

Exploring Students' and Teacher's Perceptions of Non-Digital Games in Reading



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ABSTRACT

Reading motivation is crucial for literacy, yet limited infrastructure in Indonesian rural schools often hinders innovation. Despite the digital learning trend, literature regarding low-cost strategies in resource-constrained settings remains scarce. This study aims to explore student and teacher perceptions of non-digital games, specifically Reading Bingo and Treasure Hunt, to enhance reading engagement at MI Ma'arif Jambu. Employing a descriptive qualitative design with 14 fourth-grade students and one teacher, data were collected via observations, questionnaires, and interviews, then analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model. Findings revealed that students perceived the games as exciting, with physical movement identified as a key factor in boosting vocabulary comprehension. Furthermore, the teacher perceived these games as feasible ice-breakers creating a lively atmosphere without complex preparation. The study concludes that limited resources are not a barrier to active learning; simple non-digital games offer a high-impact solution for fostering reading motivation.

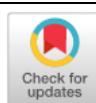
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INTRODUCTION

Reading is considered the most essential skill in mastering English because it acts as the primary gateway for students to acquire vocabulary, understand grammar, and build critical thinking (Grabe & Stoller, 2013). In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), reading is not merely about receiving information passively. Instead, it is an active process where students construct meaning by interacting with the text. Nation (2001) states that students need extensive exposure to reading materials to achieve academic success. By reading extensively, learners obtain the linguistic input required to transition from basic communication to advanced literacy. Especially for young learners, reading helps develop curiosity and imagination, which serve as the foundations for their future learning journey.

However, developing reading skills is difficult if students lack reading motivation. Motivation is the internal drive that pushes students to engage with texts, either for learning or for pleasure (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). This psychological factor is a significant predictor of whether a student will be successful in reading or not. Based on the Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000), student motivation will flourish if the class environment supports their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Therefore, teachers should not only focus on teaching linguistic mechanics but must also employ pedagogical strategies that empower students to feel capable and connected to the learning process.

In the context of EFL learning, this connection is often hindered by what Krashen (1982) defines as the "Affective Filter", a psychological barrier consisting of anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and low motivation. When the filter is high, comprehensible input cannot reach the language acquisition device, making learning ineffective. Students in rural settings often experience high anxiety due to unfamiliarity with English and fear of making mistakes. Games have the unique ability to lower this affective filter by shifting the focus from "learning" to

"playing." When the pressure is removed, students become more willing to take linguistic risks, which is essential for reading development (Prensky, 2001).

Unfortunately, the reality of reading literacy in Indonesia remains far from ideal. Even though the national curriculum mandates reading to be mastered at all school levels (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2013), many students in Indonesia, particularly in elementary schools, exhibit low interest in reading English texts. This issue is clearly reflected in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results. Indonesia was ranked 74th out of 79 countries, a position far below the average of OECD countries (OECD, 2019). These findings indicate that a large portion of Indonesian students still struggle with basic comprehension and lack the intrinsic drive to engage with English literature.

This national issue is clearly seen in local rural schools, such as MI Ma'arif Jambu in Semarang. Based on preliminary observation conducted in 2025, the teaching method in this school remains largely traditional and teacher-centered despite the new building facilities. The English lessons mostly rely on memorizing words from textbooks. Moreover, the school lacks technology like computers or LCD projectors to support learning. As a result, students often perceive reading activities as monotonous and intimidating, leading to passive participation (Iftanti, 2012). This situation highlights an urgent need for innovative and cost-effective strategies to solve the problem. The teacher requires a method that can increase student engagement without depending on expensive technology (Papastergiou, 2009).

To address this gap, game-oriented learning is proposed as a solution. Prensky (2001) argues that games create a natural learning atmosphere that fosters engagement, repetition, and motivation through challenge and play. Similarly, Gee (2007) highlights that games promote active problem-solving and meaningful experiences, moving away from passive memorization. In resource-limited settings, non-digital games provide an accessible pedagogical approach to boost student participation (Papastergiou, 2009). Based on this framework, this study selects two non-digital games: Reading Bingo and Treasure Hunt. These games are chosen because they can transform static reading tasks into dynamic classroom experiences without requiring digital infrastructure.

Practically, Reading Bingo is implemented by providing students with a grid of images representing various vocabulary categories, which they must match with written English words provided by the teacher. This mechanism facilitates rapid word recognition through repetitive visual and textual exposure in a low-anxiety environment. Conversely, the Treasure Hunt game elevates the cognitive demand by requiring students to navigate the classroom to find hidden clues. To progress, learners must not only decode the words but also accurately comprehend the semantic meaning of the riddles. By integrating physical movement with social interaction, these games are designed to fulfill the psychological needs of young learners while maintaining a focus on English literacy.

The effectiveness of games in the English classroom has been documented in various previous studies. Ratminingsih, Mahadewi, and Divayana (2018) found that incorporating enjoyable activities like games significantly improves student participation and performance in the Indonesian context. Furthermore, experts have consistently highlighted the importance of pedagogical innovation to prevent student boredom. Cahyono and Widiati (2011) emphasize that teacher creativity in designing activities is crucial for sustaining student interest in EFL classrooms. Other researchers, such as Tuan and Doan (2010) and Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (2006), also reported that classroom-based games have a positive influence on vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension. However, a significant portion of existing research tends to employ quantitative methods or focuses on digital tools for higher-level learners.

This limited exploration highlights the research gap that the present study aims to address. The novelty of this research lies in its qualitative approach, capturing both teacher and student perceptions regarding the implementation of Reading Bingo and Treasure Hunt in a real-world, resource-constrained context. Rather than focusing solely on test scores, this research investigates how these games influence classroom interaction and motivation from multiple perspectives. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how the use of Reading Bingo

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive design to systematically explore participants' perceptions of using non-digital games in an English reading classroom. This approach is suitable for providing a comprehensive summary of events in everyday terms while capturing the informants' experiences in their natural setting (Creswell, 2012; Sandelowski, 2000). By utilizing this framework, the study investigates the complex pedagogical interactions and motivational shifts that occur during the implementation of Reading Bingo and Treasure Hunt (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Respondents

The study was conducted at MI Ma'arif Jambu, Semarang, representing a rural context with limited digital infrastructure. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique to ensure rich and relevant data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The respondents included one English teacher (coded as Participant T) and fourteen fourth-grade students, coded as S1 to S14. This group was chosen due to their direct involvement in the English reading lessons where the game-oriented strategies were applied.

Instruments

To ensure data triangulation, three primary instruments were utilized: observation checklists, structured questionnaires, and semi-structured interview guidelines. Observation checklists documented student engagement across three sessions: pre-intervention, Reading Bingo, and Treasure Hunt. Systematic observation is vital to correlate reported perceptions with actual classroom behavior (Yin, 2018). Individually administered questionnaires using a Likert-scale format captured student attitudes (Creswell, 2012). Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher and students using group interviews (4-5 students) for the latter to ensure a comfortable atmosphere (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Procedures

Data collection followed a chronological timeline in November 2025: pre-intervention observation on November 3, Reading Bingo implementation on November 5, and the Treasure Hunt game on November 7. Subsequently, questionnaires were distributed on November 8, followed by group interviews with students on November 10. The process concluded with a professional interview with the English teacher on November 24. This systematic progression allowed the researcher to track changes in student perception and motivation.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from observations, questionnaires, and interviews were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). This model conceptualizes data analysis as a continuous, iterative process consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

The analysis commenced with data condensation, where the researcher performed the process of selecting, focusing, and transforming the raw data obtained from field notes, fourteen student questionnaires, and various interview transcripts. This involved coding the data to identify core themes such as "student engagement," "vocabulary recognition," and "learning barriers." During this phase, irrelevant information was set aside to ensure the analysis remained focused on the research objectives regarding participant perceptions (Miles et al., 2014).

Subsequently, the researcher moved to the data display stage, which involves organizing the condensed information into an accessible and compact form. The findings were presented through narrative descriptions and thematic tables to illustrate the interaction patterns and motivational shifts observed during the games. A structured display allows the researcher to see what is happening and draw justified conclusions based on the patterns that emerge from the classroom activities.

The final stage involved conclusion drawing and verification. As the analysis progressed, the researcher began to identify meanings, patterns, and explanations regarding the effectiveness of non-digital games. To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of these conclusions, the researcher performed method triangulation by cross-referencing the observation findings with the survey responses and interview feedback. Verification was conducted rigorously to ensure that the final conclusions were grounded in the actual data and reflected the authentic voices of the participants (Miles et al., 2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews revealed significant insights into the implementation of Reading Bingo and Treasure Hunt at MI Ma'arif Jambu. The findings are organized into two main sections corresponding to the research questions: the students' perception of motivation and the teacher's perception regarding the feasibility of the games.

Students' Perception: Enhancement of Motivation and Engagement

The first research question aims to investigate how students perceive the use of non-digital games in reading lessons. Based on the interview data, the majority of students initially felt bored with traditional English lessons. As stated in the group interview, "*Rata-rata ga suka karena bosen soalnya cuma duduk dengerin*" (Most of us did not like it because it was boring; we just sat and listened). However, this perception shifted drastically after the intervention. The observation data showed active participation, and this is supported by the questionnaire results presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Perception of Reading Bingo and Treasure Hunt Games

No.	Statement	Agree	Disagree
1.	I enjoyed learning English using Reading Bingo.	100%	0%
2.	I found the Treasure Hunt game exciting and fun.	100%	0%
3.	The physical movement in the games helped me understand vocabulary better.	93%	7%
4.	I felt more confident reading and speaking during the games.	93%	7%

As displayed in Table 1, the students' response was very positive. Notably, 100% of students agreed that they enjoyed Reading Bingo and found Treasure Hunt exciting. This perfect score indicates that the "fun factor" successfully eliminated the boredom mentioned in the pre-intervention interview. When asked why they liked Treasure Hunt, students in the interview highlighted the physical aspect: "*Suka jalan-jalannya, geraknya, kerja sama timnya... belajarnya jadi ga monoton*" (I like the walking, the movement, the teamwork... learning became not monotonous). This finding aligns with Prensky (2001), who argues that games provide a stimulating environment that fosters engagement.

To further illustrate the impact of the games, the researcher conducted a comparative observation of the classroom atmosphere before and during the implementation. The differences were clear, particularly in terms of student engagement and interaction, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Observation of Classroom Atmosphere

Aspect	Pre-Intervention	During Intervention
Student Engagement	Passive; students mostly listened to the teacher and looked bored.	Active; 100% of students participated physically and mentally.
Classroom Interaction	Teacher-centered; one-way communication.	Student-centered; students interacted with peers and the teacher actively.

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Confidence Level	Low; students were afraid to speak or read aloud.	Improved; students shouted out answers and read clues without hesitation.
Classroom Vibe	Quiet but monotonous (low energy).	Lively and "noisy" in a productive way (high energy).

Beyond general enjoyment, the interview data revealed that the games specifically improved students' phonological awareness. In the Reading Bingo session, students reported that the challenge was not just visual but auditory. One student remarked, "Paling pas kebetulan dapet kalimat atau kata yang artinya hampir sama kaya house dan horse, goat dan god" (It was particularly interesting when we got words that sound similar like house and horse, or goat and god). This finding is crucial as it demonstrates that the game forced students to pay close attention to minimal pairs and pronunciation details. By doing so in a playful context, the students were practicing critical linguistic discrimination skills without the anxiety usually associated with pronunciation drills (Krashen, 1982).

Furthermore, as supported by Table 1 (Item 3), 93% of students perceived that physical movement helped them understand vocabulary. Only one student (S13) disagreed, which might indicate a preference for a different learning style. However, for the majority, the combination of cognitive and physical activity proved effective. This supports the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), where fulfilling the need for autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation. A student mentioned, "Susah-susah gampang, tapi kami proaktif tanya kalau ada kata yang gatau" (It was challenging but we were proactive in asking questions). This shift from passive listening to proactive questioning demonstrates a significant improvement in learning engagement.

Regarding confidence (Table 1, Item 4), 93% of students felt more confident, while one student (S7) disagreed. This is a realistic reflection of classroom dynamics where some introverted students may need more time to build confidence. Nevertheless, the teacher observed that the competitive nature of Bingo forced even the shy students to speak up. The teacher noted, "Motivasi belum kelihatan penuh karena kesulitan arti, tapi bagus karena jadi banyak bertanya" (Full motivation was hampered by vocabulary difficulty, but it was good because they asked a lot of questions). This suggests that while confidence is still a work in progress for some, the games successfully triggered the willingness to participate.

Teacher's Perception: Feasibility in Resource-Limited Context

The second research question addresses the teacher's perception of the games' feasibility. Before the implementation, Participant T relied heavily on the textbook and blackboard, admitting that "Fokus anak-anak paling susah, gampang hilang" (Student focus is the hardest part, it is easily lost). Initially, there was concern that games might be disruptive. However, the post-intervention interview revealed a positive change in the teacher's perspective. Participant T described the classroom atmosphere as "Lebih hidup" (More alive), which corresponds with the observation data in Table 2 regarding the lively classroom vibe.

Participant T particularly appreciated how the games fostered contextual learning. In the interview, the teacher observed that students started to recognize objects in their immediate environment: "...cukup membantu anak-anak jadi lebih banyak bertanya dan tau ciri-ciri buah, hewan, juga tau jendela, pintu, dan buku di sekitar kelas" (...it helped students ask more questions and know the characteristics of fruits, animals, and they also learned window, door, and book around the class). This statement highlights the power of using realia in Treasure Hunt. The game successfully bridged the gap between abstract vocabulary in the textbook and the concrete reality of the classroom, making the learning process more meaningful and memorable for young learners.

Regarding the "noise" issue often associated with games, the teacher perceived it constructively. Participant T stated: "Lebih hidup... jadi ramai karena belajar... anak-anak aktif semua mengikuti dan sangat semangat" (More alive... it became noisy because they were learning... all students were active and very enthusiastic). This confirms that the teacher distinguished between disruptive noise and "productive noise," where the chaos was a sign of

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active learning rather than misbehavior. The teacher also appreciated the low-cost nature of the games, noting that the preparation was feasible and did not require complex technology.

However, the teacher provided a crucial suggestion for future implementation regarding time management. In the reflection session, Participant T advised: "Saat nyetting treasure-nya jangan pas jam pelajaran... mungkin bisa hari sebelumnya" (Do not set up the treasure hunt during the lesson hour... maybe do it the day before). This practical insight highlights that while non-digital games are effective, they require logistical preparation to avoid wasting instructional time. Despite this minor logistical challenge, the teacher concluded that the method is "Layak sekali" (Very feasible) to be applied again, as it successfully transformed the passive students into active participants (Cahyono & Widiati, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, two main conclusions can be drawn. First, the students perceive the implementation of Reading Bingo and Treasure Hunt positively. The games successfully shifted their perception of reading from a monotonous activity to an exciting challenge. The data indicates that the "fun factor" and physical movement found in these games significantly enhanced their engagement, confidence, and intrinsic motivation to learn English. Second, the teacher perceives non-digital games as a highly feasible and effective pedagogical solution for a resource-limited school. Despite minor challenges in classroom management and time allocation, the teacher acknowledged that the low-cost nature and high impact of the games outweighed the logistical hurdles. Therefore, this study suggests that limited technological infrastructure should not hinder pedagogical innovation. Teachers in rural areas can use creative non-digital games to foster a vibrant reading environment. For future implementation, it is recommended to prepare the game properties beforehand to maximize instructional time. Future researchers are encouraged to explore other variations of non-digital games in different language skills to broaden the literature on low-resource teaching strategies.

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