

Students' Learning Experiences Through English Fun Learning at SMP Negeri 2 Mowewe

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i5.3206>

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ABSTRACT

English learning at the junior high school level in Indonesia often faces challenges related to students' limited engagement, motivation, and participation. Students frequently experience difficulties with vocabulary, pronunciation, confidence, and active involvement in classroom activities, particularly when learning methods are monotonous or teacher-centered. This study aims to describe students' learning experiences during the implementation of English Fun Learning at SMP Negeri 2 Mowewe. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed with students of class VIII A as participants. Data were collected through student self-reflection, classroom observation, teacher interviews, documentation, and supporting pre-test and post-test results. The main instrument was a self-reflection sheet covering 15 aspects of students' learning experiences. Data were analyzed descriptively by identifying recurring themes related to students' feelings, preferred activities, participation, cognitive experiences, interaction, confidence, and learning difficulties. The findings indicate that students generally experienced positive, enjoyable, and engaging learning experiences through English Fun Learning, particularly through games, ice-breaking activities, vocabulary learning, visual media, and group activities. Students also reported increased confidence and greater interest in English, although some continued to experience difficulties with pronunciation, vocabulary retention, and understanding word meanings. Supporting test data showed an increase in the mean score from 21.36 to 49.93 among 14 students with complete paired scores.

Keywords: *English Fun Learning, Learning Experience, Descriptive Qualitative, English Learning, Student Reflection*

Article History:

Received 20th August 2026

Accepted 10th October 2026

Published 15th October 2026



INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in various areas of life, including education, technology, communication, and employment. As interaction across countries continues to develop, English learning at the school level needs to provide students with opportunities to engage with the language in meaningful ways. Learning activities therefore need to consider not only the materials being taught but also the experiences students obtain throughout the learning process. Game-based approaches, for example, have been associated with improvements in language learning and vocabulary acquisition, although their effectiveness may vary according to instructional design and learning context (Thompson & von Gillern, 2020; Zhang & Yu, 2022).

At the junior high school level in Indonesia, English is taught within the national educational curriculum. However, as English is a foreign language in Indonesia, students may have limited opportunities to use it outside the classroom. Such conditions can create challenges when students need to develop vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking skills. Foreign language classroom anxiety has been identified as an important factor affecting learners' experiences, particularly when language learning involves communication and the possibility of making mistakes (Horwitz et al., 1986). Furthermore, research on game-based learning suggests that instructional activities can influence both learners' motivation and

anxiety, highlighting the importance of considering students' emotional responses during English lessons (Ahmed et al., 2022).

At the junior high school level, students encounter various aspects of English, including vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, speaking, and simple expressions. However, students may experience difficulties when learning these aspects, particularly when they have limited opportunities to use English directly. Students may struggle with vocabulary retention, find pronunciation challenging, lack the confidence to speak English in front of peers, or feel unmotivated when learning methods are repetitive or teacher-centered. Research on foreign language enjoyment and anxiety indicates that learners' emotional experiences are shaped by both individual characteristics and classroom conditions, including teacher-related factors and learning interactions (Fang & Tang, 2021; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019).

Students' learning experiences include how they feel, participate, interact, understand learning materials, and respond to activities. Therefore, understanding students' experiences can provide useful information about how a learning activity is perceived and experienced by learners. Rather than focusing only on learning outcomes, examining students' experiences can reveal aspects of learning that may not be visible through test scores alone. This perspective is particularly relevant when exploring classroom activities because students may respond differently to the same instructional strategy, depending on their preferences, confidence, and opportunities to participate.

One activity that can provide varied learning experiences is English Fun Learning. English Fun Learning integrates English language instruction with enjoyable, interactive, and student-centered activities. It is not a single fixed method but rather a framework for delivering English materials through activities that prioritize student engagement, positive emotions, and active participation. Activities typically included in this approach are games, ice-breaking activities, visual media, vocabulary exercises, group tasks, and creative learning interactions. Studies have reported that game-based ice-breaking activities can support student engagement and motivation during English lessons (Sari et al., 2024), while ice-breaking activities have also been investigated as a strategy for increasing students' motivation to learn English (Adi et al., 2021). Students' perceptions of ice-breaking activities further suggest that enjoyable classroom interactions may contribute to confidence and willingness to participate (Mardianti, 2025).

Previous research has reported positive responses toward enjoyable English learning activities. Hidayah et al. (2024) examined students' responses to Fun English Learning strategies at the junior high school level, while Agustina et al. (2025) investigated the influence of fun learning on beginner-level students' motivation in non-formal education. Related research has also examined the contribution of songs to English learners' motivation (Adara & Taufik, 2020). In addition, research involving modified English songs has investigated their potential to support vocabulary mastery and learning motivation among Indonesian junior high school students (Sunra et al., 2026). A systematic review of game-based learning in EFL education has likewise examined the relationship between game-based activities and students' motivation (Susaniari & Santosa, 2024). More recent research has investigated how different video game genres relate to English learning motivation among Indonesian EFL learners (Andhara et al., 2026). Meanwhile, multimedia glosses have been examined as a resource for second-language vocabulary learning (Mahdi et al., 2024), and a systematic review has explored the potential of digital game-based vocabulary learning (Vnucko & Klimova, 2023).

Although previous studies have discussed fun and enjoyable English learning activities, students' experiences may vary according to their learning environment, characteristics, materials, and activities. Moreover, previous studies have examined specific instructional strategies, motivation, vocabulary learning, or learning outcomes. There is therefore a need to further describe how students experience a series of English Fun Learning activities, including their positive experiences, participation, interaction, perceived learning, and continuing difficulties.

Based on this gap, this study aims to describe the learning experiences of class VIII A students at SMP Negeri 2 Mowewe during the implementation of English Fun Learning. The

study explores students' feelings, preferred activities, responses to games and visual media, confidence, cognitive experiences, interaction with peers, learning difficulties, and perceptions of English learning.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to describe students' learning experiences during the implementation of English Fun Learning. A descriptive qualitative design was selected because the primary focus of this study was on understanding and describing students' subjective experiences, perceptions, feelings, and responses during the learning process. Unlike quantitative approaches that measure and test the statistical significance of outcomes, a qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meaning learners attach to their learning experiences in depth and in context (Creswell, 2014). This design is therefore appropriate for investigating how students experience a series of learning activities, what they feel, and what difficulties they encounter.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Mowewe, located in East Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, from July 22 to August 8, 2026. SMP Negeri 2 Mowewe is a public junior high school serving students in a semi-rural area where English is primarily encountered in the formal school context. The school follows the national curriculum and English is taught as a compulsory subject.

The participants were students of class VIII A who participated in the English Fun Learning activities. Class VIII A consisted of 18 students who completed the self-reflection instrument. The class was selected because the English Fun Learning program was implemented specifically with this group as part of an independent study program (SIM-B). The participants were aged approximately 13 to 14 years and had received English instruction since Grade VII.

It should be noted that while the participant group was class VIII A (18 students), the pre-test and post-test analysis involved only 14 students. This difference occurred because four students did not have complete paired scores – either they were absent on the day of the pre-test or the post-test, or their score sheets were incomplete. These 14 students were therefore the only ones included in the descriptive comparison of test scores. The qualitative analysis, however, drew on all available reflection responses from the 18 students who completed the self-reflection sheet.

Instruments

The main instrument used in this study was a student self-reflection sheet. The instrument consisted of 15 aspects concerning students' experiences after participating in English Fun Learning. The aspects included students' feelings after learning, preferred activities, responses to games and visual media, willingness to speak or pronounce English vocabulary, vocabulary remembered, perceived ease of understanding the materials, learning difficulties, easiest learning activities, group-work experiences, confidence, perceived benefits, activities students wanted to repeat, suggestions for future learning, perceived changes, and interest in English.

In addition to the reflection sheet, an observation guide, teacher interview guide, documentation, and pre-test and post-test instruments were used. Observation focused on students' participation, responses, interaction, and classroom atmosphere. The teacher interview was used to obtain additional information about students' English learning conditions and the implementation of the activities.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed descriptively following the general process of qualitative data analysis involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis began by reviewing students' reflection responses, observation notes, teacher interview information, and documentation. Relevant information was selected and grouped according to recurring themes: emotional experiences, preferred learning activities, responses to games and visual media, cognitive experiences, participation and collaboration, confidence, learning difficulties, and students' perceptions of English learning.

The pre-test and post-test results were analyzed descriptively. Of the 18 students recorded in the dataset, 14 had complete paired scores and were therefore included in the descriptive comparison. The test data were not subjected to inferential statistical analysis because they functioned as supporting data within the qualitative study and no control group was used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are organized according to five main themes derived from the student reflection data: (1) emotional experiences and preferred learning activities, (2) responses to games and visual media, (3) cognitive experiences in vocabulary and comprehension, (4) interaction and collaboration, and (5) confidence and interest in English. These themes were identified through recurring patterns across students' responses to the 15 reflection aspects. Supporting test data are also presented as descriptive evidence of score changes before and after the activities.

Theme 1: Emotional Experiences and Preferred Learning Activities

The students' reflections indicate that English Fun Learning provided generally positive emotional experiences. Several students described feeling happy, excited, enthusiastic, or more interested in learning English after participating in the activities. For instance, one student (S3) wrote: "I feel happy and more enthusiastic in learning English." Another student (S7) stated: "Learning English is now more exciting and I want to keep learning."

Games were one of the most frequently mentioned preferred activities. Some students specifically identified games as their favorite activity, while others mentioned ice breaking, vocabulary memorization, quizzes, or particular learning materials. S1, for example, identified ice breaking as his preferred activity because it made him feel more enthusiastic, while several other students (S4, S6, S9) mentioned games as activities they most enjoyed.

Students' positive responses toward games are consistent with Hidayah et al. (2024), who found that junior high school students generally responded positively to interactive and varied Fun English Learning activities. Similar findings were reported by Agustina et al. (2025), whose qualitative study showed that games and other enjoyable activities could encourage emotional and social engagement among English learners. These findings suggest that the form in which English materials are presented can become an important part of students' learning experiences.

Theme 2: Responses to Games and Visual Media

The reflection data also show positive responses to the use of games and visual media. Several students stated that games and pictures made them more enthusiastic about learning English. S3 stated: "Games and pictures make me more enthusiastic because they help me understand English better." S4 also reported that pictures made learning English more enjoyable, while S5 explained that pictures and games helped him see examples directly.

These responses are in line with Zulfikar & Pebriyana (2024), who used short movies as visual media in an English Fun program and reported positive benefits for students' learning experiences. However, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that games or visual media directly caused an improvement in English proficiency. Instead, the data

demonstrate that students perceived these activities as enjoyable and as an important part of their learning experience.

Theme 3: Cognitive Experiences in Vocabulary and Comprehension

Students' reflections reveal cognitive experiences related to vocabulary, understanding learning materials, and remembering English expressions. Several students reported that vocabulary was relatively easy to learn and that they remembered words introduced during the activities. Students mentioned vocabulary such as cat, chair, table, pen, and book, as well as expressions such as good morning, good night, and vocabulary related to nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

S3 stated that she could understand the materials easily. S6 reported that the materials were easier to understand after participating in the activities. These findings are consistent with [Hidayah et al. \(2024\)](#), who reported that students perceived Fun English Learning activities as helpful for remembering vocabulary and understanding English concepts.

Nevertheless, not all students experienced identical cognitive progress. S2 reported difficulty understanding some materials and pronouncing English letters. S4 mentioned difficulty memorizing vocabulary, while S5 reported difficulty understanding the meanings of some English expressions. These differences demonstrate that enjoyable activities do not automatically remove learning difficulties and that students may still require repeated exposure and reinforcement.

Theme 4: Interaction and Collaboration

Group activities provided students with opportunities to interact and collaborate with their peers. Several students described group work positively. S11 wrote: "Group activities are very fun because I can discuss answers with my friends." S12 similarly noted that working together made completing tasks easier and more enjoyable.

This aspect of the findings is consistent with [Agustina et al. \(2025\)](#), who found that group activities in a fun learning context were associated with social engagement and collaboration. In the present study, collaboration was not merely related to completing classroom tasks but also formed part of students' social learning experiences, allowing them to interact with peers while using English-related materials.

Theme 5: Confidence and Interest in English

The reflections also provide evidence of changes in students' perceived confidence and interest. S1 stated that he felt more confident after the activities, while S3 associated her increased confidence with her desire to gain more knowledge. Several students – including S1, S3, S6, S7, S8, S9, and S10 – reported a change in their interest in English, with some stating that they had previously not liked English but became more interested after participating in English Fun Learning.

However, S9 also noted: "I still feel less confident in speaking English, even though I enjoyed the activities and can memorize some vocabulary." This variation is important because it demonstrates that students' experiences cannot be generalized as completely positive. English Fun Learning created a learning environment that was perceived positively by many students while some individual differences and difficulties remained.

Supporting Evidence from Pre-Test and Post-Test

The pre-test and post-test results were included as supporting descriptive data. Of the 18 students in the dataset, 14 had complete paired scores and were therefore included in the comparison.

Table 1. Descriptive Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Indicator	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Students with complete data	14	14
Mean score	21.36	49.93
Minimum score	12	32
Maximum score	36	80
Mean difference	28.57	-

Source: Research data, 2026.

The mean score increased from 21.36 in the pre-test to 49.93 in the post-test, representing a difference of 28.57 points. All 14 students with complete paired scores obtained higher post-test scores than their respective pre-test scores. However, these results are interpreted descriptively and cannot be used to establish a statistically significant effect of English Fun Learning, as the study did not employ inferential statistical testing or a control group. The test results are interpreted alongside the qualitative findings as additional descriptive information about changes in students' scores.

Learning Difficulties and Implications

Despite the generally positive experiences, students' reflections also reveal continuing difficulties. S2 reported difficulty pronouncing English letters, S4 mentioned difficulty memorizing vocabulary, S5 reported difficulty understanding the meaning of English expressions, and S9 noted that he was still not confident in speaking English. These findings indicate that enjoyable learning activities should be accompanied by continuous reinforcement, repeated vocabulary practice, and pronunciation activities.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to describe the learning experiences of class VIII A students at SMP Negeri 2 Mowewe during the implementation of English Fun Learning. The findings revealed that students generally experienced positive, enjoyable, and engaging learning experiences across five themes: emotional experiences, responses to games and visual media, cognitive experiences, interaction and collaboration, and confidence and interest in English. Games, ice-breaking activities, vocabulary learning, visual media, and group activities encouraged students to become happier, more enthusiastic, confident, and interested in learning English. Several students also found vocabulary and learning materials easier to understand, while collaborative activities promoted peer interaction. However, some students continued to experience difficulties with pronunciation, vocabulary retention, word meanings, and speaking confidence. Supporting pre-test and post-test data showed an increase in the mean score from 21.36 to 49.93 among 14 students with complete paired scores. This improvement was interpreted descriptively within the qualitative framework. Overall, English Fun Learning offered meaningful learning experiences, although continued practice, reinforcement, and individualized support remain necessary to address students' learning difficulties.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their gratitude to SMP Negeri 2 Mowewe for providing the opportunity and support to conduct the English Fun Learning activities. The authors also thank the English teacher and the students of class VIII A for their participation, cooperation, and contributions throughout the implementation of the activities.

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