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Online ESL Games as Interactive Media for Teaching English to Kindergarten Prospective Teachers

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Shohebul Hajad[a]
[1]Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Al Mujtama Pamekasan, Indonesia.
Corresponding author: shohib_628@yahoo.com

A B S T R A C T

English learning motivation remains a challenge among prospective Early Childhood Education (PAUD) teachers due to limited classroom interaction, low self-confidence, and the use of conventional teaching methods. Integrating technology-based learning media, such as online ESL (English as a Second Language) games, has the potential to create more engaging and motivating learning experiences. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of online ESL games as interactive media for enhancing the English learning motivation of prospectivePAUD teachers. A quantitative approach employing a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design was adopted. The participants were 30 female undergraduate students enrolled in the Early Childhood Education Department at STAI Al Mujtama Pamekasan. Data were collected using a learning motivation questionnaire and classroom observations before and after the implementation of online ESL games. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' learning motivation, with the mean score increasing from 65.47 (SD = 5.68) in the pre-test to 82.27 (SD = 2.71) in the post-test. A paired-samples t-test confirmed that the difference was statistically significant, $t(29) = 16.85$, $p < .001$. Classroom observations further indicated that students demonstrated higher participation, greater confidence, stronger collaboration, and more active engagement during English learning activities. The implementation of online ESL games also created a more interactive and enjoyable classroom environment while reducing students' anxiety in learning English. These findings suggest that online ESL games are effective interactive media for improving English learning motivation and provide practical implications for integrating technology-enhanced language learning into teacher education programs, particularly in preparing prospective PAUD teachers to implement innovative English instruction in early childhood classrooms.

Keywords: *Online ESL Games, English Learning Motivation, Interactive Media, Game-Based Learning, Prospectivepaud Teachers*

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INTRODUCTION

English is recognized as one of the most important international languages used in communication, education, technology, and global interaction. In the twenty-first century, English proficiency has become an essential competency for teachers, including prospective Early Childhood Education (Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini/PAUD) teachers, as they are expected to prepare young learners for an increasingly interconnected and technology-driven world. In Indonesia, English has gradually been introduced from early educational levels to develop children's language awareness and communication skills. Teachers with adequate English proficiency are better equipped to utilize international teaching resources, integrate English songs, stories, games, and digital media into classroom activities, and create meaningful learning experiences for young children (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 2011). Therefore, English competence is no longer considered an additional skill but an important professional competency for prospective PAUD teachers who will facilitate children's early exposure to foreign languages and foster global perspectives from an early age.

Despite its importance, learning English among university students, particularly prospective early childhood education teachers, remains challenging. Many students perceive

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English as a difficult subject due to limited vocabulary mastery, low confidence in speaking, inadequate exposure to authentic language use, and teacher-centered instructional practices. These challenges often reduce students' willingness to communicate and participate actively during classroom activities. Learning motivation is widely recognized as one of the strongest predictors of successful second language acquisition because motivated learners tend to demonstrate greater persistence, higher engagement, and better academic achievement (Dörnyei, 2001). However, many Indonesian university students still experience low learning motivation because English instruction often relies on conventional teaching methods that provide limited opportunities for meaningful interaction and authentic communication. Consequently, English lecturers need to employ innovative instructional strategies that encourage students' active participation and increase their motivation to learn (Fitria, 2022; Neman, 2023).

The rapid development of educational technology has transformed traditional teaching practices into more interactive, collaborative, and student-centered learning experiences. Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to integrate digital technologies into teaching and learning processes to accommodate the characteristics of today's students, who are highly familiar with digital devices, mobile applications, and online learning environments. As digital natives, university students generally respond more positively to technology-enhanced learning activities that are interactive and enjoyable. Therefore, integrating technology into English language instruction is becoming increasingly relevant to improve learning quality and student engagement (Lever-Duffy & McDonald, 2015; Stanley, 2013).

One of the emerging approaches in English language teaching is the use of online ESL (English as a Second Language) games as interactive learning media. Online ESL games are digital learning platforms specifically designed to facilitate language acquisition through enjoyable, collaborative, and meaningful activities. According to Prensky (2001), digital game-based learning combines entertainment with instructional objectives to create engaging educational experiences. Likewise, Kapp (2012) explains that gamification enhances learner motivation by incorporating game elements such as points, badges, rewards, challenges, and immediate feedback into learning activities. These elements encourage learners to participate actively while reducing anxiety commonly experienced during language learning.

In English language learning, online ESL games provide authentic opportunities for learners to practice vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, listening, and communication skills in less stressful learning environments. Brown (2007) argues that interactive language learning activities encourage students to become active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Similarly, Wright et al. (2006) state that games create enjoyable classroom atmospheres that reduce learners' anxiety and facilitate language acquisition through repeated exposure and meaningful interaction. Furthermore, online games allow learners to receive immediate feedback, collaborate with peers, and repeatedly practice language skills, thereby improving both learning motivation and language competence.

Recent studies have consistently demonstrated the positive impact of gamification and digital learning on English language education. A systematic review by Saputra et al. (2021) reported that game-based English learning effectively improves students' participation, vocabulary acquisition, and classroom interaction. Likewise, Fitria (2022) concluded that gamification positively influences students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement in English learning. More recently, Susaniari & Santosa (2024) found that game-based learning creates enjoyable learning environments that significantly increase EFL students' motivation. Siregar & Degeng (2025) further reported that gamification promotes active learning and enhances English learning experiences among prospectiveteachers. In addition, Izhar et al. (2024) emphasized that technology-supported learning experiences are essential in teacher education because they prepare prospective teachers to integrate digital instructional media into their future classrooms.

Although numerous studies have investigated gamification and online ESL games, research focusing specifically on prospective PAUD teachers remains limited. Most previous

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studies have concentrated on elementary school students, secondary school learners, or general university students, while relatively little attention has been given to prospectiveearly childhood education teachers. This population requires not only English language competence but also pedagogical knowledge and technological skills to design age-appropriate learning experiences for young children. As future educators, prospective PAUD teachers should be capable of selecting and implementing innovative digital media that support children's language development while maintaining enjoyable and meaningful classroom interactions.

Moreover, preparing prospective teachers to integrate technology into language instruction has become increasingly important in the era of digital education. University students who experience technology-supported learning during their teacher preparation programs are more likely to implement innovative teaching practices in their future classrooms (Levy, 1997; Stanley, 2013). Therefore, introducing online ESL games during teacher education not only enhances students' English learning motivation but also familiarizes them with technology-based instructional strategies that can later be adapted to early childhood education settings.

Despite growing evidence regarding the effectiveness of gamification in language learning, limited research has simultaneously examined its influence on English learning motivation and its contribution to preparing prospective PAUD teachers to integrate technology into future teaching practices. Addressing this research gap is important because future teachers are expected to possess both language competence and digital pedagogical skills that align with the demands of twenty-first-century education.

Therefore, this study offers a novel contribution by investigating the implementation of online ESL games specifically among prospective PAUD teachers in an Indonesian higher education context. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on school students or general university learners, this study explores how online ESL games can simultaneously enhance English learning motivation and prepare future early childhood educators to adopt technology-integrated instructional practices. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of online ESL games as interactive media in improving English learning motivation among prospective PAUD teachers. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for English lecturers, teacher education institutions, and future researchers in developing innovative and effective technology-enhanced English learning for prospective early childhood educators.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design to investigate the effectiveness of online ESL games as interactive media in teaching English to prospective Early Childhood Education (PAUD) teachers (Creswell, 2012). The research design is illustrated as follows:

$O_1 \rightarrow X \rightarrow O_2$

Where:

O_1 = *Pre-test*

X = *Treatment using online ESL games*

O_2 = *Post-test*

Participants

The participants of this study were 30 female undergraduate students aged 18–21 years enrolled in the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) Department at STAI Al Mujtama Pamekasan. All participants were taking the compulsory English course during the 2025/2026 academic year and had not previously experienced learning English through online ESL games in a formal classroom setting. A purposive sampling technique was employed because the participants met the criteria relevant to the objectives of the study, namely prospective PAUD teachers enrolled in the English course (Creswell, 2012). This group was selected because prospective early childhood teachers require not only English proficiency but also the ability to integrate innovative digital learning media into their future teaching practices.

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Research Instruments

The primary instrument was a learning motivation questionnaire adapted from Dörnyei (2001) motivational theory. The questionnaire measured five aspects of students' motivation, namely interest, confidence, participation, enjoyment, and enthusiasm toward learning English through online ESL games. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Classroom observation was employed as a supporting instrument to document students' participation, interaction, confidence, collaboration, and engagement during the implementation of the online ESL games. The observation findings were used to complement the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire.

Treatment Procedure

The treatment was conducted over six classroom meetings during a six-week period, with each meeting lasting approximately 90 minutes. Before the intervention, all participants completed a pre-test questionnaire to measure their initial motivation toward learning English. During the intervention, English learning activities were integrated using online games available on the Games to Learn English platform. This web-based platform provides a variety of interactive ESL games specifically designed to improve learners' English vocabulary, grammar, spelling, listening, pronunciation, and basic communication skills through enjoyable learning activities and immediate feedback. The platform was selected because it offers free, interactive, and classroom-friendly learning resources suitable for university students and prospective teachers.

Several games available on the platform were selected according to the learning objectives of each meeting, including Vocabulary Games, Grammar Games, Spelling Games, Memory Games, and Question and Answer Games. The learning materials focused on basic English topics relevant to prospective PAUD teachers, such as greetings, classroom expressions, colors, numbers, family members, animals, daily activities, and simple vocabulary commonly introduced in early childhood classrooms.

Each learning session consisted of four instructional stages. First, the lecturer introduced the learning objectives and explained the target vocabulary or language expressions. Second, students individually or collaboratively completed the selected online ESL games using laptops or smartphones while interacting with classmates to solve language tasks and achieve the highest scores. Third, the lecturer facilitated classroom discussions by reviewing the answers, correcting common mistakes, providing explanations, and giving immediate feedback on students' performance. Finally, students completed reflection and reinforcement activities to consolidate their understanding of the lesson and evaluate their learning progress.

Throughout the implementation, classroom observations were conducted to monitor students' participation, engagement, collaboration, confidence, and overall learning behavior during the game-based learning activities. After completing the six treatment sessions, the participants completed the post-test questionnaire using the same instrument administered before the intervention. According to Prensky (2001), digital game-based learning increases learner motivation by combining educational objectives with interactive and enjoyable learning experiences.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean scores and standard deviations of students' learning motivation before and after the treatment. Inferential analysis was conducted using a paired-samples *t*-test to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level. Classroom observation data were analyzed descriptively to support the quantitative findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' engagement during the implementation of online ESL games.

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Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was voluntary. Before data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the research, and their consent was obtained. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout the study, and all collected data were used solely for academic and research purposes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation of online ESL games as interactive media for teaching English to PAUD prospective teachers and to examine their influence on students' learning motivation and classroom engagement. The findings were obtained from motivation questionnaires and classroom observations conducted before and after the implementation of online ESL games during English learning activities.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of online ESL games as interactive media for improving the English learning motivation of prospective Early Childhood Education (PAUD) teachers. The findings were obtained from a learning motivation questionnaire administered before and after the implementation of the online ESL games, supported by classroom observations conducted throughout the intervention.

Students' Learning Motivation Before and After the Implementation of Online ESL Games

The descriptive statistics of students' learning motivation before and after the implementation of the online ESL games are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Learning Motivation

Test	N	Mean	SD
Pre-test	30	65.47	5.68
Post-test	30	82.27	2.71

Table 1 shows a substantial improvement in students' English learning motivation following the implementation of the online ESL games. The mean score increased from 65.47 (SD = 5.68) before the intervention to 82.27 (SD = 2.71) after the intervention, indicating an average improvement of 16.80 points. In addition, the lower standard deviation in the post-test suggests that students demonstrated more consistent levels of learning motivation after participating in the game-based learning activities.

To determine whether the improvement was statistically significant, a paired-samples t-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Paired-Samples t-Test Results

Comparison	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test – Post-test	16.80	16.85	29	< .001

As shown in Table 2, the paired-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, $t(29) = 16.85$, $p < .001$. This finding indicates that the implementation of online ESL games significantly improved the English learning motivation of prospective PAUD teachers.

Classroom Observation Findings

Classroom observations supported the quantitative findings. Before the implementation of the online ESL games, students generally showed low participation during English learning activities. Most students were reluctant to answer questions, lacked confidence in speaking English, and depended heavily on the lecturer's explanations. Classroom interaction was relatively passive, and only a few students actively participated in discussions.

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Following the implementation of the online ESL games through the Games to Learn English platform, students demonstrated noticeable improvements in classroom participation and engagement. They became more enthusiastic about learning activities, participated actively in discussions, and showed greater confidence in answering questions and completing English tasks. Students also collaborated effectively with their peers while completing vocabulary, grammar, and spelling games.

The observations further indicated improvements in students' vocabulary recognition, pronunciation, and classroom interaction. The immediate feedback provided by the online games enabled students to identify and correct their mistakes independently, while the enjoyable learning atmosphere encouraged them to participate more confidently throughout the learning process. Overall, the classroom observations consistently confirmed that online ESL games created a more interactive, engaging, and student-centered English learning environment.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of online ESL games effectively enhanced the English learning motivation of prospective PAUD teachers. The significant increase in the mean score from 65.47 in the pre-test to 82.27 in the post-test, supported by the paired-samples *t*-test result ($t(29) = 16.85$, $p < .001$), demonstrates that game-based learning positively influenced students' motivation and classroom engagement. In addition, classroom observations showed that students became more confident, enthusiastic, and actively involved in English learning activities after the implementation of the online ESL games.

The improvement in students' motivation can be explained through Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci & Ryan (2000). According to this theory, learners become more intrinsically motivated when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. During the implementation of the online ESL games, students were encouraged to complete language tasks independently, receive immediate feedback, and collaborate with classmates. These learning experiences enhanced students' confidence and created a sense of achievement, thereby increasing their motivation to learn English.

The findings are also consistent with the principles of Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through active participation and social interaction. Instead of relying solely on lecturer explanations, students actively explored vocabulary, solved language problems, discussed answers with peers, and learned through meaningful experiences provided by the online games. This interactive learning process encouraged students to become active participants and improved both their understanding of English and their classroom engagement.

Furthermore, the positive impact of the online ESL games supports Gamification Theory (Kapp, 2012), which argues that incorporating game elements such as challenges, competition, rewards, and immediate feedback into learning activities increases students' engagement and persistence. The Games to Learn English platform provided these game elements through vocabulary games, grammar exercises, spelling activities, and interactive quizzes. These features created an enjoyable learning atmosphere that reduced students' anxiety and encouraged them to participate more actively during English learning sessions. This finding is also consistent with Prensky (2001), who states that digital game-based learning successfully combines educational objectives with enjoyable learning experiences.

The findings of this study are in line with previous research. Saputra et al. (2021) reported that game-based English learning improves classroom participation and vocabulary mastery among language learners. Similarly, Fitria (2022) found that gamification significantly increases students' learning motivation and engagement in English classrooms. More recently, Susaniari & Santosa (2024) concluded that game-based learning creates enjoyable learning environments that positively influence students' motivation and participation. Likewise, Siregar & Degeng (2025) emphasized that gamification helps prospectiveteachers develop positive attitudes toward technology-enhanced language learning. The consistency between

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the present study and previous findings strengthens the evidence that online ESL games are effective instructional media for English language learning.

An important contribution of this study is its focus on prospective PAUD teachers. While most previous studies examined school students or general university learners, this study specifically investigated future early childhood educators. The findings suggest that online ESL games not only improve English learning motivation but also introduce prospective teachers to innovative digital learning media that can be adapted to early childhood classrooms. Through this experience, prospective teachers gain practical knowledge of integrating technology into English instruction, which is increasingly important in twenty-first-century education.

Despite the positive findings, several challenges were identified during the implementation. A few students experienced unstable internet connections, while others required additional guidance when using the online platform for the first time. Nevertheless, these challenges did not substantially affect the overall effectiveness of the learning activities. Lecturers should therefore prepare adequate technological facilities and classroom management strategies to maximize the benefits of online game-based learning.

Overall, this study demonstrates that online ESL games are effective interactive media for enhancing English learning motivation among prospective PAUD teachers. The integration of digital game-based learning creates a more engaging, collaborative, and student-centered learning environment while simultaneously preparing future teachers to implement innovative technology-based instructional practices in early childhood education.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that online ESL games are effective interactive learning media for enhancing the English learning motivation of prospective Early Childhood Education (PAUD) teachers. The improvement in motivation indicates that game-based learning creates an engaging, student-centered, and technology-supported environment while encouraging participation, collaboration, and confidence in using English. These findings highlight the importance of integrating digital learning experiences into teacher education to strengthen prospective teachers' English skills and digital pedagogical competence. Practically, English lecturers are encouraged to incorporate online ESL games into classroom instruction to increase motivation and engagement. Teacher education institutions should also consider technology-based media to prepare prospective teachers to develop innovative English learning activities for young learners. However, this study involved only 30 prospective PAUD teachers from one institution and employed a pre-experimental design. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, use experimental or quasi-experimental designs with control groups, and examine other learning outcomes, including vocabulary acquisition, speaking proficiency, communication skills, and long-term retention.

DECLARATION

Author Contributions: The author was responsible for all stages of the research in accordance with the relevant research competencies and responsibilities. The contributions included conceptualization, research design, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript preparation. The author also undertook the writing, reviewing, and editing of the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

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Ethical Approval: This study was conducted in accordance with the applicable research ethics guidelines and institutional ethical requirements of STAI Al Mujtama Pamekasan. The

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research procedures followed the ethical standards established by the institution for studies involving human participants.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of the study. Participation was voluntary, and the participants were informed about the research objectives and procedures. Their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

Use of Generative AI: Generative AI tools were used to assist in narrating and refining the research report, particularly in improving English language expression, sentence construction, grammar, and clarity. The author reviewed and revised the AI-assisted suggestions and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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