The Perception of EFL Primary Students Toward Learning English Through Interactive Games

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English as a foreign language to primary school children can be challenging due to their linguistic and cognitive limitations. Traditional methods like rote memorization may not be effective or engaging. Interactive games have been proposed as a solution, but there is little research on how students perceive game-based learning and how teachers can incorporate games into language learning curricula. This study examines EFL primary students' attitudes toward three types of interactive games as language learning tools, the impact of game elements on learning outcomes, and the benefits and drawbacks of game-based teaching. The research was conducted in an elementary school in Vietnam and suggests that interactive games can improve EFL learning outcomes in primary school students, but their perception and reaction to this method plays a crucial role in its effectiveness. The study aims to guide the creation of effective language teaching techniques and is relevant to curriculum designers, policymakers, and language teachers worldwide. The research has three main goals: (1) examine EFL primary students' attitudes toward using interactive games to learn English; (2) investigate how game elements affect students' perceptions of game-based learning; and (3) propose ways to improve students' perception of interactive games as a language learning tool. The study has some limitations, such as its focus on Vietnamese EFL primary students and its small sample size. Nonetheless, it contributes to our understanding of how interactive games can enhance EFL learning outcomes in primary school settings by examining students' attitudes, motivations, and enjoyment.

Keywords: Perception, Interactive games, Game-based learning (GBL).

1 Introduction

English is considered a second language in Vietnam, and citizens with limited exposure to English may regard it as a foreign language. The acquisition of the English language is highly emphasized in the Vietnamese education system, where it is taught as a compulsory subject at the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Despite the fact that the English language is heavily emphasized in the education system, Vietnamese are still a long way from achieving the country's objective of becoming a nation that is fluent in English. This study aims to investigate EFL primary students' attitudes towards learning English through interactive games, examining their advantages and disadvantages, and how their components affect language learning outcomes.

1.1 Background of the study.

Primary school pupils may struggle with acquiring English as a foreign language due to their limited cognitive and linguistic abilities, and traditional teaching methods can be unengaging. Interactive games have been proposed as a means of increasing student participation and enthusiasm in EFL classes. However, understanding how young learners perceive language learning is crucial in determining the effectiveness of incorporating interactive games into language instruction. Thus, it is important to consider students' perspectives and attitudes towards learning when designing EFL curriculum and incorporating interactive games as a teaching strategy.

1.2   The significance of the report.

Despite the potential benefits of employing interactive games in language learning, there has been little research on how Vietnamese EFL primary students perceive and experience game-based learning. There is also a lack of awareness about how teachers may properly integrate games into the language learning curriculum to optimize their benefits. As a result, the issue statement of this study is to investigate EFL primary students' perceptions of learning English using interactive games and to investigate how instructors might improve students' perceptions of games to optimize their language learning outcomes.

1.3   Research objectives.

This study's research question is: What is the perception of EFL primary students about learning English through interactive games? The study's aims are as follows:

- Examine the views of EFL primary students on adopting interactive games to learn English.
- Examine the advantages and disadvantages of adding games into EFL training.
- Investigate how games' social and cooperative components can affect language learning outcomes.
- Determine techniques for improving students' perceptions of interactive games as a language learning tool.

1.4   Research questions

Research question 1: How do EFL students feel toward interactive games?

Research question 2: How does each aspect of games impact the perspective of a student? (motivation, rules, enjoyment)

Research question 3: How can tutors enhance students' perceptions of interactive games to boost their learning capabilities?

2   Literature review

2.1   What is EFL?

English as a foreign language (EFL) is taught in non-native English-speaking nations where English is frequently a required subject. EFL students have limited exposure to English outside of the classroom, making it difficult to acquire the language. Interactive games have become popular in EFL instruction as they provide an immersive and enjoyable learning experience, allowing students to practice their language skills.

However, little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of interactive games in EFL instruction, especially in non-native speaking countries. Further study is needed to determine how interactive games can improve EFL learning outcomes and guide the development of effective language teaching methods.

2.2   Perception and attitude toward learning languages.

Language learning involves psychological and social elements and is heavily influenced by learners' motivation and mindset (Padwick, 2010). Learners' attitudes towards the target language can determine their ability to acquire it (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Attitudinal research is significant in language acquisition and may affect learners' behavior (Baker, 1992). According to De Bot et al., students' motivation and positive views towards language learning aid in the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, learners' attitudes towards language acquisition may differ, and can affect their behavior in learning the target language (De Bot et al.). The learning process is a positive change in a person's personality across emotional, behavioral, and cognitive domains, and each of these dimensions has different characteristics (Kara, 2009).

2.3 Engagement and motivation.

It has been shown that using interactive games to learn English increases students' motivation and involvement. Due to their interactive and engaging character, interactive games are especially successful in raising students' motivation and engagement.

The effects of interactive games on primary EFL students' motivation and engagement have been the subject of several studies. Interactive games boosted students' desire for learning English and increased their willingness to engage in class. Similarly, interactive games enhanced students' attitudes about learning English and boosted their enthusiasm to study.

Also, it has been shown that the use of interactive games boosts motivation and engagement more effectively than conventional teaching techniques. According to Kapp (2012), interactive games provide a pleasurable and exciting learning environment that inspires students to learn. Papastergiou (2009) made similar discoveries when he discovered that interactive games encourage active and interesting learning, which increases motivation and engagement. Moreover, interactive games may boost students' drive to study by fostering a feeling of accomplishment and competence. According to research, using interactive games increases students' self-worth and confidence, both of which are crucial for fostering motivation and engagement in the classroom (Dörnyei, 2001).

Interactive game usage has also been shown to boost student participation in English classes. As they demand players to actively participate and interact with the game's material, interactive games provide students the chance to engage in active learning (Prensky, 2001). Hence, it has been discovered that interactive games raise students' attention and focus as well as their general participation in the English classroom.

Interactive games in English-language instruction successfully boost primary EFL students' interest and involvement. The games' dynamic and captivating design provides an exciting and stimulating learning experience, encouraging learning and boosting students' desire to engage in class. Moreover, interactive activities offer active learning opportunities that increase students' interest in English class, while also fostering a sense of accomplishment and competence that heightens their desire to study.

2.4 Language proficiency

"Language proficiency" refers to a person's ability to interact effectively in a given language, which can be influenced by the situation and their objectives. In the context of EFL primary pupils, factors such as age, exposure to the target language, quality of teaching, and attitudes and motivation towards language acquisition can impact language competency.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) assess language competency through various degrees of speaking, reading, writing, and listening abilities. To gauge language competency, standardized exams, teacher observations, and self-assessments can be used. To develop and increase their language skills, EFL primary students must get enough teaching and exposure to the target language.

2.5 What are interactive games.

Interactive games can improve language learning, as shown by studies like Chen and Michael (2005). However, not all games are equal, and some may have harmful effects on certain individuals or populations, as Ferguson (2015) noted. Competition can increase motivation, but teachers need to be careful not to encourage feelings of inadequacy. Teachers can maintain control of the class by ensuring that students follow the rules of the game. Enjoyment is a crucial component in fostering students' interest in language

learning. Based on these principles, a new definition of games in pedagogy includes three components: competition, rules, and enjoyment, all with a teaching and learning purpose.

2.6   EFL Classroom Model.

The nature of learners' descriptions of their language learning experiences remains unclear, as studies have focused on different aspects such as perceptions, attitudes (Gardner, 1983), and evaluations. In this study, perception is defined as the process of apprehending sensory input from the language teaching/learning environment, particularly the activities encountered. After taking part in specific exercises and understanding what they saw, students can do various things (Figure 1).
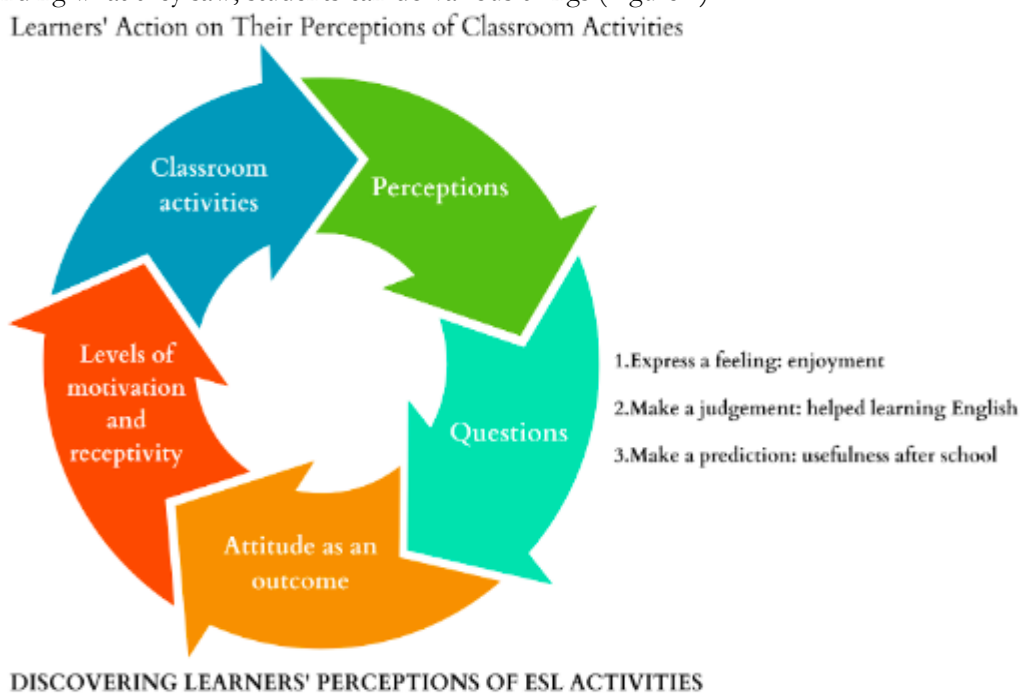

Figure 1: *Leaner's Action on their perception of classroom activities*

In this study, students' perception of language learning activities was examined using a model consisting of three components: expressing feelings, making a decision, and making an educated guess. Students were asked questions such as "Did you enjoy this activity?" to express their feelings towards the activity, "Do you think it will help you learn more English?" to make a decision based on their previous learning progress, and "Do you think this activity will be useful for your social skills in the future?" to make an educated guess about the potential benefits of the activity after graduation.

2.7   Types of interactive games.

Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (2002) noted that young learners have high physical energy and emotional needs, get bored easily, learn more slowly and forget information quickly. Instructors should tailor activities to meet these requirements. Hadfield (1984) identified two categories of language activities: linguistic games that prioritize accuracy and interactive games that focus on knowledge sharing. And categorized games into more specific types that possess characteristics of both linguistic and communicative games, such as chance-based games, discovery games, matching games, and board games like "Scrabble."

2.8   Three aspects of games:

Multiple studies have found that motivation, rules, and enjoyment are crucial components of game-based learning. "Motivation is a critical component of game-based learning, as it drives learners to actively engage

with the learning material and persist in the face of challenges" (Plass et al., 2014). Rules provide structure and guidance for learners, helping them understand what is expected of them and what they need to do to succeed in the game" (Kiili, 2005). Enjoyment is also critical as it motivates learners to engage with the material, persevere through challenges, and remain interested in the learning process" (Sitzmann, 2011).

Motivation aspects in interactive games:

Game-based learning can enhance language learners' motivation through features like competition and challenge. Such elements provide learners with a sense of accomplishment and mastery, thereby boosting their intrinsic motivation to learn (Vallerand, 1997).

Feedback is another crucial feature in game-based learning that can motivate learners by providing information about their progress and areas of improvement. Immediate and interactive feedback in the form of visual cues, sounds, or messages comparing learners' performance to their peers can give them a sense of control and ownership, motivating them to improve their language skills (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Rules in interactive games.

Rules are a crucial element in game-based learning, as they provide clear objectives and guidelines for learners. Al-Azawei et al (2016) found that rules were among the most important factors contributing to the success of game-based learning in language classrooms. Rules help to structure the learning process, and they can increase motivation and engagement by providing learners with a sense of progress and achievement. Simple rules, such as matching words with pictures, can be used in vocabulary games, while more complex rules, such as character creation and decision-making, can be used in role-playing games.

Enjoyment in interactive games.

Enjoyment is a positive emotional experience associated with learning English in an EFL classroom through interactive games. "Enjoyment is a crucial aspect of game-based learning because it has a direct relationship with motivation and engagement, two of the key factors that influence learning outcomes," Sung said (Sung, Chang, & Liu, 2016, p. 205). It is a complicated construct with several components such as pleasure, fun, satisfaction, and engagement. When players have fun while playing a game, they are more likely to keep playing and feel motivated to complete the game's objectives.

According to research, enjoyment is an important factor in game-based learning, particularly in the context of language learning. "Enjoyment is one of the primary factors that contributes to the success of game-based learning because it encourages learners' engagement, attention, and motivation". When learners are immersed in a fun and immersive game, they are more likely to be motivated to learn and retain the language. Furthermore, enjoyment in interactive games can lead to positive affective outcomes such as increased self-esteem and confidence, which can improve the learning experience even further.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method involved a focus group interview with five EFL teaching assistants from VUS's English education. The quantitative method used an online survey via Google Form to analyze the attitudes of both pupils and adults in Ho Chi Minh City towards learning English through interactive games.

3.2   Participants

Five EFL teaching assistants from VUS's English education were chosen for a qualitative study using the purposeful sample method. The participants had at least one year of teaching experience and ranged in age from 18 to 24. The quantitative method used an online survey via Google Form to analyze the attitudes of both pupils and adults in Ho Chi Minh City towards learning English through interactive games. The survey was launched for one week, and 261 respondents participated.

3.3   Materials and Instruments

For the qualitative method, focus group interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires to acquire data. For the quantitative method, an online survey via Google Form was used to analyze the attitudes of both pupils and adults in Ho Chi Minh City towards learning English through interactive games. The data collected from the survey was imported into a spreadsheet for analysis.

3.4   Procedures

For the qualitative method, focus group interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires to acquire data. The data collected from the participants was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. For the quantitative method, an online survey via Google Form was used to analyze the attitudes of both pupils and adults in Ho Chi Minh City towards learning English through interactive games. The data collected from the survey was analyzed using statistical methods.

3.5   Data analysis

For the qualitative method, the data collected from the participants was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves finding recurrent themes and patterns in the data. For the quantitative method, the data collected from the survey was analyzed using statistical methods. The results were presented using tables, graphs, and charts, with a succinct explanation of the results.

4   Results and discussion:

4.1   Qualitative

4.1.1   Motivation

Students feel encouraged to step out of their safe zone when learning English through interactive games. Teaching assistants underlined the significance of comprehending the various personalities and linguistic prowess of EFL basic pupils. "In my experience, there are always some students who have exposure to English at a much younger age than others so they are confident in learning English. However, some students just learned English in first grade so of course, when they felt their pronunciation wasn't as good as the previous group as I told you, they would be shyer," noted Interviewee 1. It's critical to be aware of these variations so I can modify our teaching strategies to approach their feelings.

Interactive games are effective in getting EFL primary students to leave their comfort zones and participate in language learning, according to the study's teaching assistants. Interviewee 4 said, "We observe students who are often quiet or cautious start to participate more when we introduce games in the classroom. One prime example of a situation where students are unconsciously forced to step out of their shells is the "Backs to the Board" game, as a teaching assistant I have the responsibility of giving chances to the passive kids by noting down who has participated in class for more than 2 times and so on, so whether they like it or not, they would have to represent their team and head to the board.

Since it gave the students a pleasant and interesting way to improve their vocabulary as well as convey a message to their teammates, they felt more assured in their language skills. "In a safe and encouraging setting, students are willing to utilize terms that they may not have used previously. Because the game is so

entertaining and engaging, they are more willing to take chances so their team can win", as mentioned by Interviewee 4.

*(Back to the board game: create two teams and place a student from each team facing away from the board or put them in front of it. A point is awarded to the team of the first student to correctly guess the word out of the two who are now in front of the board.)

The teaching assistants noted that students can polish their language skills in a safe and supportive environment by playing interactive games. Kids generally feel more at ease speaking up or making mistakes in front of their pals during a game. Interviewee 5 supported this statement: "During the "Back to the board" game, team A describe the "toothbrush" word through various non-verbal acts, some of them even go above and beyond like pretending to brush their teeth, waking up, etc." As Interviewee 5 pointed out, games provide an even playing field where everyone is focused on the task and not on who is making mistakes. In short, using games, specifically, games that require interactions between students helps primary kids feel more at ease and less embarrassed.

Some students experience anxiety and are consequently demotivated when participating in group activities because they worry that they'll be blamed for their team's failure

Certain teaching assistants voiced worry about certain children being anxious and unmotivated during group activities throughout the interviews with them. Interviewee 3's aide said that "Some pupils are more introverted and feel uneasy in a group situation. They fear that if they don't perform well, they'll be held accountable for their team's failure.

Interviewee 2 also stressed the importance of fostering a supportive environment in the classroom. Teachers may foster a feeling of community and collaboration in the classroom by rewarding students for their successes with "stars" which they can trade for figures and stickers or encouraging them to help their classmates. "Teachers are responsible for creating a positive learning environment in which all students feel valued and encouraged. Teaching assistants and instructors have decided that all forms of rivalry should be prohibited in the classroom to alleviate tension during games."- said Interviewee 2.

4.1.2   Rules.

Children typically require visual cues or movements to help them understand rules because they aren't used to understanding lengthy instructions.

Previous research has shown that EFL primary students often require visual aids or gestures to understand game rules (Liu, 2016). This finding was corroborated in the interviews with teacher assistants. According to Interviewee 1, explaining game rules to students can be challenging, and visual aids or demonstrations can be helpful. "To help them understand the rules faster, the teacher and I will play the game first because it is simpler to observe someone play and the children can imitate them," Interviewee 1 stated. Interviewee 3 also emphasized the importance of using visual aids like photos or flashcards to help students comprehend game rules, particularly for games like "Charades." The teaching assistants agreed that conveying game rules to EFL primary students through body language and visual cues is crucial for increasing accessibility and engagement with the game's instructions.

*(Charades: Invite a student to the front of the class so they may exhibit a flashcard or say anything to them. The student then performs that term, and the first person to guess who it is can move on to the next round.)

Games that had consistent and repeating rules were excellent for reinforcing English language topics and enhancing recall.

Interviews with teacher assistants revealed their observations regarding the beneficial effects of games with rules on children's English language acquisition. Interviewee 3 described how their class plays a game called

"Flip the Flashcard" to review vocabulary, where students must run to the board and stick the corresponding flashcard to earn points for their team. This game is played frequently, but students remain engaged and find it amusing due to the consistent rules. Interviewee 3 stated, "The fact that the rules are always the same in warm-up games, in my opinion, prevents distraction. And I anticipate that the cost they paid after obtaining those 'stars' is more satisfying than the game itself." Various teaching assistants stressed repetition in various games in addition to the advantages of consistent rules. "I Spy" and "Simon Says" are two games I enjoy playing with my pupils according to Interviewee 4. "Repetition is a powerful tool for reinforcing vocabulary and grammar ideas that we're working on."

4.1.3   Enjoyment

Students find security and safety in playing games with their classmates rather than competing with others alone. Students were reported to feel more at ease and secure when participating in group games than when competing against others alone during the teacher assistant interviews. They have their peers to turn to for support and advice. She stated: "This was particularly clear in games where students had to cooperate in teams to attain a shared goal, such as "Back to the Board" and "Charades". Students were able to share their knowledge and abilities while working together, which promoted trust and camaraderie."

Additionally, by participating in group games, students were able to practice their language abilities in a less formal context, which made them feel less pressurized or anxious when speaking English in a typical classroom setting. As Interviewee 5 put it, "Students feel more confident and eager to take risks with the language when they play games. They are less concerned about making mistakes because they are aware of their peers' support. "It's fascinating to see how students who are typically shy or introverted become more outgoing and expressive when they play games with their classmates," said Interviewee 3.

These findings are consistent with earlier research that showed how interactive games and other collaborative learning environments can increase students' feelings of involvement and belonging (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that social interaction-promoting games enhance language learning and retention. (Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009).

The social component of games can aid in language learning.

Games that promote cooperation and teamwork include: "Games that required students to work together toward a common goal were particularly effective at promoting language learning," Interviewee 5 observed. Students had to interact with one another, bargain over assignments and directives, and give feedback to their peers. Both their language skills and interpersonal skills were improved as a result.

Games can promote cross-cultural interaction and language immersion. According to Interviewee 4, "Some of the games we played involved cultural elements or references to real-life situations." "This allowed pupils to learn about various cultures and customs in addition to the language. It also gave practice using the language in context more genuinely and interestingly.

4.2   Quantitative.

4.2.1   Research participants.

Firstly, I can observe that the majority of respondents (66.3%) are between the ages of 7 and 15, which implies that primary school students' perceptions of EFL learning are probably more typical in this age range. This is the demographic that our research mostly covers. Thus, the number of participants represented more than half of the responses.

Furthermore, just 12.3% of respondents (12.3%) are between the ages of 15 and 18, which is the traditional age range at which pupils reach the completion of secondary school. This might imply that elementary school kids may see interactive games differently from high school students and that the effectiveness of this teaching strategy may change depending on the age range of the students.

In addition, I chose to conduct a poll of adults, therefore 20% of respondents were over the age of 18. To expand the scope of the study, I want to know what adults' perspectives on these learning techniques are. It also emphasizes how interactive games might be utilized as a training tool for adults, perhaps in a professional context.

Overall, these results imply that interactive games may be beneficial for teaching English to students of different ages, including adults, and that the perception of EFL learning through interactive games may vary depending on student's experience with English.
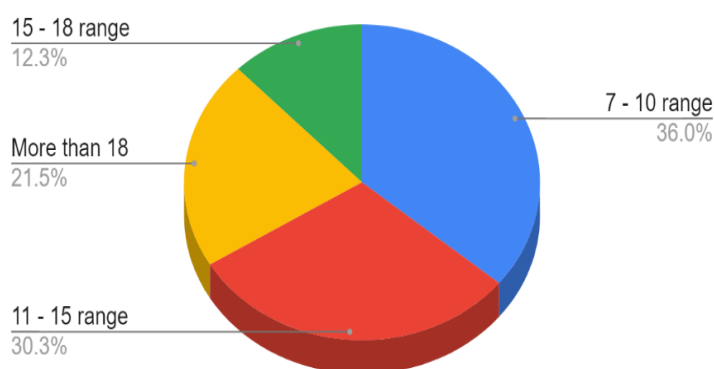
Figure 2: *Sample' age*

The majority of respondents (71.6%) have been studying English for three years or more, indicating that most of the sample consists of basic to advanced English speakers. Specifically, among 261 respondents, 20.7% studied English for 1-2 years, 31.0% for 3-4 years, and 40.6% for more than 4 years. These results suggest the need for further research on the relationship between the amount of time spent studying English and the belief in the effectiveness of interactive games for language acquisition. Tailoring interactive games for students with different levels of English proficiency and learning experience may also be
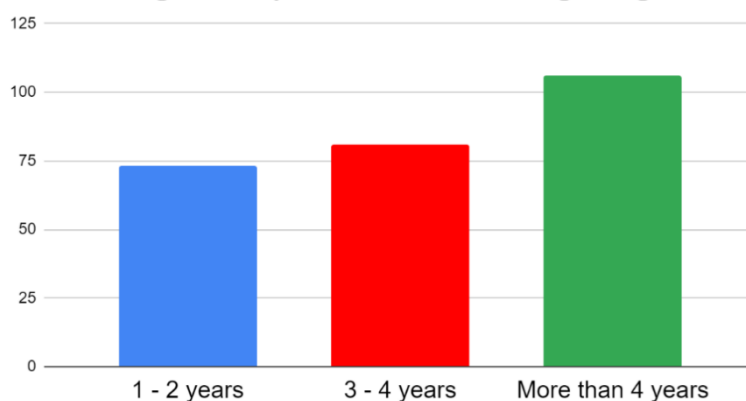

Figure 3*: The year that respondents' have been learning English*

4.2.2 Findings

Out of 261 respondents in the survey on "The perception of EFL primary students toward learning English through interactive games," 98% were aware of learning English through interactive games, while only 1.9%

were not. This finding indicates that the majority of EFL primary students in the study were familiar with this method of language learning.

The results suggest that introducing interactive games in lesson plans may increase student motivation and engagement. However, the small fraction of respondents who were unfamiliar with this strategy suggests a need to raise awareness of interactive game-based learning.
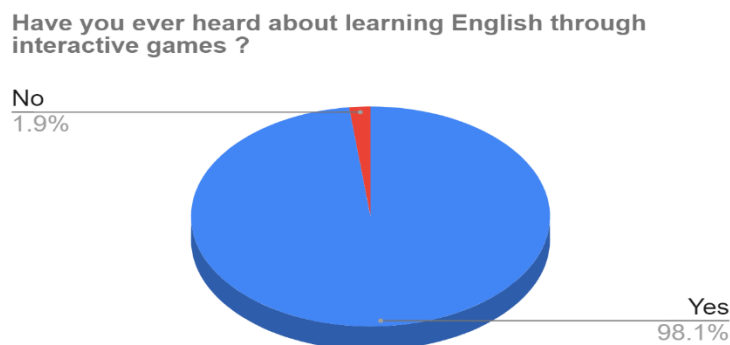
Have you ever heard about learning English through interactive games ?

No
1.9%

Yes
98.1%

Figure 4: *The percentage of respondents' have heard about learning English through interactive games Perception toward learning English by interactive games*

The survey "The perception of EFL primary students toward learning English through interactive games" found that out of 261 respondents, 43.7% believed that interactive games helped them "a lot" in learning English, while 51.7% thought they helped "moderately," and only 4.2% believed they helped "slightly." This indicates that the majority of students perceive interactive games to be at least somewhat beneficial to their English learning. These findings could be beneficial to curriculum developers and instructors, who may wish to incorporate interactive games into their lesson plans to enhance student engagement and improve their language learning experience.
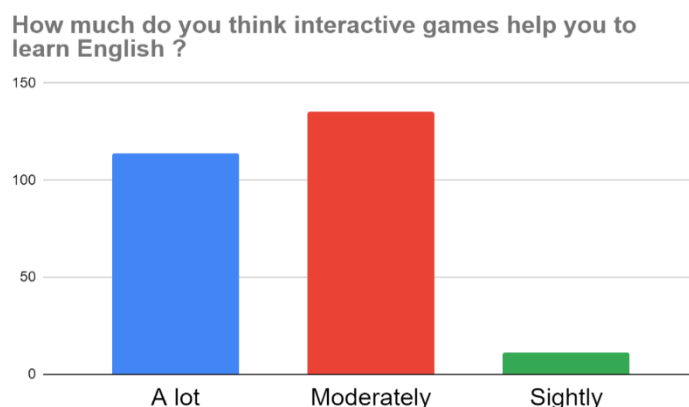
How much do you think interactive games help you to learn English ?

A lot   Moderately   Sightly

Figure 5: *The rating of interactive games' usefulness in learning English*

4.2.3 Key finding questions.

Motivation:

How motivated are you to learn English through interactive games?

A total of 261 respondents participated in the survey, when asked about their motivation to learn English through interactive games. About 36.8% of those respondents said they were very motivated to learn English using interactive games, 58.2% said they were somewhat motivated, and 6.9% said they were

neutral. These findings suggest that interactive games may be a successful method of learning English, as motivated students are more likely to perceive them as successful.
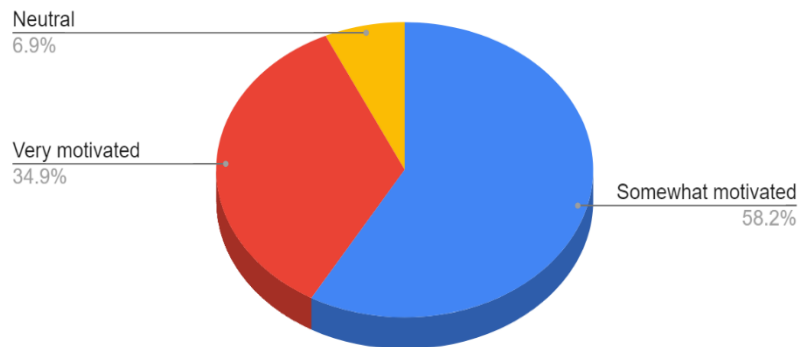

Figure 6: *Respondents' opinions on how motivated interactive games are in learning English*

Huang and Liang's (2018) research supports this claim by indicating that interactive games improve language learning outcomes and motivation. Turgut and Yavuz (2018) found that students reported better motivation when using interactive games to learn English. Another point that Kim (2020) also found that using interactive games in language learning courses improves motivation and language ability. These results have important implications for educators who may consider using interactive games to enhance student engagement and motivation in language learning. Future research could explore the relationship between motivation and the effectiveness of interactive games in language learning.

What motivates you to learn English through interactive games?

The findings of our study indicate that EFL primary students are motivated for a number of reasons to learn English using interactive games. The most common motive was "Improving my English skills," with 58.3% of respondents selecting this option.

Learning through play was another common motivator, with 38.6% of respondents choosing this option. This incentive is consistent with the theoretical foundations of game-based learning, which argue that play and learning can be combined to provide effective learning experiences (Gee, 2003).

"Having fun" was the third most common motive, chosen by 37.5% of respondents. This finding supports Papastergiou's (2009) idea that game-based learning can be enjoyable and interesting for students.

Finally, 27.4% of respondents reported that the possibility of winning awards or prizes inspired them. This incentive could be linked to the concept of "gamification," which involves using game components like leaderboards, badges, and points to motivate students

Educators can use these different incentives to create game-based learning experiences that meet students' varied needs and interests. For example, instructors can develop games that not only focus on language competence improvement but also incorporate entertaining and motivating elements. Rewards and awards can also serve as valuable feedback to motivate students to continue participating in game-based learning activities.

However, it's important to remember that while game-based learning can be a useful tool for fostering motivation and engagement, it should not be the sole method used to teach English. Using a range of instructional strategies and materials can help ensure that students have a well-rounded learning experience. Overall, our study indicates that EFL primary students are motivated to learn English via interactive games for a variety of reasons, such as improving their language abilities, participating in playful learning, enjoying themselves, and winning incentives or prizes.

What motivates you to learn English through interactive games?

Figure 7: *Respondents' thoughts on which aspects motivate them in learning English by interactive games.*

Rules:

How important are the rules of the game to you?

The findings of our survey indicate different EFL primary students' opinions on how important game rules are while learning English via interactive games. Our survey found that 33.7% of participants consider game rules "very important" in game-based learning contexts, while 30.3% believe they are "somewhat important." In contrast, 31.8% of respondents rated game rules as "not very important," and only 4.2% held an unfavorable view of their significance.

The findings of our survey shed important light on how EFL primary students' perceptions of interactive games for English language learning regard game rules. This result is in line with other studies that looked at how game rules affected game-based learning

However, our results differ from those of Dicheva et al.'s (2015) study, which emphasized the importance of game rules in clarifying learning goals and encouraging student engagement. The inconsistency in students' perceptions of game rules in game-based learning suggests that educators and game designers must consider the diverse needs and preferences of their students when designing game-based learning environments.

Overall, our findings highlight the complex relationship between game mechanics and EFL primary students' motivation and participation in game-based learning activities. Further research is needed to fully understand this relationship and how it affects the efficacy of game-based learning as a tool for English language acquisition.
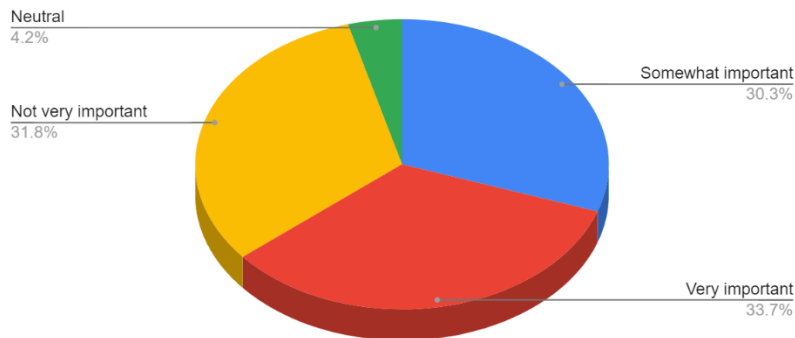
How important are the rules of the game to you?

Figure 8: *Respondents' thoughts on importance of game's rule(s) to them*

Do you prefer games with simple or complex rules?

Among 261 participants were surveyed, and according to their replies, In a survey of 261 participants, 69.7% preferred games with simple rules, 23.3% chose games with complicated rules, and 7.3% had no preference. The study suggests that simplicity is crucial for game-based learning in EFL primary settings. However, the unexpected finding that a significant number of participants preferred games with complicated rules implies the need for a variety of alternatives to meet individual preferences.

Previous studies, such as Dicheva et al. (2015), have emphasized the significance of simplicity in game-based learning, while others, such as Papastergiou (2009), suggest that complex games may provide more possibilities for cognitive engagement and deeper learning. These conclusions emphasize the need of taking into account students' preferences and requirements while developing and putting into practice game-based learning activities in EFL primary settings. Teachers and game designers may construct more effective and interesting learning experiences that respond to the different requirements and motivations of EFL primary students by considering their preferences for simple or complicated rules.

Enjoyment:

How enjoyable do you find learning English through interactive games?

The study's results indicate that game-based learning is an enjoyable experience for EFL primary students, with 58.5% of respondents stating that they found it very enjoyable. Other studies support these findings, suggesting that game-based learning can boost student engagement and improve learning outcomes. However, there is still room for improvement, as 38.8% of respondents found game-based learning only somewhat enjoyable. Future research should examine the factors that contribute to students' enjoyment of game-based learning activities. Future studies should examine the elements, such as the degree of difficulty, the applicability of the material, and the feedback given, that contribute to students' pleasure of game-based learning activities

Furthermore, a small percentage of respondents (2.3%) had a neutral attitude towards game-based learning, indicating that this method of language learning may not be preferred by all students. Teachers and curriculum designers should consider these results when incorporating game-based learning activities into their instructional strategies. The study's findings suggest that game-based learning has the potential to engage and encourage students, but individual preferences and experiences may vary.

What types of games do you find most enjoyable for learning English?

The study found that role-playing games and puzzle games were the most enjoyable for EFL primary students among the game genres provided, with 51.2% and 39.6% of respondents choosing them as their favorite game genre, respectively. Matching games and adventure games were less popular, with 25.8% and 30.4% of respondents picking them as their favorite game category, respectively. The study suggests that when creating interactive games for EFL elementary students, educators and game developers should focus on role-playing and puzzle games.

While these findings indicate that different game genres appeal to EFL primary students to varying degrees for language acquisition, role-playing and puzzle games seem to be particularly well-liked. However, it's worth noting that adventure and matching games, which have been shown to be helpful for language acquisition in prior studies, were less popular in this study.

The study provides valuable insights into the game genres that EFL primary students enjoy playing the most while learning language. Future studies could further investigate the factors that influence students' preferences for different game genres and how game design can be tailored to support language acquisition. Overall, it highlights the importance of offering a range of game types and genres in EFL primary classes to cater to diverse student interests and learning styles.
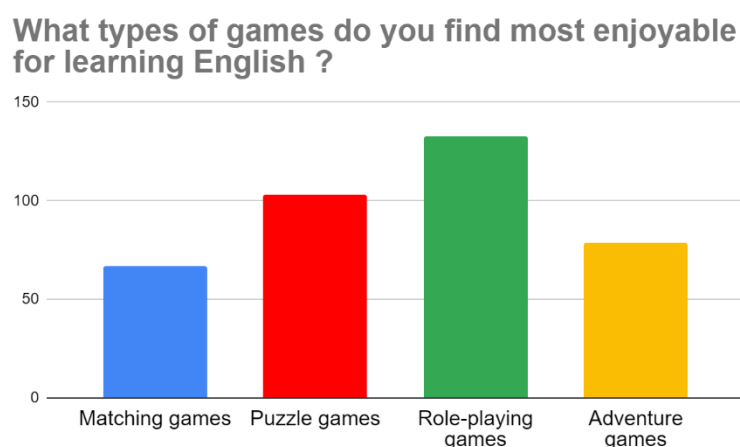

Figure 9: *Respondents' preference in types of games*

4.2.4   Other findings

What do you think are the advantages of using interactive games to learn English?

Survey data indicates that EFL primary students believe playing interactive games can aid in learning English in various ways. The majority of respondents (54.4%) found playing interactive games interesting, highlighting the significance of fun and involvement in language acquisition. Additionally, a significant proportion (52.5%) believed that playing interactive games improved language abilities, indicating the potential of game-based learning to enhance language learning outcomes.

Moreover, a minority of respondents (38.3%) perceived that playing interactive games increased memory retention, suggesting that game-based learning could promote long-term language learning and retention. In contrast, just 20.3% of respondents said that playing interactive games improved motivation, indicating that game-based learning activities may be more beneficial for students who may struggle to stay motivated in traditional classroom settings.

Finally, only 17.6% of respondents considered playing interactive games to provide rapid feedback, which while significant, may not be as highly valued as other advantages of game-based learning. These findings suggest that game-based learning activities can have a positive impact on EFL primary students' language

learning and retention, and may be used to guide future research in the field and develop game-based learning activities in EFL classrooms.
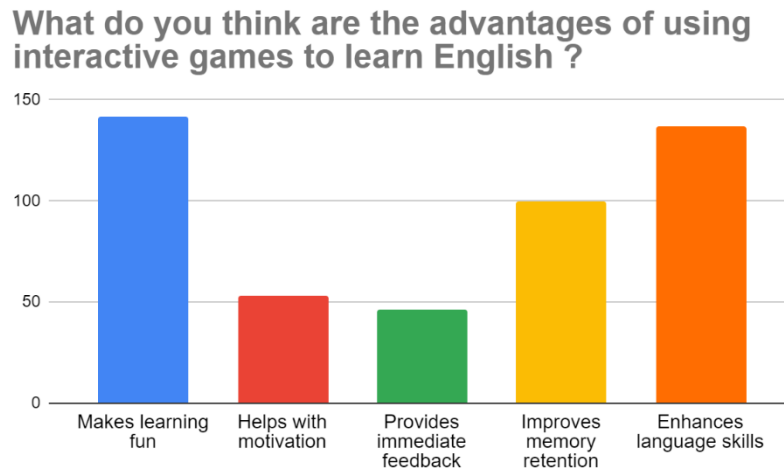

What do you think are the advantages of using interactive games to learn English ?

Figure 10: *Respondents' opinion about advantages of using interactive games to learn English*

What do you think are the disadvantages of using interactive games to learn English?

According to the survey's findings, there are several drawbacks to using interactive games to learn English. The most common disadvantage mentioned was that the games can be distracting, with almost half of respondents (49.4%) agreeing. However, some experts contend that careful planning and implementation of game-based learning activities can reduce or eliminate these potential drawbacks (Papastergiou, 2009).

Over half of the respondents (53.3%) believed that interactive games can be repetitive, suggesting limitations on the variety and complexity of language learning activities that can be provided through game-based learning. This highlights the importance of creating game-based learning activities that are both interesting and challenging for students, as well as providing opportunities for practice and diversity.

A sizable portion of respondents (39.1%) stated that interactive games may only be useful for developing fundamental language skills, highlighting the importance of properly planning game-based learning activities that are tailored to students' language learning needs and objectives.

Finally, just 12.6% of respondents said that interactive games offered insufficient engagement with actual people, emphasizing the possible drawbacks of game-based learning for improving communication and social interaction skills.

Overall, these survey findings provide significant new information on the possible drawbacks and restrictions of utilizing interactive games to learn English, especially for EFL primary students. They emphasize the need of developing interesting, difficult, and correctly targeted game-based learning activities for students' language learning requirements and objectives. These results may guide the creation and use of game-based learning activities in EFL classrooms and provide guidance for further study in this field.

5   Managerial implications.

5.1   Research question 1: How do EFL students feel toward interactive games?

When playing games to learn English, students feel safe and free from judgment.

Many students claimed that playing games as opposed to conventional classroom activities made them feel more at ease and less apprehensive. Interviewee 1 observed that pupils who have trouble learning a language frequently experience shame or embarrassment when they make mistakes. However, because the stakes seem lower when we incorporate games into the classroom, students are more inclined to experiment and take chances.

Games offer a low-pressure setting where children may practice their English without worrying about criticism or judgment, said Interviewee 2 who repeated this idea: "They are able to make errors and grow from them without feeling defeated."

Additionally, it was discovered that using games increased student engagement and enthusiasm for learning English. When children are having fun, they are more likely to remain interested and eager to continue learning, according to Interviewee 3. "In VUS English Center, students are encouraged to develop their listening, reading skills, and other soft skills like teamwork when playing interactive games".

These results are in line with earlier studies that discovered that using games establishes a good learning environment and lessens anxiety. (Gonzalez-Bustamante et al., 2021). Games can assist students in overcoming their worries and increasing their confidence in their abilities by offering a secure and enjoyable environment for language learning.

5.2 Research question 2: How does each aspect of games impact the perspective of a student? (motivation, rules, enjoyment).

Students feel encouraged to imply social interaction and collaboration when playing games with teammates.

Qualitative findings show that adding social interaction and collaboration among students when playing games improves students' relationships. Students appreciated working together and playing games that needed group cooperation, according to Interviewee 1, "because it helped them speak with one another and utilize the language more naturally. "I noticed that students who were initially shy and hesitant to speak up in class became more confident and comfortable when they were playing games with their peers," Interviewee 1 observed. The cooperative nature of the games enabled them to form bonds and collaborate toward a common goal."

Furthermore, when playing games together, students exhibited a sense of belonging and connection to their classmates, which contributed to a positive learning environment. "I like playing games with my friends because we can help each other and learn together," one student from VUS Superkids Class. It's more enjoyable than studying alone." Incorporating social contact and teamwork through games can boost students' motivation and engagement while also fostering a sense of community and support in the classroom.

Students find the repetitive game patterns rather uninteresting, thus they are only driven by the prize.

The findings suggest that students may find the repetitive game patterns uninteresting and are only driven by the prize. As Interviewee 2 stated, "I think it's important to have different types of challenges in the games so that we don't get bored doing the same thing over and over again." "It would make us more interested in the learning material and less focused on just winning the prize."

5.3 Research question 3: How can tutors enhance students' perception of interactive games to boost their learning capabilities?

First, setting out boundaries when playing games.

When playing games, it's important to establish clear guidelines and expectations to avoid problems caused by excessive competition and to provide a welcoming and inclusive learning atmosphere. All teaching assistants agree that young pupils, especially those in the primary grades, can be unpredictable, so they must always be kept under close observation. Giving them guidance to be nice to others is important because, when students work in groups, some are good and some aren't. As Interviewee 1 said, "They need to know to help each other, and not push their teammates away." Teacher assistants are aware that if rivalry happens, they must stop them right away and calm down their students; once they've been convinced, the TA will

have them sincerely apologize to their classmates, and for firm actions, they would take away "stars" from that student.

Beliefs can determine attitude, and attitude, positive or negative, can affect behavior. As competition is used to assist learning for authentic experiences, a student's belief in their ability may affect participation in those experiences (Ajzen, 2005; Carlson, 1995; Pajares, 1992; Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999). They will expect no negative events to take place as long as the lecturer knows how to keep the mindset of primary students on the right track. "By establishing clear boundaries, we were able to avoid scenarios in which certain students became extremely competitive and made others feel uncomfortable or left out", said Interviewee 4. This method encouraged a sense of community and collaboration in the classroom by allowing all children to feel at ease and included in the game.

Second, instructors can select games based on their student's language proficiency and learning goals.

Tutors can assist students in appreciating the importance of using games as a learning tool by choosing games that are both adequately demanding and pertinent to their requirements. "We made sure to select games that were appropriate for each student's English proficiency level and that concentrated on the particular abilities they needed to improve on", as stated by all teaching assistants in the research. This made it easier for them to realize how beneficial games may be for language learning and practice.

Third, tutors might include social and cooperative aspects in gameplay to strengthen students' sense of belonging.

Tutors can foster a friendly and interesting learning atmosphere by encouraging students to collaborate and communicate in English. "We encouraged the pupils to play games with one another while using English to communicate, they are not allowed to speak Vietnamese, but if they are stuck on that idea, we will give them some suggestions to demonstrate their initial explanation to their teammates" according to Interviewee 2. They developed a sense of camaraderie as a result, in addition to learning the language. "Because kids are forced to speak their thoughts in English, so if one member shows sign of being unable to speak that thought, the rest of the team would ask further questions to understand what he/she is trying to say".

Discovery.

There are some problems that we have found out. Half of our respondents (⅔) Some sensitive students will feel anxious about these games because they are scared of being the main reason why their team is lost. "There was one incident in my class, the boy named Dat in the team that lost to the other team, had a burst out after class because he felt terrible for being "one rotten apple spoils the barrel". This is quite prevalent in primary school classrooms. Every child has a unique personality and working style, which can have a detrimental impact on people around them, especially when working with peers. One classroom usually has 20-30 students, so devoting time to one individual and encouraging them is a difficult effort for teachers and teaching assistants, and students' enthusiasm suffers as a result. Furthermore, children at developing ages may be more competitive than ever, as they lack a clear distinction between competition and rivalry, "Kids will take winning and losing personally, even though the competition is necessary to keep them entertained in games, we practice mindfulness and tell them to cooperate with peers every class, but it barely works."

Moreover, it is essential to ensure that the prizes or rewards are not the sole motivation for students to engage in the games. As another interviewee highlighted, "If the game is too focused on winning the prize, then students might just try to cheat or take shortcuts to get to the end. It's important to emphasize that the game is just a tool to help us learn, and the prize is just a bonus." Applying this mentality to students, however, can be challenging because their intrinsic motivation may come from their peers or from the desire to compete against "stars". As Interviewee 1 noticed: I knew that the children are bored with the

repeated warm-up games, but they still engage very eagerly because they know that with the "stars" gathered, they could have a figure of Pokemon, Pikachu, etc.

These remarks imply that motivating students to participate in interactive games may depend in part on incentives or prizes. However, it's crucial to take into account any possible drawbacks of relying solely on extrinsic incentives like rewards because doing so might prevent students from developing a long-lasting interest in or enjoyment of the learning process.

6   Recommendations

Way to cover the problem: The feeling of anxiety when playing games, scared of being the reason for their team's losing.

The lecturer needs to recognize that each of the students has their demeanor and way of thinking in this situation because they are all so delicate and sensitive. There is no question that in some circumstances, elementary school students may experience anxiety while engaging in the activity. For young children, McTavish (2014, p.6) suggests the following method for effective learning through "play and discovery":

- Children are inspired or encouraged.

- They learn and explore.

- They play with what they already know.

- They choose to participate.

Teachers will thus be able to quickly identify the main points, sub-points, and order of priority in each action and activity; when to provide, support, and when to give children some privacy; and thus prevent children from feeling anxious during the lesson's activity. (that is creativity and critical thinking). Additionally, it trains kids to keep trying until they succeed and to repeat the process if necessary.

By establishing clear boundaries and norms for gameplay, bad behaviors such as excessive competitiveness or disruptive behavior can be avoided. This can be accomplished by creating rules and repercussions for violations, as well as encouraging students to treat one another with respect and sportsmanship.

Way to cover the problem: Children's sole motivation is prizes and awards but not the lesson itself.

To promote deeper engagement with the learning material, I recommend that instructors consider incorporating more challenging and diverse game elements that align with the learning objectives.

7   Conclusion

This study explored the use of interactive games in EFL primary classrooms in Vietnam and found that games can positively impact language learning and student engagement. The study identified important factors such as game design, teacher guidance, and social interaction that influence students' perceptions of games. However, further research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to confirm these findings. To effectively integrate games into the EFL curriculum, teachers and curriculum designers should consider the appropriateness of games for their students' language proficiency and learning objectives, establish clear guidelines and boundaries during gameplay, encourage social interaction and teamwork, and prioritize student participation and interaction in their programs. By following these recommendations, EFL teachers and curriculum developers can enhance their students' language learning experiences through the use of interactive games.

8   Declarations

8.1   Study Limitations

The survey size of 261 including students, parents, teachers, adults and five teacher assistants may not be indicative of all EFL primary students' attitudes toward learning English using interactive games. The report

is focused on Vietnam, and the conclusions may not apply to other countries or cultures. Because the study was conducted over a short period, the paper did not investigate the long-term consequences of playing interactive games in language learning.

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8.3 Publisher's Note

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