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REDUCING GENDER DISPARITIES IN EFL CLASSROOMS THROUGH GAMIFIED LEARNING: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY USING BAAMBOOZLE IN INDONESIAN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Bouchra Eddraoui[1], Didi Sukyadi[2], Ahmad Bukhori Muslim[3], Bachrudin Musthafa[4]
[1,2,3,4]*Department of English Education, Faculty of Language and Literature, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia*

Corresponding author's email: Bouchra.Eddraoui@upi.edu

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Abstract: Gender disparities often affect participation rates in language classrooms, with male pupils dominating discussions and activities. Therefore, effective educational practices to increase female students' engagement in English-speaking classrooms are pertinent. This action research investigates the potential of Baamboozle, a digital-based game, to address gender disparities at an elementary school in Bandung, Indonesia. Over a 12-week period, Baamboozle was incorporated into English speaking lessons across Grade 4-6, involving approximately 170 students. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the intervention, while a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with seven female students from a Grade 4 class provided in-depth insights into their experiences. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, resulting in the identification of two major themes. Interpreted through Sociocultural and Feminist Theories, findings revealed that the interactive and collaborative nature of the game significantly improved female students' cooperation, verbal communication skills, and classroom engagement. This study highlights that integrating digital games like Baamboozle not only enhances English language learning but also serves as a powerful pedagogical approach for fostering gender equity within the classroom.
Keywords: *Action research; Baamboozle; digital game-based learning; EFL speaking; gender disparities*; *Indonesian female participation*

INTRODUCTION

Gender disparities in language classes significantly impact students' engagement and learning outcomes. Research revealed that male students frequently dominate classroom activities and discussions, take more talking turns, and receive more teachers' attention, which leads to a learning environment where female students are less confident and passive (Wang, Patterson, & Long, 2024). More recent studies indicated that gender influences learners' participation and engagement in EFL classrooms, which affects classroom interaction, confidence, oral participation, and responsiveness to instructional practices (Almusharraf, Aljasser, Dalbani, & AlSheikh, 2023; Wang, Patterson, & Long, 2024; Tewachew, & Abebe, 2024; Li & Wei, 2023; Granger & Gerlach, 2023). These differences are often more noticeable in Southeast Asian and Islamic cultures, where values like hierarchy and group harmony are emphasized (Akther, 2023). Recent studies on Asian and Southeast Asian learning contexts show that values such as group harmony, respect for authority, and face-saving, cultural norms, interpersonal relationships, and historically situated expectations about appropriate classroom conduct may contribute to classroom silence, hesitation, and reluctance to express ideas publicly (Pham et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2024; Le, 2024). From a sociocultural perspective, these patterns are not merely associated with individual's deficits such as low proficiency or shyness. Rather, they are socially mediated behaviours (Vygotsky, 1978).

Gender disparities in language classrooms in Indonesia mirror broader societal norms and standards that impact educational dynamics. With its traditional values and gender roles, Indonesian society commonly regards male students as more vocal and assertive in academic settings. In contrast, female students may encounter cultural constraints, affecting their involvement (Waluyo, 2024). This pattern is consistent with findings from other parts of Asia, where the cultural value of "saving face" makes students hesitant to speak out due to fear of making mistakes in front of others (Pham et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2024; Le, 2024).

In Indonesian elementary EFL classrooms, speaking participation is vital because young learners need repeated opportunities to practice oral English in supportive and low-anxiety environments. However, female students may be less willing to initiate responses due to shyness, fear of mistakes peer judgment, and sociocultural expectations about modesty and classroom behaviour. These issues are not only psychological but also interactional. From the perspective of Feminist Pedagogy, classroom participation reflects power relations because some voices become more visible and valued than others (Hooks, 1994). From the perspective of Sociocultural Theory, language learning develops through interaction, scaffolding, and participation in social activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, limited female participation may reduce both classroom equity and opportunities for language development.

To address limited participation in EFL speaking classrooms, researchers have increasingly explored gamification and digital game-based learning (DGBL). Gamification refers to the use of game design elements in non-game learning contexts to increase engagement, motivation, and interaction (Chan & Lo., 2024). In language learning, gamified activities can provide repetition, immediate feedback, peer collaboration, competition, and a less threatening atmosphere for oral practice. Recent studies and reviews indicate that gamification can improve students' motivation, enjoyment, engagement, and language learning outcomes, although its effectiveness depends on learner characteristics, task design, and classroom implementation (Chen & Law, 2024; Sailer & Homner, 2023; Zhou, 2024). Therefore, gamified learning should not be viewed merely as entertainment, but as a pedagogical strategy that can support interaction when it is carefully planned and mediated by the teacher.

Research on gamification in EFL contexts has developed along three interconnected trajectories relevant to gender disparities. *First*, studies on digital game-based learning (DGBL) in EFL have consistently demonstrated positive effects on motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and speaking confidence. Aeni, Nur, Limbong, and Yunus (2024) found that Baamboozle promoted EFL student engagement in Indonesian higher education. However, the study did not disaggregate findings by gender, leaving questions about differential effects unanswered. *Second*, research specifically examining gender and gamification has produced mixed findings. Chung and Chang (2017) found that gender influenced motivation and achievement in digital game-based learning, though the direction of effects varied by game type. On the other hand, Almusharraf et al. (2023) reported gender differences in utilizing game-based approaches within EFL online classrooms.

Although recent research demonstrated that gamification and digital game-based learning can support EFL learners' motivation, engagement, enjoyment, and language learning outcomes, their effects vary across contexts, platforms, and learner characteristics (Chan & Lo, 2024; Li et Wei., 2023; Sailer & Homner, 2020; Zhou, 2024). In EFL contexts, several game-based platforms are utilised, for instance Kahoot!, Quizizz, Wordwall, Quizlet, and Baamboozle. These games provide immediate feedback, competition, collaboration, and repeated language practice. However, learners' willingness to participate is further shaped by anxiety, confidence, classroom emotions and gendered engagement patterns (Almusharraf et al., 2023; Alrabai, 2024; Lee & Chiu, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Table 1 below summarizes the most relevant studies by context, platform, outcome, and relevance to the present study.

Table 1. *DGBL and gender studies*

Author(s)	Context	Platform / Gamified Approach	Main Outcome	Relevance to the Present Study
Aeni et al. (2024)	Indonesian EFL higher education	Baamboozle	Improved student engagement in EFL learning activities.	Directly supports Baamboozle use, but does not examine elementary learners or gender disparities.
Toda et al. (2018)	Educational gamification	Review of negative gamification effects	Poorly designed gamification may produce negative effects such as excessive competition or reduced motivation.	Supports the critical argument that Baamboozle requires teacher mediation and structured participation.
Chen & Law (2024)	Gamified language learning across proficiency levels	Various gamified language-learning tools	Gamification was generally effective, but outcomes varied across learner groups and learning conditions.	Shows that gamification effects are context-dependent.
Almusharraf et al. (2023)	EFL online classrooms	Game-based learning approach	Reported gender-related differences in students' use of game-based learning.	Supports the claim that gender may influence responses to gamified learning.
Abu Qub'a et al. (2024)	University English language learning	Gamification	Gamification was associated with improvement in English language skills.	Provides recent evidence that gamification can support English language learning, though in a university rather than elementary context.
Chan & Lo (2024)	EFL/ESL instruction	Review of gamification studies.	Gamification was found to support engagement, motivation, and language learning, but outcomes depended on design and context.	Supports the State-of-the-art argument that gamification is useful but context-sensitive.
Li et al. (2023)	General educational settings	Gamification meta-analysis	Gamification supported teaching and learning, but effects varied across contexts and implementation designs.	Provides meta-analytic support for cautious claims about gamification effectiveness.
Jaramillo-Mediavilla et al. (2024)	Educational settings	Gamification systematic review	Gamification affected motivation and academic performance, but outcomes varied across studies.	Supports the need to avoid assuming that gamification automatically works in every classroom.
Sailer & Homner (2020)	Educational gamification	Meta-analysis	Gamification showed positive effects on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral outcomes, but effects varied by design features.	Supports the claim that gamification can support learning, while also requiring careful implementation.
Hanus & Fox (2025)	Higher education classroom	Gamified course design	Gamification did not necessarily improve motivation or performance and was associated with reduced intrinsic motivation in some conditions	Provides counter-evidence showing that gamification is not automatically effective or equitable.
Krath et al. (2021)	Gamification serious games, and game-based learning research	Systematic review	Gamification research is theoretically diverse, and outcomes depend on the design and theoretical basis of the intervention.	Supports the need to frame Baamboozle pedagogically rather than treating it as a neutral tool.

Zhou (2024)	Chinese EFL learners	Digital game-based learning	DGBL supported EFL learners' enjoyment, motivation, and positive language-learning experience.	Relevant to the affective rationale for using game-based learning in EFL speaking activities.
Tao and Zou (2023)	EFL classroom learning	Kahoot!	Students perceived Kahoot! as useful for EFL learning and classroom engagement.	Offers platform-based evidence from EFL gamification, useful for comparison with Baamboozle.
Kamal Hossain & Abdullah Al Younus (2024)	Bangladeshi tertiary EFL/grammar classroom	Kahoot!	Kahoot! Increased motivation for learning English grammar.	Shows that interactive game platforms can support motivation, though not specifically speaking or gender equity.
Wei (2025)	Foreign language learning	Enjoyment, anxiety, teacher variables, and online class environment	Enjoyment and anxiety were influenced by teacher and classroom-environment variables.	Supports the affective interpretation of Baamboozle as a potentially enjoyable and less threatening speaking environment.
Gunawan (2025)	Indonesian EFL speaking classroom	Game-based learning	Game-based learning was associated with students' speaking skill development.	Highly relevant to Indonesian EFL speaking, although it does not focus specifically on gender disparities or Baamboozle.
Panmei and Waluyo (2023)	Higher education English vocabulary learning	Gamification	Gamification supported vocabulary learning and engagement in English learning.	Supports gamification in English learning, but the context differs from elementary EFL speaking.
Mrissa and Anasse (2024)	EFL learning	Computer-based gamification	Computer-based gamification supported EFL learning engagement and outcomes.	Provides additional evidence that digital gamification can support EFL learning.
Chung and Chang (2017)	Digital game-based classroom	Digital game-based learning	Gender influenced motivation and achievement, although the effect varied by game type.	Important for showing that gender effects in DGBL are complex and context-dependent.
Sakkir et al. (2023)	EFL vocabulary learning	Wordwall	Wordwall supported EFL students' vocabulary mastery.	Shows the use of digital games in EFL learning, but does not address gendered participation.

Table 1 shows that previous studies have examined gamification and DGBL across several EFL contexts, including Indonesian higher education, elementary classrooms, and online EFL learning. The findings indicated that digital-game based learning can support EFL motivation, engagement, vocabulary building, and speaking confidence. Studies on Baamboozle, Kahoot!, Quizizz, Wordwall, and broader DGBL approaches have reported positive learning, engagement, and motivation in EFL contexts (Aeni et al., 2024; Chan & Lo, 2024; Tao & Zou, 2023; Zhou, 2024). Likewise, recent studies on game-based and computer-based gamification suggest that these approaches may may support English learning motivation and speaking development (Gunawan, 2025; Mrissa & Anasse, 2024). However, these findings are context-dependent. Meta-analytic and review studies suggest that gamification effectiveness varies depending on learner characteristics, proficiency level, game elements, instructional design, and classroom implementation (Bai et al., 2020; Jaramillo-Mediavilla et al., 2024; Chen & law, 2024; Li et al., 2023; Sailer & Homner, 2023). Counter-evidence also indicates that gamification may not always improve motivation or performance when lacking alignment with learning goals (Hanus & Fox, 2015; Toda et al., 2018). Similarly, gender-focused EFL studies show that anxiety, enjoyment, and willingness to communicate interact with gender in complex ways, meaning that gamification may increase general engagement without necessary reducing gender disparities (Alrabai, 2024; Li & Wei, 2023). In addition, studies showed that male and

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female students may respond differently to digital game-based learning and classroom interaction patterns (Almusharraf et al., 2023, Mamnoun & Nfissi, 2023). However, a few studies have examined whether these tools narrow gender disparities in actual speaking participation. This gap is evident in Indonesian elementary EFL classrooms, where female students' participation is shaped by cultural norms, speaking anxiety, and classroom turn-taking patterns. This study responds to that gap by focusing on Indonesian female students' participation, confidence, and engagement during Baamboozle-supported speaking activities.

Methodologically, previous research has several limitations. Many studies on gamified EFL learning rely on surveys, pre-test and post test designs, or general engagement measures, which do not fully capture how participation changes during classroom interaction. Such studies can show whether students become more motivated or perform better, but they often do not explain whether female learners receive more speaking turns, speaking more voluntarily, or become more confident across lessons. In addition, gender is frequently treated as a demographic variable rather than as the main focus of analysis. These limitations justify the use of classroom action research in this study, which allows the teacher-researcher to observe participation patterns, reflect on gendered interaction, and revise the intervention across cycles.

Chronologically, recent research has developed in three stages. The first stage Focused on the general effectiveness and theoretical foundations of gamification in education, including how game elements influence motivation and learning outcomes (Krath et al., 2023; Sailer & Homner, 2023). The second stage moved toward affective and communicative dimensions of EFL learning, especially anxiety, enjoyment, motivation, and willingness to communicate (Alrabai, 2024; Dewaele & Li, 2023; Li & Wei, 2023; Zhou, 2024). The third and more recent stage has begun to connect DGBL with gendered participation (Almusharraf et al., 2023). However, there is a shortage in studies that directly examined gender in relation to game-based EFL learning. In the Indonesian context, a study has examined gender awareness in Indonesian EFL pedagogy (Waluyo, 2024). However, it is not directly related to gamification. Thus, this emerging body of research still offers limited classroom-based evidence on how a specific platform such as Baamboozle can be used to contribute in narrowing gender disparities in elementary EFL speaking participation.

This study is grounded in the complementary integration of two theoretical perspectives:

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1978) posits that learning occurs through social interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners accomplish tasks with support that they cannot complete independently. In gamified environments, peer collaboration and teacher scaffolding within team-based game structures may provide the interactive context necessary for language development. From this perspective, Baamboozle functions as a cultural tool mediating learning through structured social interaction.

Feminist Pedagogy (Hooks, 1984, 1994) conceptualizes the classroom as a site where power relations determine whose voices are heard and valued. Female students' limited engagement is not merely an individual issue but a reflection of broader sociocultural norms affecting confidence, agency, and opportunities for self-expression. Feminist Pedagogy informs this study's focus on participation patterns as indicators of equitable classroom dynamics, rather than solely measuring learning outcomes.

The integration of these frameworks addresses a limitation in prior gamification research, which has often examined engagement without explicitly theorizing gender as a structural dimension of classroom interaction.

Despite growing evidence on gamification, EFL motivation, and DGBL, several gaps remain. First, most studies examine general engagement, achievement, or motivation rather than gendered speaking participation. Second, research on female participation in Indonesian EFL classrooms has identified cultural and pedagogical barriers, but few studies have examined practical classroom interventions to address them. Third, although Baamboozle has been used in Indonesian EFL contexts, little is known about its role in reducing gender disparities in elementary speaking classrooms. Fourth, much of the existing research on gamification has relied on survey-based designs, students' perceptions, achievement measures, reviews, or meta-analysis rather than classroom action research (Almusharraf et al., 2023; Bai et al., 2020; Chan & Lo, 2024; Li et al., 2023; Sailer & Homner, 2020; Tao & Zou, 2023; Zhou, 2024). As a result, less is known about how teachers use classroom action research to observe,

reflect on, and improve gender-responsive teaching practices across cycles.

To address these gaps, the present study examines the use of Baamboozle as a DGBL platform in an Indonesian elementary EFL classroom. Baamboozle was selected because it enables teachers to design team-based speaking tasks, provide immediate feedback, organize turn-taking, and create a playful learning atmosphere. Guided by Feminist Pedagogy and Sociocultural Theory, this study conceptualizes classroom participation as both to form voice and a process of language development. Feminist Pedagogy highlights the need to make female students' voices more visible and valued, while Sociocultural Theory explains how interaction and peer-supported activity can support language learning. Through an action research design, this study investigates how Baamboozle can be planned, implemented, observed, and revised to support minimizing gender disparities in EFL speaking participation. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1- To what extent does the use of Baamboozle influence gender disparities in participation and engagement in an Indonesian elementary EFL classroom?

RQ2- How do female students perceive the effectiveness of Baamboozle in enhancing their participation, confidence, and engagement in English-speaking activities.

This study offers three novel contributions: *First*, it is the first empirical study to explicitly examine Baamboozle's impact on gender disparities in EFL speaking classrooms. Prior Baamboozle research (e.g., Aeni et al., 2024) has focused on general engagement without disaggregating by gender. *Second*, it applies action research methodology to investigate gamification and gender equity in an Indonesian elementary context, allowing for iterative refinement of pedagogical practices based on observed participation patterns. *Third*, it integrates Sociocultural Theory and Feminist Pedagogy to analyze both the interactional mechanisms (SCT) and power dynamics (Feminist) of gamified learning, addressing a theoretical gap in gamification research that has predominantly relied on motivational frameworks (e.g., Self-Determination Theory).

This study is significant for four constituencies: *For elementary EFL teachers:* Findings provide evidence-based guidance on using team-based digital games to increase female students' speaking participation in mixed-gender classrooms, particularly in collectivist cultural contexts where female students may face participation barriers. *For curriculum developers:* Results inform decisions about integrating DGBL to address gender equity goals, suggesting that competitive-collaborative hybrid structures may be more effective than purely competitive gamification. *For researchers:* The study establishes a methodological framework for examining gender and gamification that moves beyond measuring motivation to analyzing participation patterns, turn-taking, and classroom interaction dynamics. *For Indonesian educational policy:* Findings contribute to discussions about gender-responsive pedagogy in the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) curriculum, suggesting that technology integration can serve equity objectives when deliberately structured.

METHOD

Grounded in action research, this study employed a qualitative design to investigate the use of Baamboozle game to promote fourth-grade female students' active engagement and participation in an English-speaking class. The study followed Kemmis and McTaggart's (2014) action research spiral of planning, action, observation, and reflection. In this study, the teacher served as the researcher throughout the research process to observe students' reactions to classroom activities and learning preferences

Cycle 1: Implementation. *Planning:* The teacher identified a classroom problem in the traditional learning environment where many students demonstrated reluctance to participate in oral classroom activities, low initiation, and reliance on teacher nomination, especially female students. To address this issue, the teacher planned to integrate Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) activities into English speaking lessons with the aim of encouraging students' engagement and oral participation.

Action: The teacher introduced a series of DGBL activities during classroom instruction. Various digital games and digital platforms were introduced such as Wordwall, GamestolearnEnglish.com, which offers various educational games such as Hangman, MatchingPairs, Spelling Bee, Word Search, and vocabulary and language learning activities. During the action stage, students played Baamboozle-supported speaking activities that combined team competition, peer collaboration, and student-selected question categories, with the

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teacher facilitating turn-taking and encouraging female students to take part in answering questions. The game consisted of themes such as nations, animals, energy sources, and Indonesian independence, with each encompassing a grid of up to 24 questions. The questions were hidden, and could only be revealed as the teacher clicked on the number picked by the students. The class was divided into two teams, the males and females competing against each other. Each team member could choose a number, and the entire team debated the answer privately before sharing it with the entire class. Points were awarded based on response quality.

Observation: During the implementation, students generally responded positively to the DGBL activities and actively participated in the game-based tasks. The teacher observed increased engagement, collaboration, and enthusiasm associated with playing different types of games. However, students showed a particularly strong preference for Baamboozle. They frequently requested to play Baamboozle and seemed to demonstrate higher levels of participation, excitement, teamwork and determination during these sessions. Female students, who had previously been less active in oral classroom activities, appeared to participate more frequently, interact with peers, and engage in team-based speaking tasks when playing this game.

Reflection: Following the implementation, the teacher reflected on the effectiveness of Baamboozle game in promoting student participation and conducted a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to gain deeper insights into female students' experiences. Students reported enjoying the game and highlighted feelings of enjoyment, excitement, teamwork, and motivation. Although students expressed positive attitudes toward DGBL in general, they consistently identified Baamboozle as their preferred platform. In addition, several female students expressed preference for girls-only classrooms and indicated that mixed-gender interactions sometimes negatively affected their willingness to participate. The findings suggest that Baamboozle might have created a more engaging and interactive learning environment that encouraged greater participation, especially among female students. These reflections informed the teachers' decision to continue incorporating game-based activities, especially Baamboozle, and further explore how specific game features influence students learning and behaviour, with an emphasis on considering gender dynamics.

Cycle 2: Revised Implementation. Based on the reflection from Cycle 1, the teacher revised the Baamboozle activities in Cycle 2. The revisions included clearer turn-taking, more balanced opportunities for male and female students to answer, additional peer support before speaking, and more manageable speaking prompts. The teacher also provided positive feedback and allowed students brief preparation time before giving responses, and organized activities that encouraged collaboration among female students. When female students worked together as a team, they appeared to support and encourage one another, which results in greater confidence and participation during oral activies.

During the second cycle, female students appeared more visibly involved in the speaking activities. They showed more voluntary responses, more active peer interaction, and greater willingness to speak during team-based rounds. Male students continued to participate actively, but classroom interaction appeared more balanced because speaking opportunities were more clearly distributed. The teacher's reflection after Cycle 2 suggested that Baamboozle-supported activities, when combined with structured turn-taking and teacher mediation, were associated with more inclusive participation patterns.

The action research process showed that Baamboozle was not treated as an automatically effective tool. Instead, its use was continuously adjusted through classroom reflection. The cycles helped the teacher identify how game-based learning, peer support, structured turn-taking, and positive feedback could work together to create more visible and voluntary female participation in EFL speaking activities. Because this study was qualitative and context-specific, the findings are interpreted as descriptive classroom patterns rather than causal evidence or broad generalizations.

Finally, action research was considered appropriate because the study aimed to address a classroom-based problem through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The teacher-researcher identified classroom participation problems, implemented game-based speaking activities, observed student responses, and revised the teaching strategies across cycles.

To evaluate their reactions to classroom activities and learning preferences, and as the first data-gathering method, the teacher-researcher

observed her eleven classes, including grade 4, 5, and 6, with 15-16 students in each class (N= 170) throughout the term (12 weeks) during regular English-speaking sessions held once a week. Preliminary classroom observations indicated that male students across grades participated more actively than female students during speaking activities, while female students tended to be more hesitant, less likely to initiate responses, and more dependent on teacher nomination during speaking activities. In response to these disparities, the researcher centered the classroom activities on digital-based learning games, specifically Baamboozle, as a pedagogical intervention to address students limited oral participation in EFL speaking activities.

During and after Baamboozle-supported activities were introduced, the teacher observed more visible participation across grade levels and across gender groups. Students appeared more willing to respond, interact with peers, and take part in speaking tasks during team-based game activities. However, the teacher also noted that female students' participation remained an important issue to explore more deeply because their confidence, hesitation, and willingness to speak were closely connected to the study's focus on gender disparities. Thus, seven female students from a single Grade 4 class that had consistently participated in the gamified speaking activities throughout the intervention period were purposively selected as the focus group discussion (FGD) to further investigate their perceptions and experiences regarding Baamboozle game. The participants' ages vary from 9 to 10, are native Indonesians learning English as a foreign language, and all belonged to the same cultural background.

Although, Baamboozle was introduced across Grades 4, 5, and 6 during the first term as part of teacher's effort to create a healthier, more enjoyable, and lower, anxiety English-speaking environment, the approach was implemented more consistently in Grade 4 than Grades 5 and 6. This was because Grade 4 was viewed as a preparatory stage in which students needed to build confidence, reduce speaking anxiety, overcome shyness, and develop positive attitudes toward oral participation before moving to more demanding speaking tasks. In the second term, the teacher intended to integrate role plays and basic presentation performances, while Grade 5 and 6 were already oriented more toward presentations, debates, and classroom discussions. Therefore, one Grade 4 female students were selected for the FDG because they represent the class level where game-based learning was most closely aligned with the teacher's pedagogical goal of building a healthy, fun, and supportive foundation for English-speaking practice.

The study was conducted at a primary integrated Islamic school in Bandung, Indonesia. The school integrates Islamic, Cambridge, and national curricula in an environment where English is the medium of instruction (EMI). The rationale for choosing that institution was its dedication to improving students' English, mainly spoken skills, and its accessibility to the researchers. Collecting naturally occurring data means researching people's behaviour in non-invented natural environments where observation is the primary data source. In this way, one of the researchers was a part of the natural context, which allowed a better comprehension of the participants.

The research site, the Islamic institution, does uphold religious principles. Although they shared the same classroom, the two genders, male and female, sat apart in gender-based groups. The classroom environment urged the teacher to advocate the Baamboozle game, which featured two teams, the boys' team against the girls' team.

This study employed two primary research instruments, including participants' observation and a focus group discussion (FGD) to collect comprehensive data and deep insights into the EFL speaking classroom dynamics and the use of the Baamboozle game in promoting active engagement among students. The observations enabled the teacher to detect the pupils' interactions, behaviours, and engagement levels during Baamboozle playtime. This strategy provided a thorough real-time report on the game's impact on classroom participation and collaboration. It is noteworthy to say that classroom observations helped the teacher identify the recurring patterns. However, no formal observation checklist, systematic observation field notes, or written reflection journals were used. Therefore, the study does not report observational frequencies or statistical changes in participation. Instead, it focuses on female students' participation patterns noticed by the teacher during regular teaching practice.

The focus group discussion (FGD), on the other hand, was the main data source. It examined attitudes, perceptions, feelings, and thoughts about the topic by interacting and commenting on the questions. The FGD questions encouraged students to describe how they felt during

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Baamboozle activities, whether the game format made speaking easier or more enjoyable, whether the game answering with peers affected their confidence and whether team-based interaction influenced their willingness to participate. Because the study seeks research-relevant information from the respondents, it focused on the evidence used to characterise, predict, or explain the phenomena. Participants' observations and discussion allowed deep insights, improved the findings' validity and reliability and mitigated any study biases.

The FGD was guided by the following questions: (1) How did you feel when learning English through Baamboozle? (2) Did Baamboozle make you feel more confident to speak English? Why? Or why not? (3) Did you enjoy speaking English more during Baamboozle activities compares with regular classroom activities? (4) Why do you like Baamboozle? Why? And why not? (5) Is Baamboozle about competition or Collaboration? (6) What makes you shy in the classroom?

Several factors were examined throughout the preparation stage of this study's focus-group discussion. The objectives and the participants' availability were decided ahead of time. Based on the teacher's observations in class, it was determined that male students were more active than female students. On the other hand, creating a competitive atmosphere between male and female students through Baamboozle activities increased female students' enthusiasm, involvement, and active learning. As a result, female students were purposively chosen as the focus group to study their perspectives. Nyumba et al. (2018) propose that the focus group includes six or twelve individuals to achieve synergy. Hence, seven students were recruited to participate in the focus group discussion.

The teacher-moderator started the interview by welcoming the participants and thanking them for dedicating their time to sharing their experiences. Then, briefly stated the purpose, emphasised the confidentiality regulations, and allowed the group to ask possible questions.Furthermore, to obtain reliable and efficient data, the moderator carefully selected what and how many questions to ask to avoid yes or no replies or quantitative responses.

As the process progressed, the moderator introduced the questions one by one, encouraging the participants to converse with one another rather than merely replying to the questions. Although six key questions were provided, much debate led to naturally sequenced questions. She also intervened to abort any dominance attempt of a particular participant, which allowed everyone to voice their perspectives openly. The participants' mother tongue is Indonesian, yet they are fluent in English and can express themselves in this foreign language. Thereby, the discussion was conducted in English, and lasted for 40 minutes. During the discussion, the moderator took written notes and recorded the intervention.

Data were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis. Since the FGD was the main rescored data source, the analysis focused primarily on female students' responses during the discussion. In the initial data analysis phase, the researchers transcribed the recordings, then, thoroughly and repeatedly examined the transcripts for themes and concepts related to participants' experiences and perspectives. After that, they labelled text blocks by theme to code the data. The context of words and phrases was closely examined to understand participants' ideas and emotions better. Initial codes were generated from repeated ideas is students' responses. For example, comments related to "feeling happy," "enjoying the game," "being less afraid," and "wanting to answer" were coded under motivation, confidence, and enjoyment. Responses related to "answering with friends," "discussing in teams," and "feeling helped by classmates" were coded under peer support and collaborative participation. The codes were then grouped into broader themes.

Using this theme analysis, the researchers acquired an insightful understanding of the participants' experiences, which enabled their comprehension of the research's main issues. The findings were then reported through narrative summaries supported by selected verbatim quotations to ensure clarity and preserve the participants' perspectives (Anderson., 1990). To preserve participants confidentially, students' identifying codes (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7), were used throughout the study.

Trustworthiness was addressed through four strategies, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. First, credibility was supported through the teacher-researcher's prolonged 12-weeks engagement with the classroom context across Grades 4, 5, and 6, as well as oral clarification during the FGD to check students' intended meaning. Second, transferability was strengthened by providing a clear thick description of the Indonesian elementary EFL context, participants, grade level, class size, classroom problem, and Baamboozle-

supported activities. Third, dependability was addressed by outlining the action research cycles, participant selection, FGD protocol, and thematic analysis process. Fourth, confirmability was supported through researcher reflexivity cautiously as context-specific qualitative insights rather than usual causal or generalized claims.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated how the gamified digital platform Baamboozle shaped participation and engagement in an Indonesian EFL classroom, with particular focus on female students. This section presents the findings derived from classroom observations and FGD. The researchers analyzed the data thematically, resulting in two main themes reflecting behavioural changes, classroom dynamics, and students' perceptions and responses to the Baamboozle game. These themes are discussed in alignment with Feminist and Sociocultural Theoretical perspectives.

Theme 1: Enhanced motivation, confidence, and enjoyment supporting active participation

A qualitative summary of the engagement levels, based on informal field notes, is provided below to illustrate the contrast pre and post Baamboozle's intervention.

Table 2. *Observed participation level among all students (11 classes)*

Observation Phase	Gender	Observed Participation Pattern	Descriptive Criteria	Interaction Characteristics	Notable Behaviours
Pre-intervention	Female	Low Participation	Female students rarely initiated speaking, usually responded only after teacher nomination, gave short answers, and often showed hesitation before speaking.	Limited initiation, mostly teacher-directed interaction	Shyness, silence, hesitation, minimal verbal interaction, low initiation
Post-intervention	Female	More active participation	Female students appeared more willing to volunteer, respond during team activities, interact with peers, and take initiatives in speaking tasks.	Increased voluntary participation, active peer interaction	Confident speaking, collaboration, active participation, initiative-taking, emerging leadership, enthusiasm
Pre-intervention	Male	Moderate to active participation	Male students participated more regularly, volunteered more often, and sometimes dominated classroom or group interaction. However, their participation was uneven because not all male students contributed equally, and some tended to dominate while others remained less active.	Frequent but uneven participation, with occasional dominance in interaction	verbal participation, uneven collaboration, tendency to lead
Post-intervention	Male	Sustained active participation	Male students continued to participate actively, but interaction appeared more balanced during structured team-based activities.	Sustained participation, more balanced peer interaction	Active participation, increased collaboration, healthy competition

This table presents participation patterns based on classroom observations, including students' speaking initiation, voluntariness, response length, hesitation, peer interaction, and visible engagement during EFL speaking activities. The terms (low*)*, (more active), and (sustained active) are used as descriptive categories, not statistical measures. They indicate observed classroom patterns within this action research context and are not intended to classify students' ability, personality, or long-term participation traits.

As shown in table 2, participation patterns were noted across all 11 observed classes. Female students were generally less likely to volunteer responses and more likely to wait for teacher nomination, while male students were more visibly active during classroom speaking tasks. Although exact speaking turns were not statistically counted, the observations consistently recorded female students' hesitation, limited initiation, and shorter responses before the Baamboozle-supported activities. During the Baamboozle-supported phase, female students across the observed classes appeared more willing to participate, particularly when activities involved team discussion, clear turn-taking, and peer support. These findings suggest that the digital gamified environment may have contributed to a more equitable distribution of participation across genders. These changes were

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explored in greater depth through an FGD with female students from one grade 4 class.

Although female participation generally appeared to increase during the Baamboozle-supported activities, the improvement was not uniform. Some students remained hesitant and continued to rely on teacher nomination, peer prompting, or short responses. This suggests that gamified learning may not benefit all learners in the same way. For some students, speaking anxiety, low confidence, limited vocabulary, or fear of peer judgement may persist even in a playful game-based environment. Therefore, Baamboozle should be viewed as one supportive strategy rather than a complete solution to gendered participation gaps.

These findings suggest that gamified learning environments was associated with more visible engagement and contribute to reducing participation disparities among Indonesian young learners. From a sociocultural perspective, the increase in participation observed can be interpreted as a transformation toward highly engaging learning environments, where language development is facilitated by social interaction. Consistent with Vygotsky's framework (1978), enhanced opportunities for peer interaction and dialogic engagement provide appropriate environment for language practice. Studies indicate that gamification improves behavioural and emotional engagement in language learning settings when aligned with pedagogical goals (Chan & Lo, 2024). Likewise, in EFL contexts, digital gamification improves English language skills, vocabulary learning, motivation, and student-centered participation (Abu Qub'a, Abdullah Al-Haj Eid, Hasan, & Herz, 2024; Hossain & Younus, 2024). In the present study, Baamboozle acted as a supporting tool that restructured classroom interaction, which aided students, specifically the formerly less active ones, to frequently participate.

Nevertheless, sociocultural theory solely does not completely interpret the distribution of the observed participation in this study. A Feminist Pedagogical perspective is vital in investigating how power and voice function within classroom interaction. Drawing on Hooks (1994) work, classrooms are environments where participation is framed by social norms and power relations. Female participants in this study showed less visibility, hesitance, and limited interaction prior to the intervention. This pattern aligns with studies demonstrating that female learners may adopt quiet positions in classroom discussions due to sociocultural expectations, lack of confidence, or gendered norms (Akhter, 2023; Waluyo, 2024; Mamnoun & Nfissi, 2023). The introduction of Baamboozle, however, might have changed the pattern as the female students appeared to show enhanced confidence and willingness to take part in the learning, and this was evident in observation-based data. The nature of gamified environment appeared to lessen evaluative pressure and create a supportive atmosphere, which allowed female students to show greater agency in classroom interaction.

This dynamic has been further highlighted through the FGD findings that captured female students lived experiences. Participants described the gamified environment as enjoyable, socially supportive, and less threatening because they could answer with their friends and learn through a game-like activity. These responses suggest that the playful and collaborative structure of Baamboozle may have helped create a more supportive speaking environment. "*I want to play Baamboozle every day because it is super fun.*", stated S1. The participants also claimed that the Baamboozle game was their favourite game in the English-speaking class: "*Baamboozle game is my favourite game in the English conversation class*", stated S5. The data also suggests that the Baamboozle game was perceived as a valuable tool for language learning, as S3 noted "*After school, I play Baamboozle with my sister; it helps me to study.*" The data suggests that the game made learning fun and engaging, which promoted English language learning and student engagement in and outside the classroom. Moreover, As S1 shared, "*Baamboozle helps to speak because we are targeting the win; it is awkward if I lose, so I answer questions*."S4 and S5 stated, "*Sure, Baamboozle motivates*." S2 added, "*It is easy to study with,*" while S6 described it as "*smooth and creative*." Further, despite acknowledging the importance of participation in language learning, shyness and other psychological barriers might hinder fluency. However, the nature of the game contributed in overcoming those challenges. As S1 reflected, "*Being active helps improve my speaking skills, but I am shy…We are too shy to speak in front of the boys, but playing Baamboozle makes us less shy.*" S3 intervened, "*I did not have friends because I was shy; I did not know how to make friends, but now I am facing my fears, and Baamboozle helps to speak without being forced to.*" S7 further emphasised, "*Baamboozle makes us active and not shy*." These excerpts reflect the

empowering nature of game-based learning. The increase in confidence appeared to be associated with team support, clearer turn-taking, repeated speaking opportunities, and immediate feedback during the game. From a Feminist perspective (Hooks, 1994), Baamboozle served as a platform for female advocacy, enabling participation in a setting where they might typically feel overshadowed by more vocal male peers. The enjoyable and emotionally safe environment allowed for authentic self-expression and engagement.

These results are consistent with recent research that shows that gamification develops motivation and emotional engagement in language learning by making activities more enjoyable, interactive, and personally meaningful or learners (Chan & Lo, 2024; Zhou, 2024). In EFL contexts, gamified activities can promote intrinsic motivation, learner interest, enjoyment, and engagement when game elements are aligned with instructional goals and learners' needs (Alrabai, 2024; li et al., 2023). Unlike traditional teaching that could unintentionally encourage passive learning, the game's playful structure and dynamic point system generated excitement and maintained student interest, which helped to mitigate anxiety and encourage verbal participation. Given the initial observation that the Indonesian female students were less engaged in English-speaking classrooms, the finding is significant as it implies that the Baamboozle game successfully addressed this issue. Furthermore, the findings support previous studies that suggest that digital game-based learning can positively influence learners' motivation and participation across gender groups (Almusharraf, 2023). Baamboozle appeared particularly beneficial in encouraging female learners to participate more actively in speaking activities.

From a socio-cultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), Baamboozle functioned as a meaningful learning tool that mediated student engagement and supported participation within their Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD). The unpredictable game dynamics encouraged group interaction, which created scaffolding for learners to contribute to learning.

Notably, the findings emphasise the complementary roles of sociocultural theory and Feminist Pedagogy. Sociocultural theory describes how increased interaction supports learning, while Feminist Pedagogy highlights the significance of equitable and balanced participation. Freire (2000) claimed that both participation and democratisation of classroom discussions are required for a meaningful learning. Feminist Pedagogy further suggests that inclusive classrooms ought to frequently address participation patterns, confidence gaps, hesitancy, and how learners are viewed, interact, and form identity within a learning environment (Granger & Gerlach, 2023; Waluyo, 2024). The findings of this study suggest that Baamboozle contributed to overall increased interaction and aided female students to participate actively. This dual effect is significant, as previous studies on gamification has often concentrated on engagement rather than explicitly addressing equity issues.

While this study is grounded in Feminist Pedagogy and Sociocultural Theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) also offers a relevant complementary lens. From this view, Baamboozle may have supported female students' motivation by addressing autonomy, competence, and relatedness. For instance, students had more active roles in game-based participation, received repeated opportunities and feedback, and interacted with peers in teams (Ryan & Deci, 2020). However, because SDT focuses mainly on psychological needs, it does not fully capture the gendered and sociocultural power relations shaping female student's classroom participation. Future research might compare theoretical frameworks to determine which best explains gamification's effects on gender disparities.

In response to research question 1, the findings suggest that Baamboozle appeared to narrow the observed gender disparity in participation and engagement to a moderate extent. Female students' speaking participation became more visible, voluntary, and collaborative during Baamboozle-supportive activities. However, some differences remained, and these findings should be interpreted as context-specific patterns rather than causal evidence.

Theme 2: Collaborative-competitive dynamics promoting more equitable participation

The second theme underscores how Baamboozle fostered both peer collaboration and healthy competition, leading to more inclusive participation. Students noted that playing in teams helped them feel more supported and minimised their fear of making mistakes, especially in front of male classmates. "*I am worried about making mistakes in front of the boys, which makes me shy…Boys would laugh if I make a mistake, but I feel less shy when we play Baamboozle*." declared S2.This aligns with other studies suggesting that

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peer-supported digital learning activities reinforced social engagement (Zagni et al., 2026; Zagni et al., 2025; Cochon Drouet et al., 2023). When female students collaborated within the same team, they appeared to encourage and support one another, which resulted in greater confidence and participation. This supports sociocultural perspectives that view participation as socially mediated and shaped by interaction with peers. Consistent with this view, studies found that peer influence plays a significant role in learners' willingness to communicate during EFL speaking activities (Bozca & Koban Koc., 2023; Chen et al., 2021).

This theme also revealed varied student interpretations of the game's social structure. While some female students, like S2, perceived the game as collaborative "*Baamboozle game is about collaboration, not competition. If it were competition, I would be sad to lose*.", S3 viewed it as a motivating competition "*I think it is a competition. Playing the Baamboozle game makes me want to answer, being pushed by the boys to answer*." Others, such as S1 and S4, further emphasised a preference for collaborative dynamics. This mix of perceptions reflects the dual nature of the game, which can be perceived as cooperative and competitive based on an individual's perspective. This difference in perception suggests the need for balanced game system that promote both cooperation and healthy competition, to accommodate diverse student preferences without reinforcing gendered stereotypes.

This blend is supported by research which shows that children in cooperative situations have increased positive attitudes about learning, self-esteem and self-confidence than students in alternative classroom designs, which means they experience less anxiety and tension (Dörnyei, 1997; Lin et al., 2025; Zagni et al., 2025). Similarly, scholars believe that the group, which has more resources than any single person, influences members' attitudes, such as confidence and contentment, and these attitudes impact interaction (Bozca & Koban Koç, 2023; Li et al., 2023).

Further, cooperation positively affects the students' self-awareness and boosts their efforts and accountability since knowing one's unique contribution is needed for the group to succeed. When done cohesively, cooperative learning, founded on the notion that two minds are better than one, will always result in a tremendous performance. Successful completion of whole-group activities and a sense of collective achievement can be achieved through incorporating whole-group tasks or projects that result in an excellent visible product or culminate in the solution of a puzzle or challenge, after which the group can congratulate themselves on their accomplishment. The shared experience and the collaborative celebration that generally follows completing a task together boost students' happiness.

The game's team-based structure was one central element contributing to reinforced engagement among Indonesian female students in the English conversation class. Divided into teams, students had to work to respond to questions and solve issues collaboratively, allowing female students to participate in significant social interactions within their teams and contributing to their success. This finding is supported by Bozca and Koban Koç (2023) who revealed that a cooperative learning environment where students work collectively to achieve a common objective can strengthen individual accountability and encourage active contributions among all team members. In EFL contexts, cooperative learning has been shown to reinforce learners' willingness to participate in speaking activities (Zhou & Wu, 2026).

These reflections illustrate how socio-cultural theory supports the idea that learning is socially constructed through collaborative tasks and peer scaffolding. Thereby, Baamboozle acted as a mediating tool for interaction, which assisted students co-construct knowledge through shared dialogue and cooperative learning.

Simultaneously, Feminist Theory provides a lens to examine how such digital game-based strategies disrupted traditional gender dynamics, empowering female students to assert themselves, take leadership roles, and reduce male dominance in class discussions. This transformation contributed to a more equitable and balanced classroom environment where all voices were valued.

The Baamboozle game introduced a less intimidating environment than traditional whole-class activities. It allowed the female students to discuss and rehearse their answers within their teams before exposing them to the class. This approach was effective in building their confidence and diminishing their fear and anxiety that is typically experienced in a traditional conversation English classroom. This sophisticated strategy proves the efficacy of team-based learning in fostering inclusive and effective

instructional experiences. Our study's findings align with previous research demonstrating that collaborative and supportive language learning in a low-anxiety environment creates significant language practice opportunities, boosting language acquisition and proficiency (Chen et al., 2021). However, it is noteworthy to say that not all female students appeared to respond to Baamboozle-supported activities. A few numbers of students remained hesitant and shy, which suggests that they may need additional scaffolding, such as sentence starters, rehearsal time, smaller peer groups, and private encouragement.

Despite its positive effects, some studies caution that its influence is subject to context (Li et al., 2023). In certain cases, gamification assists previously active students more than passive learners, or strengthens competitive hierarchies rather than minimise them. Nevertheless, the current study proposes that when structured with collaborative features and inconsequential interaction, gamification enables more inclusive engagement.

Finally, the role of gender in gamified learning has not been largely investigated. Emerging research advocates that gender may impact the way learners respond to gamification, especially in regard of competition and collaboration (Le et al., 2023; Veldman et al., 2023). This study's findings contribute to this growing work by indicating that interactive digital platforms can be adapted to promote equity, rather than replicate traditional stereotypes. Further, the team-based structure of Baamboozle supports female learners to participate vigorously and collectively without the burden of individual performance.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings advocate that learning digital games like Baamboozle do not function merely as motivators, but as transformative pedagogical tools that restructure classroom interaction and participation, which are key elements in EFL contexts where students often experience language speaking anxiety.

Overall, the findings addressed both research questions by highlighting the pedagogical potential of Baamboozle in supporting Indonesian female students' engagement in the EFL classroom.

CONCLUSION

The results demonstrate that integrating Baamboozle in the English-speaking classroom not only contributed in improved participation and language use among Indonesian female students, but also played a crucial role in reshaping gender dynamics and empowering previously disengaged learners. The study's findings have several implications for English-speaking classrooms. Firstly, educators can consider implementing the Baamboozle game to improve female students' speaking skills, reduce shyness, and increase motivation to participate in class. Secondly, the game's random and varying reward system can promote engagement and active participation, motivating students to answer questions. Thirdly, the game's collaborative and competitive aspects can cater to different students' preferences and help build teamwork and communication skills. Finally, the study's findings indicate that fun and exciting games like Baamboozle can create a positive learning environment and help students enjoy learning, leading to better academic performance and higher levels of engagement in the classroom.

LIMITATIONS

Seven limitations should be acknowledged. First, the teacher-researcher role introduces potential bias in observation and interpretation; a second observer would strengthen future studies. Second, the small sample (n=7 focus group) limits transferability to other contexts. Third, the absence of male student perspectives prevents full understanding of how gamification affected their participation and perceptions. Fourth, the short duration (12 weeks) cannot address whether engagement gains sustain over time. Fifth, no standardized measure of English-speaking proficiency was used; findings reflect participation, not necessarily language development. Sixth, the specific context (Islamic integrated school, English as a medium of instruction (EMI) policy, gender-seated classroom) may not generalize to secular or non-EMI schools. Seventh, the study did not control for teacher-researcher enthusiasm (Hawthorne effect); students may have responded to novelty rather than Baamboozle's specific features.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Six directions are recommended. First, comparative studies examining Baamboozle versus other platforms (Quizizz, Kahoot!, Wordwall) on gender participation patterns. Second, longitudinal research investigating whether engagement gains persist after gamification is removed. Third, mixed-methods studies incorporating standardized speaking

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assessments to examine whether increased participation translates to proficiency gains. Fourth, research including male student perspectives to understand how gamification affects their engagement and whether they perceive equity changes positively. Fifth, cross-contextual replication in secular schools, rural schools, and different grade levels. Sixth, experimental designs with control groups to establish causal relationships between gamification and reduced gender disparities.

This study makes two theoretical contributions. First, it demonstrates that Feminist Pedagogy and Sociocultural Theory can be productively integrated to analyze gamification's equity effects, moving beyond motivational frameworks that dominate gamification research. Second, it challenges the assumption that competition uniformly benefits all learners, showing that collaborative-competitive hybrid structures may better support female students in collectivist cultural contexts.

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