Journal of Education and Teaching Learning (JETL)
Volume 7, Issue 2, May 2025
Journal Homepage:
http://pusdikra-publishing.com/index.php/jetl

Examining the Relationship Between Learning Motivation in Gamified English Learning and English Competence among Primary School Students

Eva Saptarina[1], Miftahulfadlik Dabamona[2], Lilik Yulianingsih[3]
[1] *Universitas Islam Ogan Komering Ilir Kayuagung, Indonesia*
[2] *Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sorong, Indonesia*
[3] *Politeknik Pelayaran Sorong, Indonesia*
Corresponding Author : Eevaavanda14@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO
Article history:
Received
09 April 2025
Revised
16 April 2025
Accepted
21 April 2025

ABSTRACT

Gamified learning is widely recognized as an engaging instructional approach that can enhance students' motivation by incorporating elements of play, challenge, and reward. While motivation plays a crucial role in the learning process, it is important to examine whether it truly correlates with language competence, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. This study aimed to examine the relationship between students' learning motivation in gamified English learning and their English competence. The participants were 30 fifth-grade students (aged 10–12) from a private primary school in Indonesia, selected through total sampling. A quantitative correlational method was used, employing a motivation questionnaire based on Keller's ARCS model (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction), and English achievement tests. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation analysis. The results revealed a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .996$, $p < .01$) between learning motivation and English competence. These findings suggest that maintaining high levels of student motivation through gamified learning strategies can significantly support academic success in language learning. This study contributes to the growing evidence that motivation is not only an emotional factor but a critical predictor of academic achievement.

Key Word *Learning Motivation, Gamified English Learning, English Competence, Primary Students*

How to cite https://pusdikra-publishing.com/index.php/jetl

Doi 10.51178/jetl.v7i2.2412

INTRODUCTION

English has become a global language and is widely used in various fields such as education, technology, international communication, and business. As part of preparing young learners to face globalization, the Indonesian national curriculum includes English as an essential subject, even from the early years of formal education (Puad & Ashton, 2023; Setiawan & Suwandi, 2022). At the

primary school level, English is often taught as a local content subject (muatan lokal), yet its significance cannot be overstated. English competence at this stage lays the foundation for future academic success and global competitiveness. However, in many cases, young learners perceive English as difficult or boring, especially when the instructional approach relies heavily on traditional methods such as rote memorization and textbook-based exercises (Gliouine & Zaidoune, 2024; Najih et al., 2025). This has led to a growing concern about students' low engagement and motivation in learning English.

In response to this issue, educational practitioners have explored innovative strategies to make English learning more enjoyable and effective (Dewi et al., 2023). One such strategy is the use of gamification, which refers to the application of game elements and principles in non-game contexts, particularly in education (Nuraini et al., 2021). Gamified learning does not mean turning the classroom into a video game, but rather using game mechanics such as points, rewards, leaderboards, and challenges to create a more engaging and interactive learning environment (Güzel & Yılmaz, 2025).

Despite the wide adoption of gamification in language classrooms, its direct correlation with measurable language competence among young learners remains underexplored. Most existing studies focus on gamification's impact on motivation and engagement, but few provide empirical data linking motivation in gamified contexts with actual learning outcomes such as students' language competence particularly in EFL primary school settings. This is a critical area of inquiry, given that motivation alone is not always a sufficient indicator of achievement.

In recent years, gamification has gained attention as a motivational tool capable of improving students' participation, enthusiasm, and learning outcomes (Barca & Tripaldi, 2024; Chans & Portuguez Castro, 2021; Lestari et al., 2024; Raju et al., 2021). In primary schools, where students are naturally curious, active, and responsive to play-based activities, gamified learning has the potential to foster a more enjoyable and meaningful learning experience (Johnstone, 2022; Qayyum et al., 2024).

Motivation is a key factor in language learning success, particularly for young learners who are still developing foundational literacy and cognitive skills (Akhmetova et al., 2021; Deci et al., 2009; Dewi & Wilany, 2023). According to Keller's ARCS model (Keller, 2008) motivation can be understood through four components: Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. These components collectively influence how learners perceive and respond to educational experiences. In gamified environments, attention is captured through interactive elements, relevance is achieved when students see the value

of activities, confidence grows as learners experience progress, and satisfaction is fostered through feedback and rewards (Alrashedi et al., 2024; Alsadoon et al., 2022; Hellín et al., 2023; Oliveira et al., 2022). When these motivational factors are present, students are more likely to engage actively in language learning tasks and persist through challenges.

Numerous studies have supported the role of gamification in increasing motivation (Alotaibi, 2024; Barca & Tripaldi, 2024; Bhuana, 2023; Ningsih, 2023; Winatha & Setiawan, 2020). For example, Barca & Tripaldi (2024) found that the integration of gamification in English language classes significantly improved learners' motivation and academic performance. Similarly, Bhuana (2023) observed that when students were motivated by game-based elements, their commitment to learning tasks increased. Plass et al. (2015) explore important educational and psychological theories most relevant to game-based learning, discussing the cognitive, motivational, emotional, and sociocultural underpinnings of these design features. However, while many studies have explored the effects of gamification on motivation and engagement, fewer have examined its correlation with actual language competence, especially among young EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in primary schools. There is a need for empirical research that not only investigates students' motivation in gamified settings but also measures its relationship to concrete learning outcomes, such as language proficiency.

English competence in this context refers to a student's ability to understand and use English appropriately, especially in the areas of vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension (Armea et al., 2022; Stevani et al., 2022). At the primary school level, this competence is essential as it supports students in developing their communication skills, critical thinking, and academic performance in later years (Aini et al., 2022; Qobilovna, 2023). English competence is typically assessed through classroom-based evaluations or standardized tests that measure students' language understanding and usage (Gustanti & Ayu, 2021; Lewkowicz & Leung, 2021). However, these competence scores can also be influenced by students' affective factors, including their level of motivation, confidence, and interest in the subject (Dewi & Wilany, 2022).

This research is grounded in the hypothesis that students with higher learning motivation in gamified English classes are likely to have higher English competence. The rationale behind this assumption is supported by both theoretical and empirical evidence. According to Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (Deci et al., 2009), intrinsic motivation when learners are driven by internal satisfaction and interest is positively correlated with improved performance and deeper learning. In the context of gamified

learning, students often experience a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which enhances their intrinsic motivation (Lestari et al., 2024). Consequently, this increased motivation is expected to contribute positively to their English learning outcomes.

From the practical perspective, understanding the relationship between motivation and English competence can help educators design more effective and engaging language learning experiences. If a strong correlation is found, it can serve as a basis for schools, especially private institutions that often have greater flexibility in curriculum implementation, to adopt gamified learning more systematically. Private schools are frequently at the forefront of educational innovation, making them ideal environments for the implementation and study of gamification in language learning. Moreover, teachers can use findings from this study to adjust their instructional strategies, focusing not only on content delivery but also on motivational support to improve students' overall language proficiency.

This study is also important within the broader context of Indonesian education, where national assessments and international benchmarks highlight the need for improved English competence among students. Despite the presence of English in the curriculum, many students still struggle to achieve basic proficiency levels (Boy Jon et al., 2021; Erlina et al., 2024; Widagsa & Khusnia, 2023). This gap suggests that traditional methods alone may not be sufficient and that new approaches, such as gamified learning, should be explored. The combination of fun, interaction, and motivation offered by gamification aligns with the learning needs and characteristics of young learners, who thrive in playful and emotionally engaging environments.

Based on the above background, this research aims to examine the correlation between students' learning motivation in the context of gamified English learning and their English competence. It seeks to answer the question: Is there a significant relationship between learning motivation, as measured by the ARCS model, and students' English competence scores? The results of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study will enrich the literature on motivational psychology, gamified learning, and EFL education. Practically, it will offer insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and school administrators on how to design learning experiences that are not only engaging but also effective in improving students' English skills.

In conclusion, motivation plays a crucial role in shaping how students engage with learning tasks, especially in language education where persistence, confidence, and interest are essential. Gamified learning has emerged as a

promising approach to foster such motivation, yet its actual impact on students' English competence in real classroom contexts, particularly in Indonesian private primary schools, has not been widely studied. This research addresses this gap by exploring the relationship between motivational factors specifically in gamified English lessons and measurable language competence among fifth-grade students.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs a quantitative correlational research design. As noted by Creswell (2014) correlational research is used to identify relationships between two or more variables without manipulating the study environment. This design is appropriate for determining whether a statistically significant relationship exists between students' motivation levels and their English competence in a gamified learning environment. A quantitative approach was deemed most suitable because the research aims to test a specific hypothesis and measure the strength and direction of the relationship between two measurable variables motivation and language competence using statistical analysis. Unlike qualitative approaches that explore in-depth perceptions or experiences, this study focuses on objective measurement and generalizability of findings. A mixed-method approach was considered but not selected, as the primary goal was not to understand the learning process or students' individual experiences, but to produce quantifiable evidence of correlation between two constructs in a specific context. The population of this study consists of fifth-grade students aged 10 to 12 years old in a private primary school. A total of 30 students were selected as the sample using a total sampling technique, meaning all students in the population who met the inclusion criteria were involved in the study. The inclusion criteria included: (1) students who had attended the gamified English learning sessions regularly during the data collection period (minimum 90% attendance), (2) students who were actively enrolled in the fifth grade at the time of the study. This technique ensures a complete representation of the targeted group and reduces sampling bias(Creswell, 2015).

The data in this study were collected using two main instruments: a Learning Motivation Questionnaire and an English Competence Test. The motivation questionnaire was adapted from Keller's ARCS model, which includes four components: Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. The instrument consists of 14 statements representing these four components, measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This questionnaire is designed to assess students'

motivational responses to gamified learning experiences in English class. To measure students' English competence, a teacher-constructed English test was used. This test covers basic language skills aligned with the national curriculum for fifth-grade students, focusing on vocabulary, reading comprehension, and simple grammar. Both instruments were tested for validity and reliability with 31 students outside the research sample. The learning motivation questionnaire showed strong validity, with item-total correlation coefficients ranging from 0.41 to 0.78, and high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.87). The English competence test also demonstrated acceptable validity, with item discrimination indices above 0.30, and a reliability coefficient of 0.82. indicating consistency and accuracy in measuring students' language proficiency. Test items were also reviewed by English teachers to ensure content validity and appropriateness for the students' proficiency level.

To examine the relationship between the two variables, the data were analyzed using the Pearson product-moment correlation technique. Before conducting the correlation analysis, the data were tested for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which is commonly used for small sample sizes. The normality assumption was checked to ensure the validity of the Pearson correlation test, as this test requires the data to be approximately normally distributed. Following the normality test, the Pearson correlation analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26. To test the research hypothesis, the results of the Pearson correlation analysis are compared against a significance level (α) of 0.05. If the p-value obtained from the correlation analysis is less than 0.05, it indicates a statistically significant relationship between students' learning motivation and their English competence, and thus the hypothesis is accepted. Conversely, if the p-value is greater than 0.05, it suggests that the correlation is not statistically significant, and the hypothesis is rejected.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to examine the correlation between students' learning motivation in gamified English classes and their English competence. Data were obtained from a sample of 30 fifth-grade students from a private primary school, using a motivation questionnaire based on Keller's ARCS model (score range: 14–70) and an English competence test (score range: 0–100). Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize the distribution of scores. The results are shown in table 1.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of Learning Motivation and English Competence

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Motivation	30	33.00	68.00	50.57	10.71
English	30	57.00	95.00	77.07	11.41

For the learning motivation variable, the minimum score was 33.00, and the maximum score was 68.00, with a mean of 50.57 and a standard deviation of 10.71. This indicates that students, on average, had a moderately high level of motivation in learning English through gamified activities. For the English competence variable, the minimum score was 57.00, and the maximum score was 95.00, with a mean of 77.07 and a standard deviation of 11.41. These results suggest that the overall English achievement level of the students was also moderately high, showing good command of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and grammar appropriate for their grade level. Next, hypothesis testing is conducted through Pearson correlation, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Correlation between Learning Motivation and English Achievement

		Motivation	English
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.996**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	30	30
English	Pearson Correlation	.996**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	30	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.996 between students' learning motivation and their English competence, with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$). This means there is a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables. In other words, students who are more motivated in a gamified English learning environment tend to perform better in English. Based on this result, the research hypothesis is accepted, indicating that learning motivation is positively and significantly related to students' English competence.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that there is a significant positive relationship between learning motivation and English competence in the

context of gamified English learning at the primary school level. Students who are more motivated to learn English through games and interactive challenges tend to show better performance in language-related tasks. Gamification taps into intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. It offers students a sense of autonomy, immediate feedback, achievable goals, and social recognition factors that, according to Deci et al. (2009) are crucial in fostering intrinsic motivation. When these elements are present, learners are more likely to engage with the material, repeat activities, and apply what they have learned, resulting in better performance. Furthermore, the developmental stage of primary school students, who are generally curious, energetic, and responsive to interactive stimuli, aligns well with the gamified learning model. Their cognitive and emotional readiness for play and exploration makes gamification particularly effective in this age group.

These results are in line with previous research. (Bhuana, 2023) found that the use of game elements in English learning increased both student motivation and academic performance. Similarly, research by Lestari et al. (2024) supported the idea that gamification enhances user engagement and learning outcomes. However, in contrast to Lestari et al. (2024) who focused on junior high school students, this study emphasizes primary school students. This distinction is important because younger students, particularly in primary school, are in a critical developmental phase where motivation and engagement are particularly responsive to interactive, game-based learning environments.s

The findings also resonate with Keller's ARCS model, which emphasizes that learners are more successful when they are attentive, find relevance in content, feel confident, and experience satisfaction. The positive correlation found in this study further supports the theory that motivated learners are more likely to achieve better academic outcomes, especially in language acquisition settings.

The strong correlation ($r = 0.996$) indicates that learning motivation plays a vital role in determining English competence. This suggests that motivation is not merely an emotional or psychological aspect of learning, but also a key predictor of academic success. Motivated learners, especially those experiencing intrinsic motivation, are more likely to engage deeply with learning tasks, persist longer, and demonstrate better academic outcomes (Dewi & Wilany, 2022). In gamified learning settings, the use of reward systems, point-based achievements, and playful interaction aligns with the core components of motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These elements stimulate cognitive engagement, which is crucial in promoting meaningful (Wang & Tahir, 2020).

Additionally, Keller's ARCS model emphasizes that increasing learners' attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction can directly enhance motivation, which in turn improves learning outcomes. In gamified environments, students often receive immediate feedback, set personal goals, and experience a sense of accomplishment all of which support the ARCS principles. Furthermore, constructivist learning theory supports the idea that learning is most effective when it is active and socially engaging (Zhang, 2023). Gamified learning provides these conditions by encouraging collaboration, interaction, and contextualized problem-solving, which reinforce language development and achievement.

Thus, motivation, particularly when nurtured through gamified techniques, goes beyond emotional involvement; it drives active participation, strategic learning behaviors, and ultimately, academic achievement, especially in language learning contexts. Active participation and strategic learning behaviors are essential drivers of academic achievement, particularly in language learning, where consistent engagement and practice are critical. Active participation refers to students' direct involvement in learning activities speaking, listening, reading, writing, and interacting with content and peers. Language acquisition is deeply rooted in social interaction; students learn best when they actively engage in meaningful communication within their zone of proximal development (Maflah Alharbi, 2023). Through active participation, learners internalize new vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pragmatic language use in authentic contexts.

On the other hand, strategic learning behaviors such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, and the use of mnemonic devices or language-learning apps enable students to become self-regulated learners. Students who use learning strategies deliberately are more likely to succeed academically because they plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning process (Dewi et al., 2025). In language learning, strategic behaviors like repeating, summarizing, using flashcards, or seeking feedback help consolidate knowledge and transfer it into long-term memory(Nuraini et al., 2021).

Moreover, constructivist theories emphasize that learners construct knowledge through active discovery and reflection (Gunduz & Hursen, 2015). In gamified or interactive environments, students are more likely to take initiative and engage with learning materials in deeper, more strategic ways, experimenting with language use, revising errors, and adjusting strategies to meet learning goals (Hellín et al., 2023). This not only enhances language competence but also boosts academic performance, as students become more autonomous and confident in applying their knowledge in both assessments

and real-life situations. This finding is particularly relevant in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, where maintaining student motivation is often a challenge due to the inherent difficulties of learning a new language. Gamified learning environments help sustain motivation by providing a supportive and enjoyable space for practice, which, in turn, contributes to improved academic outcomes in English language learning.

The results of this study have both pedagogical and practical implications. The strong positive correlation between students' learning motivation in gamified English learning and their English competence suggests that maintaining high levels of motivation is a crucial factor in supporting academic achievement, particularly in language learning. For teachers, this finding emphasizes the importance of creating a classroom environment where gamified strategies are used not merely for entertainment, but as tools to foster sustained motivation. Gamified learning that incorporates elements such as progress tracking, point systems, and friendly competition can create an engaging atmosphere that keeps students interested and willing to put effort into learning English (Alrashedi et al., 2024).

However, it is essential to ensure that the games used in instruction are balanced in difficulty. If a game is too difficult, it may cause frustration or anxiety; if it is too easy, it may not sufficiently stimulate learning or maintain interest. Therefore, selecting games that are appropriately challenging and aligned with language goals is vital. Suitable examples include vocabulary-building games like word matching, story-based games that encourage creativity and sentence construction, and speaking games such as role-playing or dialogue simulations. These game types do not only support motivation but also create meaningful opportunities to practice language use.

Moreover, collaborative games are particularly beneficial as they promote social interaction and peer learning; important elements in both motivation and language development . Still, educators must be cautious with certain digital games that may lead to addictive behaviors, isolation, or exposure to non-educational content, such as violent fighting games. These do not support the goal of enhancing language competence and can undermine the motivational and educational purpose of gamified learning. Games chosen for classroom use should encourage interaction, reflection, and real-world language use rather than isolate students in passive or solitary activities.

For curriculum developers and school administrators, especially within private schools that may have greater flexibility in curriculum design, the findings suggest that gamified learning can be strategically used to cultivate motivation, which in turn supports improved academic outcomes in English. In

essence, this study reinforces the idea that student motivation, particularly when nurtured through thoughtfully designed gamified learning, plays a significant role in language achievement.

Despite the promising results, there are several limitations to this study that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample size of 30 students is relatively small, and the study was conducted in only one private school, which may limit the generalizability of the results. The inclusion of a larger, more diverse sample across different schools and regions would provide a more robust understanding of the relationship between gamified learning and English competence. Moreover, the study did not assess the long-term effects of gamified learning on students' language competence, which could be an important aspect for future research. It would be beneficial to investigate whether the motivation and competence observed in the short term are sustained over time. Another limitation involves the potential bias in self-reported motivation levels. Students may have provided overly optimistic responses regarding their motivation, as motivation is subjective and can be influenced by personal perceptions and social desirability bias. Future studies could mitigate this by incorporating multiple data sources, such as teacher observations or performance-based assessments, to provide a more comprehensive view of students' engagement and learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between students' learning motivation in gamified English learning and their English competence among fifth-grade students in a private primary school. The findings revealed a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables, indicating that students who exhibited higher levels of motivation in gamified English learning environments also demonstrated higher English achievement. This highlights the crucial role of learning motivation, particularly when fostered through gamified instructional strategies, in supporting academic outcomes in language education. One of the key contributions of this study lies in its focus on the integration of gamified learning within the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom at the primary school level an area that remains relatively underexplored. By adapting Keller's ARCS model (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) as the foundation for the motivation questionnaire, this research provides a validated and theoretically grounded framework for understanding how motivational elements function in young learners. The results contribute to the broader conversation about how student-centered, engaging approaches can influence not only learners'

emotional responses to language learning but also their measurable academic performance. In terms of methodological contribution, the use of a correlational approach allowed the study to identify a meaningful association between motivational factors and academic competence without requiring experimental manipulation, making it practical for classroom-based educational research. The findings offer pedagogical guidance for teachers and curriculum developers seeking to implement motivational strategies in their lesson planning, particularly through the thoughtful use of educational games that promote collaboration, contextual learning, and consistent engagement. However, this study is not without its limitations. The sample was limited to a single private primary school, which may not fully represent the broader diversity of educational settings, particularly public schools or schools in different regions. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported measures of motivation, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies in young learners' perceptions. Future research should consider including longitudinal designs, qualitative interviews, and multiple sources of data, including teacher observations and academic records, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how motivation and academic performance interact over time.

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