

# Enhancing Learning Interest in Indonesian Language Through Language Games: A Classroom Action Research Study Among First-Grade Elementary Students

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## ABSTRACT

*This research was motivated by the low level of interest in learning Indonesian among first-grade students at SD Negeri 087 Panyabungan. Students tended to be passive, lacked enthusiasm, and were easily distracted during the lessons. The conventional teaching methods used by the teacher did not align with the learning characteristics of young children, who typically enjoy play-based activities and learn through them. Therefore, this study aimed to enhance students' interest in learning Indonesian through the implementation of language game strategies. This research employed a qualitative approach in the form of Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted in two cycles. The research subjects were 19 first-grade students at SD Negeri 087 Panyabungan. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The results showed a significant increase in students' learning interest. Before the intervention, only 35.98% of the students demonstrated a learning interest, with an average score of 1.84. After implementing language games in Cycle I, this figure increased to 49.2% with an average score of 2.53. Further improvement was recorded in Cycle II, reaching 75.97% with an average score of 3.37. The percentage of students who showed a positive learning attitude also rose from 52.63% (pre-action) to 84.21% in Cycle II. In addition, the learning success rate improved from 30% (pre-action) to 78.94% in Cycle II. Games such as "Name Hunt" and activities using modeling clay (plastin) proved effective in enhancing student engagement, creativity, and self-expression. This strategy fosters a joyful and participatory learning atmosphere, which is well-suited to the imaginative and motor-active nature of early childhood learners. It can be concluded that the use of language games is an effective strategy for increasing interest in learning Indonesian among first-grade elementary school students.*

*Keywords: Learning Interest, Language Games Method, Indonesian Language, Early Childhood Education*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian occupies a pivotal position in the national education system as both the official language of instruction and a compulsory subject across all educational levels. Presidential Regulation Number 63 of 2019 reinforces Indonesian as the primary medium of instruction in formal education, reflecting its fundamental role in developing students' communicative competence and national identity. Through Indonesian language education, students are expected to develop comprehensive linguistic abilities encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills that serve as foundational competencies for academic achievement and social participation (Zulfadhli et al., 2024).

At the elementary level, particularly in the first grade, Indonesian language instruction establishes a critical foundation for literacy development and communicative competence. This foundational stage is characterized by the introduction of students to alphabetic principles, basic vocabulary, simple sentence structures, and fundamental reading and writing skills. The primary objective extends beyond mere linguistic knowledge transmission; it aims to cultivate students' ability to use Indonesian effectively for communication purposes while simultaneously developing their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor capabilities through language-mediated learning experiences (Dewi Leni Mastuti et al., 2025).

Despite the acknowledged importance of Indonesian language education, pedagogical challenges frequently emerge in first-grade classrooms in Indonesia. Preliminary observations at SD Negeri 087 Panyabungan in Mandailing Natal Regency revealed significant deficiencies in students' learning interest in Indonesian language instruction. Students exhibited passive behavior, demonstrated limited enthusiasm during lessons, frequently engaged in off-task activities such as conversing with peers or requesting unnecessary exits from

the classroom, and showed minimal initiative in completing assigned tasks. These behavioral indicators suggest that existing instructional approaches fail to adequately engage students or align with their developmental learning characteristics.

Low learning interest has substantial implications for educational outcomes. When students lack interest in a subject, they typically allocate minimal cognitive resources to learning activities, demonstrate reduced persistence when encountering difficulties, and ultimately achieve suboptimal learning outcomes. Conversely, high learning interest serves as a powerful motivational force that enhances attention, promotes active engagement, facilitates deeper cognitive processing, and ultimately improves both immediate learning performance and long-term knowledge retention.

Learning interest is a multidimensional psychological construct encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Interest is a relatively enduring predisposition characterized by feelings of preference and attraction toward particular objects or activities, manifested through voluntary engagement without external coercion. In educational contexts, learning interest specifically denotes students' tendency to direct attention toward, experience positive emotions about, and actively participate in learning activities related to specific subject matter (Sahni & McCabe, 2025).

Contemporary interest theory, particularly the Four-Phase Model of Interest Development, distinguishes between situational and individual interest. Situational interest emerges temporarily in response to environmental stimuli and instructional features, whereas individual interest represents a more stable, enduring predisposition toward particular content domains. Both forms of interest encompass multiple components: positive emotional responses (enjoyment and curiosity), perceived value (recognition of importance and utility), knowledge structures (domain-specific understanding), and engagement behaviors (active participation and persistence) (Yan et al., 2025).

The developmental trajectory of interest progresses through sequential phases: triggered situational interest (initial attention capture), maintained situational interest (sustained engagement), emerging individual interest (repeated reengagement and value development), and well-developed individual interest (self-sustained motivation for continued learning). This developmental perspective has important pedagogical implications, suggesting that instructional strategies can strategically nurture interest development by initially triggering situational interest through engaging activities and then supporting its maintenance and eventual transformation into a more stable individual interest.

The significance of learning interest in educational outcomes is well-documented. Students with high learning interest demonstrate superior attention and concentration during instruction, engage more actively in learning activities, exhibit greater persistence when encountering challenging material, process information more deeply, and ultimately achieve better learning outcomes. From a neurological perspective, interest activates the brain's reward system, facilitating dopamine release, which enhances motivation and consolidates memory formation. This neurobiological mechanism explains why learning becomes simultaneously more enjoyable and effective when students experience genuine interest (Erickson et al., 2025).

Understanding first-grade students' learning characteristics requires grounding in developmental psychology, particularly in Piaget's theory of cognitive development. First-grade students, typically aged 6-7 years, occupy a transitional period between the preoperational stage (2-7 years) and the concrete operational stage (7-11 years). Children in the preoperational stage are characterized by emerging symbolic thought and language capabilities; however, they lack systematic logical reasoning and exhibit egocentric thinking. As they transition into the concrete operational stage, children develop the capacity for logical thought applied to concrete, tangible situations, understand conservation principles, and classify objects systematically.

This developmental understanding has profound implications for instructional design. First-grade students learn most effectively through direct sensory experiences and physical manipulation of concrete objects rather than abstract verbal instruction. Their natural inclination toward physical activity and play reflects not mere entertainment preference but rather a fundamental cognitive characteristic: —young children construct knowledge through active exploration and manipulation of their physical environment. Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective further emphasizes that learning occurs optimally within social contexts through guided interaction with more knowledgeable others, a principle that supports collaborative and interactive instructional approaches (Udani et al., 2025).

The affective domain is particularly salient in early childhood education. Young children's emotions significantly influence their cognitive engagement and learning outcomes. Positive emotional states, —characterized by feelings of safety, enjoyment, and curiosity, —facilitate attention, enhance information processing, and promote memory consolidation. Conversely, negative emotions, such as anxiety, boredom, or frustration, diminish the cognitive resources available for learning and may lead to avoidance

behaviors. Consequently, creating emotionally supportive and enjoyable learning environments is a pedagogical priority rather than merely a desirable enhancement.

Language games are instructional activities that integrate play elements with language learning objectives, creating learning experiences that are simultaneously enjoyable and educationally purposeful. Tarigan (2008) defines language games as structured activities employing words, sentences, and communicative interactions in game formats designed to enhance learners' language proficiency through natural, contextualized practice. These activities encompass diverse formats, including guessing games, word construction challenges, role-playing scenarios, storytelling activities, and creative language production tasks.

The pedagogical rationale for language games is based on multiple theoretical and empirical foundations. First, games align with the natural learning dispositions and developmental characteristics of young children. As Jain and Sharma (2025) articulate, "the child's world is a playing world"—play represents children's primary mode of exploring, understanding, and mastering their environment. Second, games create what Krashen terms a "low-anxiety" learning environment that reduces affective barriers and facilitates language acquisition. Third, games provide meaningful contexts for authentic language use, moving beyond decontextualized drills to purposeful communication (Jain & Sharma, 2025).

Empirical research consistently documents the positive effects of game-based language instruction. Studies have demonstrated that language games enhance vocabulary acquisition, improve speaking confidence and fluency, increase student motivation and engagement, reduce foreign language anxiety, and promote collaborative learning behaviors. For example, a quasi-experimental study by Ismayilli (2025) found that game-based speaking activities significantly improved English proficiency compared to traditional instruction, with students reporting increased motivation and reduced anxiety compared to traditional instruction. Similarly, research on digital game-based vocabulary learning has revealed superior retention and more positive attitudes compared to conventional methods.

The effectiveness of language games stems from several mechanisms, including: Games inherently motivate players through elements of challenge, competition, and achievement feedback. They provide repeated and varied practice opportunities that facilitate skill automatization. The collaborative nature of many language games develops social skills while simultaneously exercising linguistic ability. Perhaps most fundamentally, games transform language learning from an abstract academic exercise into an engaging and purposeful activity embedded within meaningful contexts.

## II. METHODS

### A. *Research Design*

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology, a practitioner inquiry approach designed to improve educational practice through systematic cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection. According to Arikunto (2010), classroom action research represents a reflective process whereby teachers systematically investigate their own practices to enhance instructional effectiveness and student learning outcomes. The methodology is distinguished by its practical orientation (addressing authentic classroom problems), participatory nature (collaboration between researchers and practitioners), situational specificity (context-bound investigations), and iterative process (cyclical refinement based on reflection) (Arikunto, 2016).

This study adopted the Kemmis and McTaggart action research model, which structures inquiry through four iterative phases within each cycle: planning (developing intervention strategies and instruments), acting (implementing planned interventions), observing (collecting data on implementation and outcomes), and reflecting (analyzing results to inform subsequent cycles). This spiral process enables the progressive refinement of interventions based on systematic evidence collection and analysis.

Two complete action-research cycles were conducted. Cycle I addressed the initial implementation of language games and provided baseline data on student responses and changes in learning interest. Cycle II incorporated refinements based on Cycle I reflections, employing modified game formats and enhanced instructional support to optimize effectiveness. This two-cycle design allowed for both an initial effectiveness assessment and iterative improvement of the intervention.

### B. *Research Context and Participants*

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 087 Panyabungan, a public elementary school located in the Panyabungan Subdistrict, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The school was selected based on preliminary observations and discussions with administrators who identified low learning interest in the Indonesian language as a significant pedagogical challenge requiring intervention.

The research participants comprised all 19 first-grade students enrolled in the 2025-2026 academic year. The participant group included both male and female students representing the typical demographic characteristics of the school population. At the time of the study, the students were in the second semester of first grade, having completed approximately six months of formal schooling.

The study was conducted from July to October 2025, spanning approximately four months. This timeframe encompassed preliminary observations, two complete action research cycles with multiple instructional sessions per cycle, and post-intervention data consolidation and analyses.

### C. *Variables*

This study examined the relationship between two primary variables. The independent variable was the instructional strategy—, specifically the implementation of language games as the primary pedagogical approach for Indonesian language instruction. The language games implemented included "Name Hunt" activities using letter cards, constructive play with modeling clay for creative language expression, word construction challenges, and picture-word matching activities. These games were selected based on their developmental appropriateness for first-grade students and alignment with Indonesian language learning objectives.

The dependent variable was the students' interest in learning the Indonesian language. Learning interest was operationally defined as a psychological disposition manifested through observable indicators, including active participation in learning activities (voluntary responses, question-asking, task completion), positive affective responses (expressions of enjoyment, enthusiasm), sustained attention and concentration during instruction, and curiosity-driven behaviors (exploration, elaboration beyond minimum requirements). This multidimensional conceptualization reflects contemporary interest theory, emphasizing the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components of interest.

### D. *Data Collection Methods*

Data collection employed three complementary methods to achieve a comprehensive understanding of both intervention implementation processes and learning interest outcomes. This methodological triangulation enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings by allowing convergence across multiple data sources.

Systematic classroom observation was the primary data collection method. The researcher conducted direct, non-participant observations during all instructional sessions, documenting student behaviors, teacher-student interactions, lesson progression, and classroom dynamics. Observations focused specifically on indicators of learning interest, including student engagement levels, emotional responses to activities, participation patterns, and on-task/off-task behaviors (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data collection was guided by a structured observation protocol. This protocol specified observable indicators of learning interest across four dimensions using a 4-point rating scale: (1) inadequate —student demonstrates minimal engagement, frequent off-task behavior, negative or apathetic emotional responses; (2) adequate — student shows basic compliance but limited enthusiasm or voluntary participation; (3) good —student actively participates, demonstrates positive emotional responses, and maintains consistent attention; (4) excellent — student exhibits high enthusiasm, initiates voluntary participation, asks questions, and demonstrates sustained, self-motivated engagement.

The observation protocol was administered at three time points: pre-intervention baseline, post-Cycle I, and post-Cycle II. This repeated measurement design enabled systematic tracking of changes in learning interest across the intervention period.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the first-grade classroom teacher to obtain insider perspectives on intervention implementation and changes in student learning interest. The interview protocol addressed several domains: the teacher's perceptions of student learning interest before and after language game implementation, observed changes in specific student behaviors, challenges encountered during implementation, strategies the teacher employed to optimize game effectiveness, and an overall evaluation of the pedagogical value of language games.

Interviews were scheduled at strategic junctures: following pre-intervention observations to establish baseline understanding, after Cycle I to inform Cycle II refinements, and following Cycle II to evaluate the overall intervention effectiveness. The Interview data provided rich qualitative insights that contextualized and elaborated on the quantitative observational findings.

Documentary data were systematically collected to provide concrete artifacts that evidenced intervention implementation and student learning. Documentation included photographs of classroom activities during language games, student work samples produced during game activities (written products, creative

constructions), lesson plans and instructional materials, and researcher field notes recording implementation details, students' comments, and emergent insights.

Photographic documentation served multiple purposes: it provided visual evidence of implementation fidelity, captured student engagement and emotional responses, and facilitated a retrospective analysis of classroom dynamics. Student work samples offer tangible products that evidence learning processes and outcomes. These documentary data complemented the observational and interview data by providing concrete artifacts for analysis.

The language game intervention was implemented through carefully designed instructional sequences aligned with Indonesian language curriculum objectives and first-grade developmental characteristics. Each cycle comprised multiple instructional sessions that followed consistent structural formats.

#### Cycle I: Implementation

Cycle I focused on letter recognition and vocabulary development using game-based activities. The primary intervention activity was "Name Hunt" (Berburu Nama), a collaborative game using letter cards. Implementation followed a structured sequence: students were arranged in a U-shaped seating configuration to facilitate whole-group visibility and interaction; letter cards were randomly distributed to individual students; students observed and identified their assigned letters; the teacher circulated, prompting students to pronounce their letters aloud and identify words beginning with those letters; students who successfully responded received small rewards (e.g., pencils, snacks) as motivational reinforcement; and the activity concluded with collaborative word construction using multiple letter cards.

The instructional sessions followed a three-phase structure. The introduction phase (15 minutes) included greeting and prayer, attendance, a brief review of previous content, and the introduction of the day's learning objectives through engaging questions (for example, "Who likes to play games? Can we learn Indonesian while playing?"). The core instructional phase (35 minutes) comprised primary language game activities with teacher facilitation and support. The closure phase (10 minutes) included reflection discussion, reinforcement of key learning points, preview of upcoming content, and assignment of follow-up tasks.

#### Cycle II: Refinement and Enhancement

Cycle II incorporated several refinements based on the Cycle I reflection. The intervention integrated diverse game formats and increased opportunities for creative language expression. The primary addition was constructive play using modeling clay (plastisin), where students created representations of favorite objects or interests and then explained their creations using the Indonesian language. This activity addressed multiple objectives simultaneously: fine motor skill development through clay manipulation, vocabulary activation and expansion through describing creations, oral language practice through presentation to classmates, and creative self-expression aligned with early childhood developmental needs.

Additional refinements included more varied grouping strategies (whole group, small collaborative groups, and individual work), enhanced use of visual supports and realia to contextualize vocabulary, increased wait time and scaffolding for students requiring additional support, and more systematic integration of formative assessment to monitor individual student progress.

#### E. Data Analysis

Data analysis employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches, reflecting the study's mixed-methods design.

##### Quantitative Analysis

The observational learning interest scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For each measurement point (pre-intervention, post-Cycle I, post-Cycle II), the following calculations were performed: the mean learning interest score was computed by summing all individual student scores and dividing by the total number of students. The percentage of students demonstrating positive learning interest was calculated by identifying students scoring  $\geq 3$  (Good or Excellent) and computing the percentage of the total sample. The learning success rate was determined based on the percentage of students achieving predetermined learning objectives, as evidenced by their performance on assigned tasks.

These quantitative indicators enabled a systematic comparison across intervention phases, documenting the magnitude of changes in learning interest and identifying which students demonstrated improvement versus those requiring additional support.

##### Qualitative Analysis

Interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed using thematic coding. The analysis followed an iterative process: initial open coding to identify preliminary themes and patterns, axial coding to identify relationships among codes and develop more abstract categories, selective coding to integrate themes into coherent interpretive frameworks, and constant comparison across data sources to ensure internal consistency and credibility.

The key analytic questions included the following: What specific student behaviors evidenced learning interest? How did these behaviors change during the intervention period? What instructional features of language games appeared to be the most engaging for students? What implementation challenges emerged, and how were they addressed? Analytic memos documented the emergent insights and interpretive decisions throughout the process.

#### Triangulation and Validation

Multiple strategies enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of research. Data triangulation involved convergence across observations, interviews, and documents to corroborate the findings. Investigator triangulation was achieved through collaborative reflection between the researcher and the classroom teacher. Member checking involved sharing preliminary interpretations with the teacher participants for validation and elaboration. Prolonged engagement throughout the four-month study period ensured sufficient familiarity with the research context of the study. Rich, thick descriptions of both context and findings enable readers to assess transferability to similar settings.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Pre-Intervention Baseline Conditions

Preliminary observations and interviews documented significant deficiencies in students' learning interest prior to the intervention implementation. A quantitative baseline assessment revealed that only 35.98% of students demonstrated an interest in learning the Indonesian language, with a mean interest score of 1.84 on a 4-point scale. The percentage of students exhibiting positive learning interest (score  $\geq 3$ ) was 52.63%, and the learning success rate was only 30%.

Qualitatively, these low interest levels manifested through observable behaviors, including frequent off-task activities (playing independently, conversing with peers about non-instructional topics), minimal voluntary participation in discussions or question-answering, students requesting unnecessary exits from the classroom (toilet breaks, pencil sharpening), lack of task completion or persistence when encountering difficulties, and generally apathetic or negative affective responses to Indonesian language instruction.

The teacher interview data corroborated these observations. The classroom teacher reported that students perceived Indonesian language lessons as "boring" and "difficult," particularly activities involving reading and writing. The teacher partially attributed low interest to instructional methods that relied heavily on teacher-centered direct instruction, worksheet completion, and rote memorization—approaches inconsistent with first-graders' developmental learning preferences for active, playful, and interactive experiences.

These baseline conditions established both the need for intervention and the benchmark against which subsequent changes were evaluated.

#### Quantitative Outcomes: Learning Interest Development

The systematic implementation of language games across two action research cycles produced substantial improvements in students' learning interest across all measured indicators. Table 1 presents comprehensive quantitative data on these changes.

Table 1. Learning Interest Development Across Intervention Phases

Phase	Number of Students (N)	Mean Interest Score (1–4)	Percentage Showing Learning Interest (%)	Percentage with Positive Interest (Score $\geq 3$ ) (%)	Learning Success Rate (%)
Pre-intervention	19	1.84	35.98	52.63	30.00
Cycle I	19	2.53	49.20	52.63	57.89
Cycle II	19	3.37	75.97	84.21	78.94

Note: The Mean Interest Score reflects the averaged observational ratings across multiple behavioral indicators. Students with Interest indicates the percentage of students demonstrating positive interest behaviors. Positive Interest represents students scoring  $\geq 3$  (Good/Excellent). The success Rate indicates the percentage of achieving lesson learning objectives.

The mean learning interest scores increased progressively across the intervention phases. The improvement from pre-intervention (1.84) to Cycle I (2.53) represented a gain of 0.69 points (37.5% increase). The subsequent improvement from Cycle I to Cycle II (3.37) constituted an additional 0.84-point gain (33.2% increase). Cumulatively, the intervention produced a 1.53-point improvement, representing an 83.2% increase from the baseline.

The percentage of students demonstrating learning interest increased from 35.98% at baseline to 49.20% following Cycle I (+13.22 percentage points) and further to 75.97% following Cycle II (+26.77 additional percentage points). This cumulative 39.99 percentage point improvement indicates that approximately three-quarters of students demonstrated positive learning interest by the end of the intervention, compared to barely one-third at baseline.

The percentage of students exhibiting positive learning interest (score  $\geq 3$ ) remained stable from pre-intervention through Cycle I (52.63%) but increased substantially to 84.21% following Cycle II (+31.58 percentage points). This pattern suggests that Cycle I successfully maintained existing interest levels while preventing decline, whereas Cycle II refinements—particularly the integration of modeling clay activities and enhanced scaffolding—catalyzed a more substantial interest development. In conclusion, more than four out of five students demonstrated good or excellent learning interest.

Learning success rates—operationalized as the percentage of students achieving lesson objectives—improved from 30% at baseline to 57.89% following Cycle I (+27.89 percentage points) and further to 78.94% following Cycle II (+21.05 percentage points). This nearly 49 percentage point cumulative improvement demonstrates that enhanced learning interest translates into improved learning performance, validating the theoretical proposition that interest facilitates learning outcomes.

The analysis of individual trajectories revealed several patterns. First, 16 of 19 students (84.21%) achieved a positive learning interest status by Cycle II, consistent with the aggregate data. Second, most students demonstrated incremental improvement across phases rather than dramatic single-phase gains, suggesting that interest development occurred gradually through sustained exposure to engaging instructions. Third, three students (G, L, and Q) did not achieve a positive interest status by the study conclusion, although all three showed some improvement. These students may require additional individualized support or alternative instructional approaches.

Students who began with higher baseline interest (scores of 2-3) generally achieved higher final interest levels (scores of 3-4), suggesting possible "Matthew effects" whereby initial advantages compound over time. However, several students who began at the lowest baseline level (score of 1) achieved a positive final status (score of 3), demonstrating that the intervention benefited students across the full initial interest spectrum.

#### Qualitative Findings: Implementation Dynamics and Mechanisms

While quantitative data document the magnitude of learning interest improvements, qualitative findings illuminate how language games facilitated these changes through specific pedagogical mechanisms and implementation.

The most salient qualitative theme was how language games transformed the affective tone of Indonesian language instruction. Teacher interviews consistently emphasized that students found language games "fun," "exciting," and "different from usual lessons." Observational field notes documented dramatic changes in the classroom atmosphere: students smiled, laughed, and expressed enthusiasm during game activities; voluntary participation increased markedly, with students eagerly raising their hands to respond; even typically reticent students engaged more actively during games than during conventional instruction.

These observations align with the theoretical propositions regarding the role of play in early childhood learning. As (Jain & Sharma, 2025) articulate, "the child's world is a playing world"—children's natural orientation toward play means that play-based instruction feels intrinsically motivating rather than externally imposed. Games satisfy students' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy (choice and voluntary engagement), competence (achievable challenges with success feedback), and relatedness (social interaction with peers), thereby fostering intrinsic motivation.

The "Name Hunt" game exemplifies these dynamics. Students' visible excitement when receiving letter cards, animated discussions when identifying words beginning with their letters, and pride when successfully responding demonstrated positive emotional engagement. One student reportedly stated, "I like Indonesian

language now because we play while learning!" Such comments evidence games' capacity to alter students' fundamental perceptions of Indonesian language from a "boring subject" to an "enjoyable activity."

Language games dramatically increased active student participation compared to conventional teacher-centered instruction. Observations documented that during game activities, the proportion of students actively engaged approached 100% compared to approximately 30-40% during traditional lecture-based instruction. Games structured interaction patterns that distributed participation opportunities more equitably. Rather than a small number of confident students dominating class discussions, games employed turn-taking structures, random selection mechanisms (e.g., card distribution), and small group collaborations that ensured broader participation in class discussions.

The modeling clay activity particularly exemplified the benefits of collaborative learning. Students worked in small groups, discussing their creations, sharing ideas, and providing feedback. This collaborative structure developed not only language skills but also social competencies, including cooperation, perspective-taking, and constructive communication. The teacher noted that some typically isolated students became more socially integrated through game interactions, suggesting the potential social-emotional benefits of games beyond purely academic outcomes (Mailizar et al., 2025).

These findings resonate with Vygotskian perspectives that emphasize the centrality of social interaction in learning. Language games created "zones of proximal development" where students with varying proficiency levels supported one another, with more capable peers scaffolding less proficient classmates' participation. The teacher's role shifted from being the primary information source to that of a facilitator orchestrating productive peer interactions a role transformation consistent with contemporary constructivist pedagogies (Kottacheruvu, 2023).

Language games embed language practice within meaningful communicative contexts rather than decontextualized drills. During the "Name Hunt," students did not merely recite letter names abstractly; they used letters purposefully to construct words relevant to their interests and experiences. During modeling clay activities, students employed the Indonesian language to describe their creations, explain their significance, and respond to peers' questions all authentic communicative functions.

This contextualization principle aligns with communicative language teaching principles and Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis. When language use serves genuine communicative purposes within engaging contexts, acquisition occurs more naturally and effectively than through explicit grammar instruction or through mechanical repetition. Games provided what researchers term "pushed output" opportunities—contexts where students were motivated to stretch their linguistic capabilities to accomplish game objectives, thereby advancing their language development.

Language games inherently accommodate diverse proficiency levels through flexible participation structures. High-achieving students can demonstrate advanced vocabulary, construct complex sentences, and assume leadership roles. Meanwhile, struggling students can participate at their current level perhaps identifying simpler words or providing one-word responses without experiencing failure or embarrassment. This inclusive participation structure stands in marked contrast to traditional instruction, where high-stakes individual performances (e.g., being called upon to read aloud) can induce anxiety and avoidance among less confident students.

The teacher explicitly noted that several students who rarely participated during conventional instruction became noticeably more engaged during the games. One previously silent student volunteered to present her modeling clay creation and explain it in Indonesian a breakthrough moment the teacher attributed directly to the games' low-pressure, supportive atmosphere. These observations underscore the potential of games to engage reluctant learners who struggle with conventional instructional formats.

Despite its overall effectiveness, implementation was not without challenges. Three primary obstacles emerged, each requiring an adaptive solution.

Games frequently require more time than traditional instruction for equivalent content coverage. The unpredictable dynamics of student interactions, the need to provide individual support to multiple students simultaneously, and the time required for game setup and transitions collectively challenge efficient time utilization. The teacher initially struggled to complete the planned activities within the allocated time periods. Adaptive solutions included more realistic time allocation in lesson planning, recognition that depth of engagement justifies reduced breadth of content coverage, development of efficient transition routines through repeated practice, and strategic use of timers and visual cues to maintain momentum in the classroom. The teacher learned to prioritize the quality of engagement over the quantity of content, acknowledging that deeply engaged learning of core concepts surpasses superficial coverage of extensive content.

Game-based instruction inherently generates higher noise levels and physical activity than conventional sedentary instruction. Managing this increased energy without suppressing the productive engagement that

games foster requires refined classroom management skills. The initial sessions occasionally veered toward excessive noise or off-task socializing.

Solutions included establishing and consistently enforcing clear behavioral expectations before game initiation, teaching and practicing specific procedures (e.g., "inside voices," turn-taking protocols), strategic use of attention signals to refocus students when necessary, and preventive strategies such as strategic student groupings. The teacher developed a more nuanced understanding of the sound and appearance of productive engagement, recognizing that animated discussion and laughter during games indicated desirable learning engagement rather than problematic behavior.

Effective game implementation requires materials (letter cards, modeling clay, manipulatives) that are not consistently available. Budget constraints limit material acquisition, potentially compromising implementation fidelity.

Solutions involved creative resourcefulness, including teacher-created materials from low-cost supplies, solicitation of donated materials from families and the community, and sharing materials across classrooms. The school administration, recognizing the effectiveness of games, committed to gradually enhancing instructional material inventories. This challenge highlights how pedagogical innovations require not only teacher skill development but also adequate material infrastructure and institutional support to be effective.

#### Theoretical Interpretation: Why Language Games Enhance Learning Interest

The observed learning interest improvements can be theoretically understood through multiple complementary frameworks.

Self-Determination Theory posits that intrinsic motivation flourishes when learning environments satisfy three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy (sense of volition and self-direction), competence (experiencing effectiveness and mastery), and relatedness (feeling connected to others). Language games address all three of these needs. Games provide autonomy through choice elements (e.g., selecting which words to form, deciding what to create with clay, and determining collaboration partners). They foster competence through appropriately challenging activities with clear success criteria and positive feedback. They support relatedness through collaborative and shared enjoyment structures. By simultaneously addressing these fundamental needs, games cultivate intrinsic motivation that manifests as learning interest.

The affective domain, encompassing emotions, attitudes, and values, significantly influences learning processes and outcomes. Positive emotions broaden attention, enhance cognitive flexibility, facilitate memory encoding, and increase persistence. Language games deliberately cultivate positive emotional experiences through novelty, challenge, achievement, and social interaction. These positive emotions trigger neurological reward systems, reinforcing engagement behavior and creating positive associations with Indonesian language learning. Over time, repeated positive emotional experiences can transform situational interest triggered by specific game activities into a more stable individual interest in the Indonesian language as a domain.

Language games promote deeper cognitive processing than the passive reception of teacher-delivered information. Constructivist learning theories emphasize that knowledge construction occurs through active manipulation, experimentation, and reflection, rather than passive absorption. During games, students actively manipulated language elements (letters, words, sentences) and tested hypotheses (e.g., Will this word work?). solved problems (how can I describe my creation?), and reflected on the outcomes. This active processing facilitates a deeper understanding and more durable learning compared to superficial engagement with conventionally delivered instruction.

The effectiveness of language games partly stems from their alignment with first-graders' cognitive developmental stage. Students transitioning from preoperational to concrete operational thinking benefit from instruction employing tangible, manipulable materials (letter cards, modeling clay) and concrete, contextualized language use rather than abstract metalinguistic discussion. Games provide concrete, sensory-rich experiences through which young children optimally learn, thereby honoring developmental realities rather than imposing developmentally inappropriate abstractions.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This classroom action research conclusively demonstrates that language games represent a highly effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing learning interest in Indonesian language among first-grade elementary students. Across two systematically implemented action research cycles, student learning interest improved dramatically across all measured dimensions: mean interest scores increased 83% from baseline to intervention conclusion, the percentage of students demonstrating positive learning interest rose from 52.63% to 84.21%, and learning success rates improved from 30% to 78.94%. These substantial quantitative improvements were corroborated by rich qualitative evidence documenting transformed classroom atmospheres characterized by

enthusiasm, active participation, and genuine enjoyment of Indonesian language learning. The theoretical significance of these findings lies in their empirical validation of play-based instruction's alignment with early childhood developmental characteristics and learning preferences. Language games satisfied fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation. They cultivated positive emotional associations with language learning while providing cognitively engaging, active learning experiences. The intervention honored first-graders' concrete operational thinking stage by employing tangible materials and contextualized language use rather than abstract instruction. Practically, this research offers several implications for Indonesian language instruction. Educators should integrate language games systematically rather than treating them as occasional rewards or time-fillers. Game selection should reflect explicit learning objectives, developmental appropriateness, and inclusive participation structures. While implementation requires investment in material resources and classroom management refinement, the substantial learning interest and achievement improvements justify these investments. Schools should provide professional development supporting teachers' game-based instruction competencies and ensure adequate material infrastructure.

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"No external funding was received for this study."

### **Ethical Compliance**

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

### **Data Access Statement**

A Data Access Statement is a section in a scientific publication or research report that explains how the data used or generated in the study can be accessed by readers or other researchers. This statement aims to promote transparency, support research reproducibility, and comply with open-access policies, where applicable.

Common Elements in a Data Access Statement:

1. **Data Location:** Specifies where the data are stored, such as in online repositories (e.g., Zenodo, Dryad, or institutional repositories).
2. **Access Instructions:** Provides information on how to access the data, such as direct links, DOI (Digital Object Identifier), or contact details.
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4. **Data Licensing:** If data are open, specify the applicable license (e.g., Creative Commons).

Examples of Data Access Statements:

1. **Open Data:**
  - "The data supporting this study are openly available in Zenodo at [DOI:10.xxxx/zenodo.xxxx]."
2. **Restricted Data:**
  - "The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. Due to privacy concerns, the data are not publicly available."
3. **No Data Available:**
  - "No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study."
4. **Conditional Access:**
  - "The data supporting this study are available under restricted access and can be obtained upon reasonable request from the corresponding author with the permission of the ethics committee."

Purpose of a Data Access Statement:

- **Reproducibility:** Enables other researchers to replicate or verify the findings.
- **Collaboration:** Encourages further collaboration by sharing data.
- **Compliance:** Adheres to the policies of funding agencies or journals that require open access to data.

### **Conflict of Interest Declaration**

The authors declare that they have no affiliations or involvement with any organization or entity with any financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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