. Students who were previously passive, particularly those seated at the back of the classroom, began to move around enthusiastically in search of word fragments. This finding indicates that GBL effectively stimulates physical engagement, which in turn enhances students' mental readiness to receive and process learning materials. To strengthen the validity of these findings, follow-up interviews were conducted with six third-grade students who directly participated in GBL-based learning activities. The interview data provided deeper insights into students' learning experiences from their own perspectives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of GBL on engagement and learning processes.

During an interview session, a student named Fathir expressed his enthusiasm toward the game-based learning activity: "I usually feel reluctant to read books, but when I am asked to find cards like this, I become more excited. I also learned that the word 'throwing away' should be followed by 'trash.'" This statement reflects a shift in students' attitudes toward learning, indicating that GBL can transform previously disengaging tasks into enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences. It also highlights how game-based activities facilitate contextual understanding of vocabulary and sentence construction through active participation.

In a second interview, a student named Aisyah reported that the game-based learning approach made the material easier to understand: "When learning like this, I understand more quickly because it does not feel difficult and is more enjoyable." This

statement suggests that GBL creates a more learner-friendly environment that reduces perceived difficulty and enhances students' comprehension. By embedding instructional content within enjoyable and interactive activities, GBL facilitates a smoother learning process and supports more effective knowledge acquisition.

In a subsequent interview, a student named Rizky reported increased participation during the learning process: "I participate more often in classroom activities instead of just sitting quietly. I feel more motivated to learn." This statement indicates that GBL promotes active student engagement by encouraging direct participation in classroom activities. The shift from passive to active involvement reflects the effectiveness of game-based approaches in fostering students' behavioral engagement and learning motivation.

In a third interview, a student named Nabila highlighted the collaborative aspect of the learning experience: "Learning becomes more enjoyable because we can work together with our classmates. We help each other when someone does not understand." This statement indicates that GBL fosters positive social interaction among students by promoting collaboration and peer support. The integration of game-based activities encourages cooperative learning, where students actively engage in shared problem-solving and knowledge construction. In another interview, a student named Dimas reported improved concentration during the learning process: "I pay more attention during the lesson because the activities are interesting and not boring." This statement indicates that GBL enhances students' attentional focus by creating engaging and stimulating learning activities. The use of interactive game elements reduces monotony and sustains students' concentration throughout the instructional process.

Finally, a student named Zahra reported increased confidence during the learning process: "I feel more confident to try and am not afraid of making mistakes because the atmosphere is relaxed." This statement indicates that GBL fosters a psychologically safe learning environment in which students feel comfortable taking risks and expressing themselves. Such conditions are essential for supporting students' confidence and encouraging active participation in language learning activities.

Based on the interview findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) has a positive impact on students' overall learning experiences. Students reported more enjoyable learning, increased active participation, stronger collaboration, improved focus, and enhanced self-confidence. These findings further reinforce the effectiveness of GBL as a pedagogical approach in fostering meaningful and student-centered learning. By integrating cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning, GBL provides a holistic framework that supports both engagement and deeper language acquisition.

The Grade III teacher at Mutiara Assyifa Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Bengkulu City also implemented a "Star Points" system as a gamification element

within the learning process. In this system, each group that successfully completed tasks accurately and efficiently was awarded stars, which were displayed on the classroom achievement board. This form of structured, healthy competition was found to increase students' excitement and engagement during learning activities. The incorporation of reward-based mechanisms not only motivated students to participate more actively but also fostered a sense of achievement and collective responsibility within groups.

We observed strong social interaction among students during group-based activities. Within their groups, students engaged in negotiation processes, particularly when differences of opinion arose regarding sentence construction. In such instances, students were encouraged to articulate arguments using appropriate Indonesian language in order to persuade their peers. This interaction not only enhanced linguistic competence but also promoted communicative and collaborative skills. In a subsequent session, the instructional focus shifted to the folktale *Malin Kundang*. The teacher implemented a game titled "*Character Bingo*," in which students were provided with bingo sheets containing character traits. As the teacher narrated the story, students were required to listen attentively and identify the corresponding traits by marking their sheets. This activity represents a form of GBL that effectively trains students' listening skills through intensive and purposeful engagement.



Figure 1. Example of the Folktale: *Malin Kundang*



Figure 2. Example of a "*Character Bingo*" Game Story

During the activity, the classroom atmosphere became notably quiet yet highly focused. Each student listened attentively to every word spoken by the teacher in order to identify the correct bingo cues. This observation indicates that GBL can effectively regulate students' attention and maintain classroom focus without the need for strict disciplinary interventions. Such findings suggest that well-designed game-based activities can function as a natural classroom management strategy, promoting self-regulated behavior and sustained concentration among students. In a follow-up

interview, the Grade III teacher, Mrs. Siti Aminah, further explained: “The implementation of GBL at this school helps me recognize students’ hidden potential. Students who may perform poorly in written tests often demonstrate strong strategic thinking and leadership skills during game-based activities.”

Based on classroom observations, the teacher assumed the role of a facilitator rather than a dominant knowledge transmitter. Instead of leading the instruction from the front, the teacher moved around the classroom, providing technical guidance and ensuring that all students were equally engaged in the learning activities. This shift reflects a transition toward a more student-centered learning environment. However, challenges related to time management were identified during the implementation of GBL. Some game-based activities exceeded the allocated instructional time, as students became deeply engaged in the tasks. To address this issue, the teacher introduced a visual timer displayed at the front of the classroom, encouraging students to develop time awareness and self-regulation during the learning process.

An inclusive learning atmosphere was also observed during the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL). Students with slower learning paces appeared less pressured and more comfortable participating in classroom activities. The flexible and play-oriented environment allowed them to make mistakes without fear of being ridiculed by their peers, thereby fostering a psychologically safe and supportive learning space. In the domain of writing skills, the teacher implemented an activity called “*Sentence Dice*.” In this game, students rolled dice to determine sentence components—such as subject, predicate, and object which they then combined into short paragraphs. This approach transformed writing, which is often perceived as a demanding task, into an engaging and enjoyable challenge driven by elements of chance and creativity.

Observational data indicate that students’ written outputs generated through the “*Sentence Dice*” activity were more varied and imaginative. Rather than relying on standard examples from textbooks, students demonstrated increased willingness to explore novel word combinations derived from the game-based activities. This suggests that GBL can foster creativity and flexibility in students’ writing practices. In addition, an interview with the school principal provided an institutional perspective on the implementation of GBL. The principal expressed strong support for the approach, stating: “We fully support GBL because it aligns with our school’s vision of nurturing students who are not only intelligent but also experience joyful learning in the pursuit of knowledge.”

At the stage of describing the research findings, the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in the Grade III classroom has fostered a self-directed learning ecosystem. Students are no longer positioned as passive recipients of knowledge; rather, they become active agents who seek, process, and construct information through structured game-based mechanisms. This transformation reflects a shift toward learner autonomy and student-centered pedagogy, where knowledge is

actively constructed through engagement, interaction, and meaningful learning experiences. The following are research findings based on thematic.

Table 2. Thematic Findings

No	Theme	Informant	Findings
1	From Passive to Active Engagement	Fathir	"I usually feel reluctant to read books, but when I am asked to find cards like this, I become more excited."
2	Enhanced Motivation through Gamification	Teacher	The "Star Points" system and healthy competition.
3	Social Interaction and Collaboration	Nabila	"Learning becomes more enjoyable because we can work together with our classmates."
4	Increased Confidence and Psychological Safety	Zahra	"I feel more confident to try and am not afraid of making mistakes because the atmosphere is relaxed."
5	Teacher Role Transformation	Teacher	From knowledge transmitter to facilitator

This study has limitations, which consist of: 1) Time management (game activities exceeding allocated time); 2) Visual timer as a solution; and 3) Teacher-reported preparation burden.

Discussions

Based on the findings, the implementation of GBL in the Grade III classroom at Mutiara Assyifa Integrated Islamic Elementary School in Bengkulu City has a significant impact on enhancing students' engagement in Indonesian language learning. The initial findings, which indicated low levels of student concentration under traditional lecture-based methods, provide a strong rationale for the need for more interactive instructional approaches. With the integration of GBL, the classroom environment became more dynamic, enabling students to sustain their attention for longer periods during the learning process. This shift highlights the effectiveness of GBL in transforming passive learning conditions into active and engaging experiences.

From a planning perspective, the teacher demonstrated a high level of professional competence in integrating GBL with the curriculum. The alignment of instructional design with targeted Learning Outcomes served as a strategic foundation to ensure that the selected games remained pedagogically relevant and goal-oriented. This finding reinforces that GBL should not be viewed merely as recreational activity, but as a systematically designed pedagogical approach aimed at achieving specific language competencies, particularly in sentence construction and vocabulary development.

At the implementation stage, the use of diverse game-based activities such as *Word Detective*, *Character Bingo*, and *Sentence Dice* proved effective in accommodating students' varied learning styles. The kinaesthetic nature of the *Word Detective* activity

provided opportunities for physically active learners to engage meaningfully, while *Character Bingo* facilitated intensive listening practice. These findings indicate that GBL is capable of addressing the demands of differentiated instruction at the primary school level by offering multimodal learning experiences tailored to students' diverse needs and preferences.

Furthermore, the implementation of GBL contributes to an increase in students' intrinsic motivation. The enthusiasm demonstrated by students, as reflected in the interview data, indicates a shift in their attitudes toward Indonesian language learning, which was previously perceived as monotonous. Game elements such as exploration, challenge, and healthy competition particularly through the "*Star Points*" system—serve to naturally reinforce students' motivation to learn. These elements create engaging learning conditions that encourage sustained participation and internal drive.

Consistent with the findings of [Amalia & Athiyyah \(2024\)](#), the implementation of GBL enhances students' ability to understand, comprehend, and critically evaluate learning materials. This approach integrates game elements into instructional practices, thereby creating learning environments that are more engaging, interactive, and enjoyable for students. By utilizing games as a medium for instruction, teachers can establish learning conditions in which students actively participate while simultaneously constructing knowledge through play. Such an approach effectively increases students' interest and engagement in the learning process.

This finding is consistent with the study by [Lutfiyah et al \(2025\)](#), which demonstrates that GBL transforms Indonesian language instruction into a more dynamic and meaningful learning experience for students. When instructional content that is typically perceived as rigid and text-heavy is presented through interactive games with engaging visual elements, students no longer experience boredom or cognitive overload; instead, they become more enthusiastic and curious to continue learning. Furthermore, when students encounter challenges within game-based Indonesian language activities, they are not merely memorizing content but are actively engaged in deeper cognitive processing to make appropriate decisions. This indicates that GBL promotes higher-order thinking and supports meaningful learning beyond surface-level understanding.

Subsequently, the study by [Karimah et al \(2025\)](#) demonstrates that the implementation of GBL is an effective approach for enhancing students' engagement across multiple dimensions, including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects. Through the use of interactive media, classroom environments become more dynamic and enjoyable, thereby stimulating active student participation. This, in turn, significantly reduces boredom and increases learning motivation. Beyond its positive impact on student enthusiasm, GBL also contributes to deeper conceptual understanding by enabling students to apply knowledge in more practical and meaningful contexts. However, the effectiveness of this approach is contingent upon the availability of technological

resources and the teacher's competence in designing relevant and pedagogically sound game-based activities.

Social interaction among students also showed a significant improvement. During group activities, students engaged in communication, negotiation, and the expression of ideas using appropriate Indonesian language. This process indirectly fostered the development of speaking skills and critical thinking, both of which are essential components of language learning. From the perspective of teacher roles, a clear pedagogical shift was observed from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered learning paradigm. The teacher functioned as a facilitator who guided the flow of the activities and ensured equitable student participation. This approach not only provided students with greater autonomy in learning but also enabled the teacher to identify students' latent potential that may not be evident in conventional instructional settings.

However, the study also identified challenges related to time management. Several game-based activities required more time than initially planned due to the high level of student enthusiasm and engagement. However, the use of a visual timer emerged as an effective strategy for promoting time discipline without diminishing the enjoyment of the learning process. This approach enabled students to develop time awareness while maintaining high levels of engagement during game-based activities. Another important finding relates to the inclusivity of GBL implementation. Students with slower learning paces did not exhibit significant pressure, as the relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere provided a psychologically safe environment. This condition allowed all students to participate equitably and develop according to their individual abilities. In terms of writing skills, the use of media such as "*Sentence Dice*" proved effective in enhancing students' creativity. Students' written outputs became more varied and less monotonous, indicating that game-based approaches can stimulate imagination and encourage greater expressive confidence in written language.

As for limitations: Single school, single grade (third grade), Short duration (one semester), and No comparison group. Future research should use mixed methods, include control groups, and examine long-term retention.

D. Conclusions

This qualitative study examined the implementation of GBL in Indonesian language instruction at an Islamic elementary school in Bengkulu, Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that GBL transforms passive, text-dominated learning into active, engaging experiences. Three structured games Word Detective, Character Bingo, and Sentence Dice enhanced behavioral engagement (participation), emotional engagement (enjoyment, confidence), and cognitive engagement (comprehension, creativity). This study extends Self-Determination Theory by demonstrating how non-digital, culturally grounded GBL satisfies students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in a low-resource primary classroom. It also contributes to culturally

responsive pedagogy by showing that integrating local folktales (Malin Kundang) into GBL enhances both linguistic and cultural literacy. For teachers: GBL can be implemented without expensive technology using simple materials (cards, dice, bingo sheets). For curriculum designers: GBL should be aligned with learning outcomes, not used as mere recreation. For teacher training: Pre-service programs should include GBL design and facilitation skills. Longitudinal studies across multiple grades and schools are needed. Experimental designs comparing GBL with traditional instruction would establish causality. Research should also examine GBL's impact on long-term retention and transfer of language skills.

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