



Engaging Secondary School EFL Students in Speaking Classroom through Guessing Games

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ABSTRACT

Speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners, particularly in contexts where classroom interaction is limited. To address this issue, interactive techniques such as Guessing Games are widely considered effective for promoting learner participation. This study aims to investigate students' engagement in an EFL speaking classroom through the use of Guessing Games and to explore their perceptions of its implementation. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research was conducted in a secondary senior high school in Karawang Regency, West Java, Indonesia, involving one intact class of 30 eleventh-grade students aged 16–17. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observation checklists, and analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that students demonstrated strong behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during the learning process. They followed classroom rules, listened attentively, and maintained focus; expressed enthusiasm, enjoyment, and positive emotions; and showed cognitive growth by enhancing their vocabulary, applying critical thinking, and demonstrating creativity when describing objects. Additionally, the activity fostered stronger peer and teacher–student connections. In conclusion, Guessing Games effectively support a more interactive, motivating, and engaging speaking classroom, making them a valuable technique for EFL instruction.

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the four key components of learning English that requires the capacity to communicate ideas, feelings, and opinions verbally (Mishra, 2017). Most students struggle with word pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence when learning English speaking (Ahkam et al., 2024; Maji et al., 2022; Reno & Manurung, 2019). Students believe that learning English is challenging because they frequently speak in their native tongue, get tired

from conventional teaching methods, and find it hard to understand the teacher's material because they are passive English users (Hariani, 2018; Medgyes, 1994; Newton & Nation, 2020).

English teachers need to be creative in order to establish positive learning environments and offer a variety of communicative activities to make English classes more engaging for students. Using games to engage students in speaking learning is a good idea since games can provide students with a sense of self-expression and help them break down barriers to communicating (Arnab et al., 2019; Azkiyah, 2024; Stefani & Setyorini, 2019). Students can improve their speaking skills by playing games, and they are motivated to support student learning through game activities (Firdaus, 2015; Liu & Chu, 2010; Marzuki & Kuliahana, 2021).

Language games offer several benefits for teaching English including motivating students to participate fully in their learning process, encouraging creativity and spontaneous language use, creating relaxing classroom atmospheres, and reducing students' fear of speaking (Atifnigar, 2024; Klimova, 2015 in Nafisah et al., 2024; Oleksandra & Alexandra, 2023; Wright et al., 2006). Students love games because there are lots of chances to talk and express their opinions, making it an enjoyable exercise that teaches students without pressuring them to learn English (Ravaja, 2005 in Abdul Jabbar & Felicia, 2015; Jarwati NIM, 2021)

Guessing games are interactive learning activities that encourage students to communicate by working individually or collaboratively to identify or describe an engaging point or object presented during the game (Merriam-Webster, 1986 in Azkiyah, 2024). These games create a lively classroom atmosphere where learners feel motivated to participate, helping them express ideas more confidently. Previous studies highlight that incorporating guessing games in speaking lessons increases students' enthusiasm, supports active engagement, and fosters meaningful communication practice. Moreover, such games help reduce students' speaking anxiety by shifting the focus from accuracy to interaction and enjoyment (Abdul Jabbar & Felicia, 2015; Estrada & Ortega, 2016 in Maqfirah, 2018; Munawarah et al., 2024).

Previous studies on guessing games, such as those by Männamaa et al. (2008), have primarily explored testing conditions and student characteristics, while Maqfirah (2018) examined how guessing games contribute to improvements in students' speaking fluency. Although these studies highlight the potential of guessing games in language learning, limited attention has been given to how such activities influence students' overall engagement in the learning process as well as their perceptions of using games to support speaking skills. Understanding these aspects is crucial because engagement and perception play significant roles in shaping learners' motivation, participation, and long-term learning outcomes. Moreover, insights into students' experiences can help teachers design more interactive and meaningful speaking activities in EFL classrooms. Therefore, this study will investigate how guessing games affect students' engagement and how students

perceive the use of guessing games in speaking lessons. Specifically, the objective of this study is to determine the ways students are engaged in learning speaking through guessing games and to explore their perceptions of this technique among 11th-grade senior high school students.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is a method for examining and comprehending the meanings that people or groups ascribe to human social issues. The interpretative paradigm focuses on subjective experiences and the meanings they hold for individuals (Cresswell, 2014). A descriptive case study describes an intervention or phenomena and the actual environment in which it takes place. This study conducted interviews and observed how students interact and what they think when they play Guessing Game activities to practice speaking.

Site and Participants

The study was carried out at a secondary senior high school in Karawang Regency, West Java. This school was chosen not only for its strategic and easily accessible location, which supported smooth data collection, but also for its strong educational accreditation, ensuring a supportive academic environment. The participants consisted of one intact 11th-grade class and six selected students aged 16 to 17 who were involved in more detailed interviews. Eleventh-grade learners were considered appropriate for this research because they are generally more capable of responding critically, engaging actively in classroom discussions, and expressing their thoughts clearly during speaking activities.

Data Collection

The researcher used interview and observation as data collection methods. Data collection involved conducting interviews and watching students' behavior where students were allowed to freely discuss topics without being asked specific questions (Creswell, 2014). Interviews were used to learn students' perception using Guessing Games in the classroom. The researcher asked open-ended, unstructured questions to allow interviewees to give more in-depth responses. Six questions about students' perceptions of utilizing guessing games to learn English were included in the interview guidelines. A voice recorder was provided for recording the interview process as documentation. Direct observation was used throughout the teaching and learning process for 2 class meetings. Observation focused on how the teacher presented the material and how students responded to the Guessing Games. The researcher used observation checklist based on Vygotsky (1962) evaluate improvements in students' behavior during research. Students had to

complete tasks on the checklist, participate, interact, and follow teacher's instructions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the steps outlined by Creswell (2014). The researcher prepared the data by gathering all interview recordings and observation checklists, then transcribed interviews word-for-word. Data was organized into files and folders, then coded using simple descriptive phrases to identify information in transcripts. Related codes were grouped together to generate themes like "confidence", "bravery", "happy", "enthusiasm", and "critical thinking". Each theme was interpreted by connecting it to research questions and goals. Findings were validated through member checking where participants provided feedback on interpretations. Finally, results were reported with thorough explanations of each theme and significant points from participant responses.

3. Results and Discussion

The study was conducted at a public secondary senior high school located in Karawang Regency, West Java, Indonesia. This school was purposefully selected as the research site for several practical and academic considerations. First, its strategic geographic location within the regency made it highly accessible for the researcher, allowing for sustained engagement during classroom observations, interviews, and follow-up data collection sessions. Second, the school is recognized for its strong academic culture and holds an excellent accreditation rating, indicating that it consistently meets national education standards. Such an environment provided a stable and supportive context for examining students' learning behaviors and teacher–student interactions. Furthermore, the institution has a well-established English program with experienced teachers and adequate facilities, making it a suitable setting for exploring language learning practices. These combined factors contributed to the selection of this school as an appropriate and reliable research site.

The participants in this study consisted of one intact class of 11th-grade students, along with a smaller subgroup of six focal learners who were observed more closely for additional qualitative insights. The students ranged in age from 16 to 17 years old, which represents the typical developmental stage of Indonesian upper-secondary school learners. Selecting 11th-grade students was intentional, as learners at this level are generally considered to possess greater cognitive maturity, metacognitive awareness, and communicative confidence compared to those in lower grades. They typically demonstrate a stronger ability to articulate ideas, reflect on their learning experiences, and engage critically with classroom activities. Students in this grade are also more accustomed to discussion-based tasks and teacher questioning strategies. These characteristics made them well-suited for contributing meaningful responses to the data collection procedures employed in this study, particularly interviews and classroom-based observations.

The learning process begins with pre-activities in which the teacher invites students to pray, checks attendance, connects the previous lesson to the current topic, and presents the learning objectives. During the main activities, students listen to the explanation of the guessing game, observe an example, and actively guess objects found in different settings. They take notes on their favorite objects, prepare descriptions, and present them without revealing the object, while the teacher observes their oral communication skills. Students participate enthusiastically and practice the guessing game with their classmates. Afterward, in the post-activity stage, they summarize the lesson, reflect on their learning, and listen to the teacher's evaluation. Following this classroom instruction, data on students' engagement and perceptions of learning speaking through guessing games are collected through semi-structured interviews. The researcher prepares guiding questions, obtains consent, and interviews students individually in a quiet room to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Each interview is audio-recorded with permission and includes open-ended questions about students' experiences, motivation, and challenges during the guessing game. Probing questions, as presented in Table 1, are used to gain deeper insights. The interviews last 10–15 minutes, after which recordings are transcribed and analyzed to identify recurring themes.

Table 1. Interview questions

No.	Questions
1.	Do you think the guessing game have a positive or negative impact on learning to speak English?
2.	How did you feel while learning to speak English using a guessing game? Are you feeling happy, bored, or pressured?
3.	What difficulties did you face when learning to speak English using a guessing game by standing in front of the class?
4.	How did you overcome difficulties when learning to speak English in front of the class using guessing game?
5.	Do guessing game make you actively involved in the process of learning English? In what case?
6.	What are the benefits do you get when you learn speak English using guessing game?

Students' Engagement in Learning Speaking through Guessing Games

Student engagement was analyzed through three dimensions following Ebralidze (2023) framework: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. These dimensions are interconnected and reinforce each other in the learning process.

Behavioral Engagement

Students demonstrated high behavioral engagement during both observation sessions. They actively participated in class discussions, responded promptly to the teacher's instructions, and consistently followed the rules of each game implemented in the lesson. Their disciplined behavior was evident as they stayed focused on the tasks, collaborated well with peers, and avoided actions that might disrupt the learning process. As noted by Fredricks et al. (2004) in Abila and Fraumeni (2019), behavioral engagement encompasses positive conduct,

adherence to classroom norms, and sustained effort in completing learning activities while avoiding disruptive behaviors.

Figure 1 below illustrates students' behavioral patterns during Guessing Games activities. On the first observation day, students actively wrote descriptive sentences spontaneously, while on the second day, they prepared descriptions of their favorite objects at home and presented them confidently. Students asked clarifying questions when needed and maintained focus during teacher explanations about descriptive texts and game rules. This active participation demonstrates meaningful teacher-student interaction throughout the English speaking learning process.

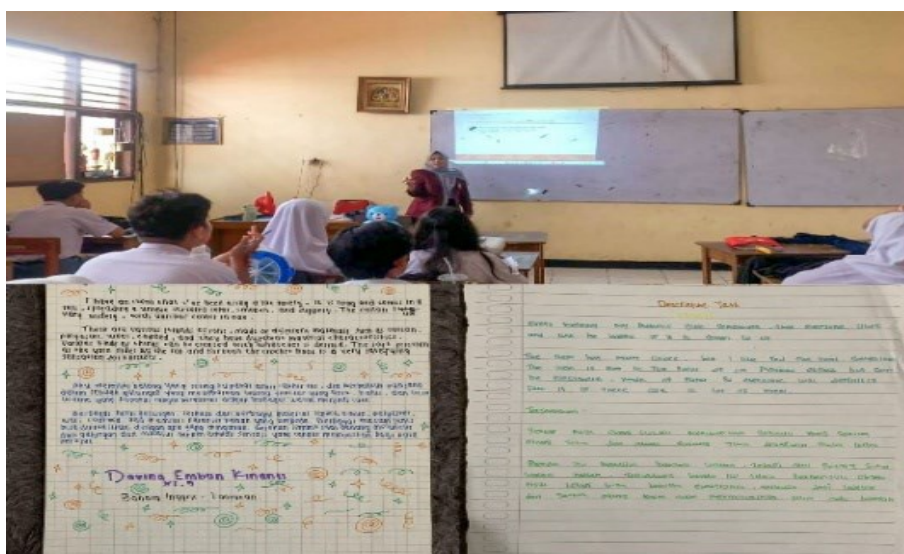


Figure 1. The students showing appear quiet, pay attention to the teacher and writing descriptive text

Emotional Engagement

Guessing Games significantly enhanced students' emotional engagement by creating an enjoyable and stress-free learning environment. According to Ebralidze (2023), emotional engagement refers to students' feelings such as interest, enjoyment, and enthusiasm regarding their educational experiences. The classroom observation showed the students exhibited curiosity, excitement, and confidence when describing objects without revealing them to their classmates. By the second observation, emotional engagement became more positive as students eagerly anticipated their turns to present their favorite objects. Participant 3 stated, "I felt happy and not stressed playing the guessing game, feeling very joyful to participate." Similarly, Participant 2 expressed that "when they play guessing games, they felt happier and more excited." These findings align with research suggesting that games can reduce speaking anxiety and increase motivation (Yağcıoğlu & Çalışkan, 2024). The competitive yet supportive atmosphere allowed students to overcome their fear of speaking in front of the class while building stronger relationships with peers.

Cognitive Engagement

Students demonstrated significant cognitive engagement through critical thinking and active vocabulary application. Ebralidze (2023) defines cognitive engagement as students' mental effort in learning, including critical thinking, information analysis, and concept connections. During the first observation, students asked questions about unfamiliar aspects of the game, showing active thinking processes. They utilized existing English vocabulary to create compelling descriptions spontaneously, requiring critical thinking skills for sentence construction. By the second observation, cognitive engagement improved as students applied previous learning to describe their favorite objects more effectively. Participant 5 noted that "students get the confidence and bravery to describe things in front of the class and helps student learn more vocabulary in English." Participant 4 added that "the guessing game made her bolder in speaking English in front of the class and think critically about what object their friend was describing." These responses indicate that Guessing Games promote both linguistic competence and cognitive development (Edeleva et al., 2023; Fitria & Nurcholis, 2025).

Students' Perceptions in Learning Speaking through Guessing Games

Interview results from six participants revealed predominantly positive perceptions of using Guessing Games in English speaking classes. According to Slameto (2003, cited in Irnawati, 2019), perception involves processing messages and information through the five senses, which then influences thought processes and forms attitudes toward objects or experiences. The analysis revealed emerged themes regarding the students' perceptions towards learning speaking through Guessing Games. Each theme is further explained as follows.

a. Learning speaking through Guessing Games boosts the students' confidence and bravery in speaking English.

Students reported increased confidence and willingness to speak English in front of their classmates. Participant 2 explained, "playing Guessing games can help student have the bravery and confidence to guess the items who their friends have described without feeling embarrassed." Participant 1 noted that "playing Guessing Games can help student feel comfortable explaining things in English and can boost their confidence while speaking in front of the class." This finding supports previous research by Lestari et al. (2022) indicating that game-based learning activities can significantly reduce speaking anxiety and build learner confidence. The interactive nature of guessing games provides a supportive environment for language practice (Hanifah, 2024).

b. Using Guessing Games technique helps the students improve their speaking skills and expand vocabulary.

Students recognized the educational benefits of the games. Participant 2 stated, "We can speak English fluently, and we can learn new vocabulary." Participant 3

observed improvements in critical thinking: "students learn to think critically when they play Guessing Games and have to guess what their friends are describing in front of the class." Research by Rasti-Behbahani (2021) supports these findings, demonstrating that interactive games can effectively enhance vocabulary acquisition and speaking fluency in EFL contexts.

c. The students showed Happiness and Enthusiasm during learning speaking through Guessing Games.

The games created a positive classroom atmosphere that enhanced student motivation. Participant 3 shared, "playing Guessing Games allows student to describe their favorite objects without feeling pressured to perform them, which makes student feeling happy." Participant 6 expressed enjoyment in creating challenging descriptions: "I'm feeling happy, because I become competitive in finding the answer, and when making descriptive text, I think about what would be difficult for friends to guess, so I want to make the class more fun." These responses align with the findings of Ramzan et al. (2023), who emphasize that enjoyable and interactive learning activities significantly enhance student engagement and foster positive associations with language learning. When students perceive the learning process as fun and meaningful, they are more willing to participate actively and take risks in using the target language. Despite these affirmative perceptions, several students also expressed concerns regarding the use of Guessing Games in speaking activities, highlighting areas that require attention and refinement, as explicated in the following section.

d. Some students experienced nervousness and fear of making mistakes when speaking in English.

Despite positive overall responses, some students experienced anxiety about making errors. Participant 3 admitted, "student is embarrassed and nervous, making it harder for her to pronounce English while playing Guessing games." Participant 5 expressed concern about limited vocabulary: "I'm still learning English, so there might be some words that I don't know the meaning of." These challenges reflect common issues in EFL speaking contexts, where learners often experience performance. However, the supportive game environment appears to minimize these concerns over time.

e. Some challenges hindered the students to learn speaking through Guessing Games

Some students found the transition from traditional, teacher-centered methods to more interactive game-based learning initially challenging. They needed time to adjust to activities that required active participation rather than passive listening. Participant 4 highlighted that Guessing Games demanded the use of multiple skills simultaneously, stating, "I need to speak and listen carefully." This multitasking aspect required greater focus and effort, yet it also encouraged students to develop their speaking, listening, and thinking skills in a more integrated manner. Although

challenging at first, the experience ultimately supported more comprehensive language skill development.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Guessing Games effectively engage students across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. According to Buckley (2013) in Payne (2017), student engagement has evolved as educational communities recognize its importance in academic success. This study confirms that game-based activities facilitate both student engagement and meaningful learning experiences. The interconnected nature of engagement dimensions is evident in the results. Students who were behaviorally engaged (following rules, participating actively) also showed emotional engagement (enthusiasm, confidence) and cognitive engagement (critical thinking, vocabulary application). This supports Ebralidze's (2023) assertion that engagement components are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

The positive student perceptions align with previous research by Azkiyah (2024), who found that Guessing Games created proactive, interactive classroom atmospheres while encouraging speaking motivation and vocabulary development. The study's findings suggest that Guessing Games address key challenges in EFL speaking instruction by reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, and providing meaningful practice opportunities. The games create what Vygotsky (1978) described as a zone of proximal development, where students can perform beyond their current level with peer support and scaffolding. However, educators should be aware of individual differences in student responses to game-based learning. While most students showed positive engagement, some experienced initial nervousness or found the activities challenging. Proper scaffolding and gradual implementation can help address these concerns. The research contributes to understanding how game-based learning can enhance EFL speaking instruction. Future studies might explore the long-term effects of such activities on speaking proficiency and investigate optimal frequency and duration for game implementation in language curricula.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Guessing Games effectively enhance students' engagement in English speaking activities across three key dimensions. Behavioral engagement was reflected in students' active participation, sustained attentiveness, and consistent adherence to the rules throughout the game. Emotional engagement appeared through their visible enthusiasm, enjoyment, and growing confidence when speaking in front of peers. Cognitive engagement emerged as students applied critical thinking, used relevant vocabulary, and employed creative strategies while describing and guessing objects. Students' perceptions of learning through Guessing Games were highly positive. They reported increased confidence, reduced speaking anxiety, improved vocabulary development, and greater overall

enjoyment of English lessons. The activity also fostered a supportive classroom atmosphere that encouraged risk-taking in language use and strengthened peer interactions. Although a few students initially experienced nervousness, the overall impact of Guessing Games proved beneficial in promoting speaking skill development and meaningful classroom engagement.

The findings confirm that game-based learning approaches can effectively address common challenges in EFL speaking instruction by reducing students' performance anxiety and enhancing their motivation to participate. Guessing Games offer meaningful contexts for authentic language practice and promote highly interactive learning experiences. The interconnectedness of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement observed in this study suggests that a holistic approach to fostering student engagement is particularly beneficial in language learning environments. In terms of practical application, English teachers are encouraged to integrate Guessing Games into their speaking lessons to strengthen student participation and improve learning outcomes. Future research should examine the long-term impact of such game-based activities on speaking proficiency and explore effective implementation strategies across diverse educational settings and proficiency levels.

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