

**ENHANCING DEEP LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
THROUGH GAMIFICATION STUDY OF GRADE VIII-B STUDENTS****Daniel Setiawan Zamasi¹, Yaredi Waruwu², Riswan Zega³, Trisman Harefa⁴**Universitas Nias^{1,2,3,4}e-mail: sianying185@gmail.com¹, Yarediwaruwu@unias.ac.id²,riswanzegadilfoz@gmail.com³, trismanharefa@unias.ac.id⁴

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ABSTRAK

Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris di kelas VIII-B SMP Negeri 1 Gido pada kondisi awal memperlihatkan keterlibatan siswa yang masih terbatas dan capaian belajar yang belum memenuhi kriteria ketuntasan yang ditetapkan. Kondisi tersebut menjadi dasar penerapan gamifikasi melalui *Kahoot* untuk meningkatkan pembelajaran mendalam (*deep learning*) dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan *Classroom Action Research* yang dilaksanakan melalui tahap *pre-cycle* dan dua siklus, dengan setiap siklus mencakup perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas 30 siswa kelas VIII-B, sedangkan data diperoleh melalui observasi kelas, tes hasil belajar, dan dokumentasi selama proses tindakan. Kegiatan pembelajaran memadukan *Kahoot* dengan diskusi kontekstual, tugas kolaboratif, dukungan kosakata, dan aktivitas reflektif pada topik “No Littering”. Perkembangan pembelajaran tercermin dari kenaikan nilai rata-rata kelas dari 64,73 pada *pre-cycle* menjadi 73,90 pada Siklus 1 dan 82,23 pada Siklus 2, disertai peningkatan persentase ketuntasan dari 36,67% menjadi 63,33% dan 96,67%. Proses pembelajaran juga memperlihatkan keterlibatan siswa yang semakin aktif dalam menganalisis persoalan, berkolaborasi, berkomunikasi, dan menghasilkan gagasan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa gamifikasi melalui *Kahoot* dapat mendukung *deep learning* ketika dipadukan dengan aktivitas pembelajaran yang kontekstual, kolaboratif, dan disesuaikan secara bertahap dengan kebutuhan siswa.

Kata Kunci: *Gamifikasi, Pembelajaran Mendalam, Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris, Studi Kualitatif*

ABSTRACT

English learning in Grade VIII-B at SMP Negeri 1 Gido initially showed limited student engagement and learning achievement that had not yet met the established mastery criteria. This condition became the basis for implementing gamification through *Kahoot* to improve *deep learning* in English instruction. The study employed *Classroom Action Research* conducted through a *pre-cycle* and two cycles, with each cycle consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The participants were 30 students of Grade VIII-B, while data were collected through classroom observation, learning outcome tests, and documentation during the intervention process. The learning activities integrated *Kahoot* with contextual discussions, collaborative tasks, vocabulary support, and reflective activities on the “No Littering” topic. Learning development was reflected in an increase in the class mean score from 64.73 in the *pre-cycle* to 73.90 in Cycle 1 and 82.23 in Cycle 2, accompanied by an increase in the mastery percentage from 36.67% to 63.33% and 96.67%. The learning process also revealed increasingly active student engagement in analyzing problems, collaborating, communicating, and generating ideas. These findings affirm that gamification through *Kahoot* can support *deep*

learning when integrated with contextual and collaborative learning activities and progressively adjusted to students' needs.

Keywords: *Gamification, Deep Learning, English Language Teaching, Qualitative Study*

INTRODUCTION

English learning at the junior secondary level increasingly requires learning experiences that move beyond vocabulary recall and routine exercises toward interpretation, communication, and meaningful application (Fatoni et al., 2025). The expansion of digital technology provides opportunities to redesign such experiences by making instructional materials more interactive while retaining clear linguistic and pedagogical purposes. Digital learning media can support English instruction when technological features are connected to activities that encourage students to participate, respond, and construct understanding rather than merely consume content (Hermansyah, 2026). Consequently, the value of technology in English classrooms lies not simply in introducing digital platforms, but in how those platforms reshape students' involvement in the learning process.

The challenge becomes more complex in *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) classrooms, where students may have limited opportunities to use English actively and meaningfully. Classroom participation can be constrained by limited confidence, restricted exposure to communicative practice, and differences in access to learning resources, particularly in educational settings where technological and instructional support is uneven (Dewi et al., 2025; Falah et al., 2025). Such conditions can lead learning activities to remain centered on answering routine questions or memorizing linguistic forms, leaving fewer opportunities for students to interpret information, exchange ideas, solve problems, and communicate their understanding. An instructional approach is therefore needed that can increase participation while simultaneously creating cognitive and social conditions for students to engage more deeply with English.

Gamification offers one possible way of restructuring this classroom experience because game elements can alter how students encounter tasks, feedback, challenge, and participation. Its pedagogical contribution does not rest solely on rewards or competition; points, challenges, immediate responses, and progression can be organized to create more active forms of learner involvement (Rosaline et al., 2023; Srimuliyani, 2023). In English learning, gamified activities have also been associated with increased motivation and participation, particularly when game mechanics are integrated with learning objectives rather than treated as an additional activity separated from instruction (Putri et al., 2026). The instructional question, therefore, is not whether students enjoy a game, but whether the game structure can be designed to make English learning more participatory, purposeful, and cognitively demanding.

This consideration connects gamification with the emerging orientation toward *deep learning*, in which students are expected to develop understanding through active engagement, reflection, collaboration, and application. In English education, pedagogical practices associated with *deep learning* encourage students to engage with language through meaningful contexts rather than treating linguistic knowledge as isolated material to be memorized (Fatoni et al., 2025). Teachers and students may nevertheless encounter challenges when translating the principles of *deep learning* into concrete classroom activities, particularly when students are accustomed to more teacher-centered and answer-oriented learning routines (Mere, 2025). Recent evidence on gamification further suggests that game-based structures can be designed to support vocabulary retention and deeper engagement when progressive challenges, feedback,

and learning tasks are deliberately aligned with cognitive learning processes (Marzuki et al., 2025).

Within EFL classrooms, this alignment requires careful attention because gamification can produce active participation without automatically producing deeper understanding. A classroom may become more energetic when students compete for points or leaderboard positions, yet such activity has limited pedagogical value if students remain focused only on speed and correct answers. Research involving gamification-assisted flipped learning in an Indonesian secondary-school EFL context demonstrates that gamified activities can accompany improvements in learning performance while also creating opportunities for students to engage more actively with reading tasks (Yoshania et al., 2023). The present study extends this line of inquiry by positioning *Kahoot* not merely as a digital quiz platform, but as one component of a broader instructional design in which competition, feedback, discussion, and contextual English tasks are connected to the development of deeper learning.

The need for such an approach is particularly relevant to the classroom context examined in this study, namely Grade VIII-B at SMP Negeri 1 Gido. Initial classroom conditions identified before the intervention indicated limited student participation and difficulties in engaging with English tasks that required interpretation, communication, collaboration, and creative responses. Rather than treating these conditions as evidence of a general characteristic of rural schools, the study uses them as the specific pedagogical context from which the intervention was developed. This contextual orientation is consistent with the view that digital literacy and English learning should be connected to students' actual learning environments, experiences, and contexts rather than introduced as technology-driven activities detached from classroom realities (Zuhra et al., 2024).

Although existing studies have established that gamification can support motivation, engagement, English learning, and selected dimensions of *deep learning*, a more specific pedagogical issue remains insufficiently articulated: how *Kahoot*-based gamification can be deliberately organized to move students from passive and surface-level participation toward deeper engagement with English within an actual junior secondary classroom. The present study addresses this gap through a *Classroom Action Research* design conducted in two cycles, allowing the instructional design to be implemented, reflected upon, and refined in response to classroom conditions. Its novelty lies in three interconnected dimensions: the pedagogical integration of *Kahoot* features with cognitive, collaborative, communicative, and contextual English activities; the iterative refinement of the gamification strategy across action cycles; and the examination of this process within a real Grade VIII EFL classroom on the topic *No Littering*. Accordingly, this study aims to examine how *Kahoot*-based gamification can be implemented to support *deep learning* among Grade VIII-B students at SMP Negeri 1 Gido through an iterative classroom-based instructional process.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed *Classroom Action Research* (CAR) involving 30 students of Grade VIII-B at SMP Negeri 1 Gido and was conducted in May. The research consisted of two cycles, with each cycle following four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. During the planning stage, the researcher prepared lesson plans, learning materials, observation instruments, and gamified learning activities using *Kahoot* for the *No Littering* topic, and the research instruments were validated by experts before their implementation. The action stage involved an introductory video, collaborative discussion, individual and group tasks, and interactive quizzes, while the second cycle incorporated vocabulary support, extended response

time, group analysis, and campaign presentations as improvements derived from the reflection of Cycle 1.

Data were collected through achievement tests and classroom observation. The achievement assessment consisted of a pre-test administered before the intervention and post-tests conducted at the end of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, while observation sheets and field notes were used to document students' participation throughout the learning activities. The observation focused on observable learning behaviors related to active participation, *Critical Thinking*, *Collaboration*, *Communication*, and *Creativity*. At the end of each cycle, the researcher reviewed the classroom observations and learning outcomes to identify aspects requiring improvement, and the resulting reflection was used to refine the activities implemented in the subsequent cycle.

The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the total score, mean score, number of students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criterion, and passing percentage. The Minimum Mastery Criterion for English was 75, and the research success criterion was established at 80% of students achieving the required mastery level. Observation data were organized according to documented classroom participation and the four targeted learning dimensions, namely *Critical Thinking*, *Collaboration*, *Communication*, and *Creativity*. The research was concluded when the achievement data reached the predetermined success criterion, while the progression of learning outcomes and classroom participation was presented in the Results section through comparative tables and a graphical representation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Initial Classroom Condition

The pre-cycle phase was conducted to document the initial learning condition of Grade VIII-B before the gamification strategy was implemented. The participants consisted of 30 students, and the Minimum Mastery Criterion (Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal/KKM) for English at SMP Negeri 1 Gido was set at 75. A non-participant observation was conducted alongside the initial assessment to record students' participation and the prevailing classroom learning pattern. The observed conditions across instructional pattern, student engagement, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Communication, and Creativity are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Initial Classroom Conditions Before the Intervention

Observed Aspect	Initial Classroom Condition
Instructional pattern	Classroom activities were predominantly teacher-directed, with explanations and note-taking occupying most of the lesson.
Student engagement	Several students showed limited involvement during instruction, including resting their heads on desks, doodling, and talking quietly with peers.
Critical Thinking	Students experienced difficulty when responding to questions requiring analysis or interpretation beyond explicit information.
Collaboration	Structured peer interaction and group problem-solving activities were limited.
Communication	Students tended to remain silent and were reluctant to express ideas in English.
Creativity	Learning tasks were largely repetitive and provided limited opportunities for students to express individual ideas in English.

The observations summarized in Table 1 indicate that student participation was limited particularly in activities requiring analysis, peer interaction, oral expression, and individual idea development. Classroom interaction was mainly concentrated between the teacher and

individual students rather than among peers. These observations established the qualitative baseline for examining changes in classroom participation during the subsequent research cycles.

The pre-cycle assessment provided the initial quantitative reference for student learning achievement. A pre-test was administered to all 30 students using the established mastery criterion, and the resulting scores were compared with the assessments conducted after Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. The comparison of learning outcomes across the three research phases is presented in Table 2.

Quantitative Learning Outcomes Across Research Phases

Cycle 1 was conducted through two meetings using *Kahoot* as part of the English learning activities on the topic *No Littering*. The instructional sequence consisted of an introductory video, collaborative discussion, vocabulary and grammar activities, and a 20-question *Kahoot* challenge. During this phase, classroom observation recorded active responses during the interactive activities, particularly when students participated in the digital quiz and followed the leaderboard.

Cycle 2 was implemented following reflection on Cycle 1 and incorporated several adjustments to the learning activities. These included a vocabulary bank, extended response time during the *Kahoot* activity, group analysis of plastic waste in the school environment, and an expanded reward system recognizing individual progress. Students also participated in group presentations concerning solutions for a *No Littering* campaign in the classroom. The learning outcomes from the pre-cycle, Cycle 1, and Cycle 2 are consolidated in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of Students' English Learning Outcomes Across Research Phases

Research Phase	Mean Score	Students Passing	Students Not Passing	Passing Percentage
Pre-Cycle	64.73	11	19	36.67%
Cycle 1	73.90	19	11	63.33%
Cycle 2	82.23	29	1	96.67%

The comparison presented in Table 2 indicates a continuous increase in learning achievement across the three research phases. The mean score increased from 64.73 in the pre-cycle to 73.90 in Cycle 1 and 82.23 in Cycle 2, while the number of students reaching the KKM increased from 11 to 19 and then to 29. The corresponding passing percentage rose from 36.67% to 63.33% and finally to 96.67%. Cycle 1 remained below the predetermined 80% mastery criterion, whereas Cycle 2 exceeded the criterion.

The quantitative progression was accompanied by changes in classroom participation. During Cycle 1, students participated more actively in discussions and interactive quiz activities, although differences in participation remained visible. During Cycle 2, participation became more consistent across individual and group activities, including analytical discussion and presentation tasks. Because these observations describe classroom behaviors rather than numerical scores, the development of the four targeted learning dimensions is presented separately as qualitative evidence in Table 3.

Development of Classroom Participation Based on the 4Cs

The qualitative observations were organized according to the four learning dimensions targeted in the intervention: *Critical Thinking*, *Collaboration*, *Communication*, and *Creativity*. These dimensions were assessed through visible student behaviors during classroom activities

and were not assigned numerical scores. The observed development of classroom participation across the three research phases is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Development of Classroom Participation Based on the 4Cs

Dimension	Pre-Cycle	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Critical Thinking	Students mainly responded to literal questions and had difficulty analyzing information or expressing opinions.	Students began discussing environmental problems and responding to questions related to the learning topic.	Students engaged in cause-and-effect questions and analyzed environmental problems before presenting solutions.
Collaboration	Peer interaction was limited and structured group activities were not routinely conducted.	Students participated in collaborative discussions and group brainstorming activities.	Students participated in group analysis, exchanged ideas, and worked jointly on campaign solutions.
Communication	Students were generally reluctant to speak English and tended to remain silent during classroom interaction.	Students became more active in responding during interactive activities and group discussions.	Students participated in group presentations and communicated ideas related to the <i>No Littering</i> campaign in English.
Creativity	Tasks were predominantly repetitive and provided limited opportunities for individual expression.	Students generated ideas related to environmental problems and possible solutions.	Students developed and presented campaign solutions related to reducing litter in the classroom.

The qualitative patterns presented in Table 3 reveal a gradual broadening of student participation across the research phases. The pre-cycle observations were characterized by limited involvement in analytical, collaborative, communicative, and creative activities. During Cycle 1, these behaviors became more visible through discussion, brainstorming, and interactive learning tasks, while Cycle 2 extended participation into environmental analysis, group work, oral presentation, and the development of campaign ideas.

Importantly, the findings in Table 3 represent qualitative observations of classroom behavior rather than quantitative measurements of the 4Cs. The table therefore does not indicate numerical gains in *Critical Thinking*, *Collaboration*, *Communication*, or *Creativity*. Instead, it documents changes in the form, visibility, and consistency of student participation during the implementation of the intervention.

The quantitative and qualitative findings were considered together to describe the overall progression recorded during the research. The quantitative component is represented by the class score at each assessment stage, while the qualitative component is reflected in the participation patterns described in Table 3. The total-score progression across the three research phases is presented visually in Figure 1.

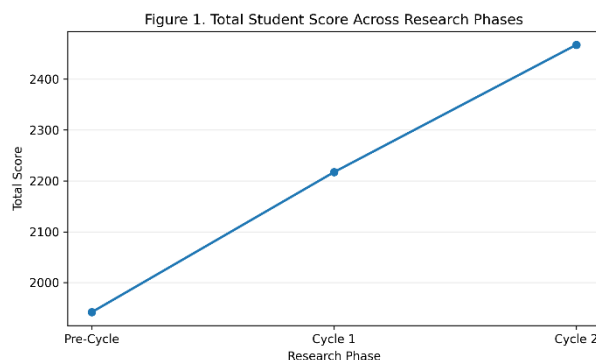


Figure 1. Total Student Score Across Research Phases

The progression depicted in Figure 1 shows an upward movement in the total student score from the pre-cycle assessment through Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, with the highest total score recorded in the final research phase. This visual pattern corresponds with the quantitative comparison presented in Table 2, while the qualitative changes in student participation are documented separately in Table 3. Together, the table and figure provide complementary representations of the quantitative development in class achievement.

Overall, the results document changes in both learning achievement and classroom participation during the research. Quantitatively, class achievement increased across the three assessment stages, with the final assessment reaching 96.67% mastery and exceeding the predetermined 80% criterion. Qualitatively, classroom observations recorded increasingly varied participation across the four targeted dimensions, particularly through analysis, collaboration, communication, and creative production. These findings provide the empirical basis for interpreting how the gamification strategy and its subsequent refinement were implemented across the research cycles.

Discussion

The changes across the research cycles suggest that the intervention altered the way students participated in English learning. At the beginning of the study, classroom activities were largely characterized by teacher explanation and limited student involvement, whereas the introduction of gamification created more opportunities for students to respond, interact, and remain attentive to the learning tasks. Kau et al. (2025) describe gamification in English learning as an approach that can create more engaging learning experiences while supporting students' competencies. A similar direction was identified by Srimuliyani (2023), who found that gamification could encourage greater classroom involvement when game elements were incorporated into instructional activities. The present findings extend this perspective by showing that the change in participation was accompanied by a gradual restructuring of classroom interaction, in which students were given a more active role in responding to and working with the learning content.

The contribution of *Kahoot* in this process was closely related to the way its features were incorporated into the lesson rather than to its digital format alone. Points, time limits, immediate feedback, and the leaderboard provided students with continuous information about their performance, while the questions remained connected to vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and the *No Littering* topic. Sundari and Prasetya (2024) found that *Kahoot*-based *game-based learning* could increase participation in English learning, and Mustafa (2022) reported its relevance to motivation and learning outcomes in junior secondary English

learning. Lashari et al. (2024) further identified relationships between *Kahoot*, motivation, engagement, enjoyment, and learning outcomes. These studies help explain the increased participation found in the present study, but the classroom evidence also indicates that the platform became more meaningful when competitive activities were followed by discussion and contextualized learning tasks. The educational contribution of *Kahoot*, therefore, was shaped by the instructional context in which the game elements were used.

The motivational response of the students provides another dimension for understanding the changes that occurred during the intervention. The opportunity to answer questions, observe progress, and compete with classmates created a learning environment in which participation had an immediate and visible purpose. Mahbubi (2025) found that gamification can contribute to a more attractive and interactive learning environment that supports students' motivation. This motivational dimension is also consistent with Al-Khresheh (2025), whose systematic review identifies cognitive and motivational benefits as important aspects of gamification in English language learning. In the present study, motivation was closely intertwined with participation because students' willingness to respond increased when the learning activity provided challenge and immediate recognition. The classroom atmosphere consequently became more active without separating enjoyment from the academic purpose of the lesson.

The development from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 demonstrates that the effectiveness of gamification depended on continuous adjustment to the difficulties encountered by students. The first implementation revealed that rapid response requirements could shift attention toward speed, while limited vocabulary and differences in digital readiness could make participation more difficult for some learners. The subsequent addition of vocabulary support, extended response time, group analysis, and a revised reward mechanism changed the conditions under which students interacted with the same general gamified approach. Pratama and Mulbar (2026) emphasize the importance of appropriate implementation when considering the relationship between gamification and learning outcomes, while Khafidh et al. (2025) highlights adaptive gamification as an approach that can accommodate differences in learning needs and classroom conditions. The stronger outcome in the second cycle can therefore be understood as the product of instructional refinement, rather than as an automatic consequence of using *Kahoot* for a second time.

The cognitive demands placed on students also became more substantial as the intervention progressed. Instead of relying primarily on rapid recognition, the activities in the second cycle provided greater space for students to examine environmental situations, consider relationships between causes and consequences, and formulate responses through discussion. Fitriana and Indriyani (2024) reported the potential of gamification combined with problem-based learning to support critical thinking, particularly through activities requiring students to examine problems and develop solutions. Astuti et al. (2026) similarly connected gamification with a deep-learning approach and students' critical-thinking development. The present study adds a classroom-based perspective to these findings by illustrating that deeper cognitive engagement emerged when competitive activities were supported by contextual problems, additional preparation, and opportunities to explain ideas. The shift was therefore not from non-gamified learning to gaming alone, but from rapid response toward more deliberate use of English for understanding and reasoning.

The collaborative activities further indicate that learning development occurred through interaction rather than individual competition alone. Students discussed possible answers, supported classmates who experienced difficulties with vocabulary, and worked collectively to formulate ideas for a *No Littering* campaign. These activities allowed English to function as a

medium for exchanging ideas while simultaneously requiring students to cooperate and produce something meaningful. Khafidh et al. (2025) identifies *game-based learning* and adaptive gamification as approaches that can support contemporary learning competencies, while the findings of Astuti et al. (2026) underline the relevance of gamification to higher-level cognitive development. The present study complements these perspectives by bringing together *Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Communication, and Creativity* within a sequence of classroom activities rather than treating them as separate outcomes. The resulting learning experience suggests that the 4Cs became more visible when students were required not only to select answers but also to discuss, justify, and apply their understanding.

Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that gamification was effective because it was progressively shaped around students' learning needs. The competitive structure of *Kahoot* created an initial stimulus for participation, while discussion, scaffolding, contextual tasks, and reflection determined whether that stimulus could develop into meaningful learning activity. This interpretation is consistent with the broader findings reported by Kau et al. (2025), Sundari and Prasetya (2024), Mustafa (2022), Mahbubi (2025), Srimuliyani (2023), and Lashari et al. (2024), while the cognitive and adaptive dimensions are supported by Al-Khresheh (2025), Pratama and Mulbar (2026), Fitriana and Indriyani (2024), Khafidh et al. (2025), and Astuti et al. (2026). Rather than treating gamification as a universal instructional solution, the present study indicates that its contribution depends on the relationship between game mechanics, instructional content, student readiness, and opportunities for reflection. This perspective gives meaning to the progression across the cycles: the improvement was associated not simply with introducing a digital game, but with continuously modifying the learning environment so that competition, interaction, cognitive challenge, and support could work together within English instruction.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of *Kahoot*-based gamification supported a shift toward more active and meaningful English learning among Grade VIII-B students at SMP Negeri 1 Gido. Its contribution was reflected not only in improved mastery of the *No Littering* material, but also in the greater involvement of students in analyzing questions, exchanging ideas, working with peers, and expressing their understanding through English. The learning process became more responsive to students' needs as the intervention was refined through reflection, particularly by combining gamified activities with vocabulary support, contextual analysis, collaborative tasks, and opportunities for reflection. Thus, the value of gamification in this study lies in how its interactive elements were integrated into purposeful instruction to support students' movement from limited participation toward deeper engagement and the targeted 4Cs.

In practice, teachers can consider gamification as part of a broader instructional design rather than using digital games as stand-alone activities. The approach can be strengthened by adjusting the level of challenge, providing appropriate scaffolding, allowing sufficient time for students to process questions, and connecting competitive activities with discussion and contextual tasks. Such an arrangement may make gamified learning more adaptable to differences in students' proficiency, participation, and digital readiness while keeping the learning objectives central to the lesson. Future studies may extend this approach to other English topics, learner groups, and longer periods of implementation to examine whether the learning benefits can be sustained and further developed across different instructional contexts.

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