

Students and teachers' perceptions of gamification in English language learning and teaching

Persepsi siswa-siswa dan guru-guru terhadap gamifikasi dalam pembelajaran dan pengajaran bahasa Inggris

Darman Pangaribuan^{1*}, Kenny¹, Vincent Tanadi¹, Gilbert Sidabutar¹, Rebecha R. Sibuea¹, & Kartina Rahmadhani Rambe²

¹Universitas Prima Indonesia, Medan, Indonesia

²STKIP Pangeran Antasari, Deli Serdang, Indonesia

Corresponding Email: darmanpangaribuan@unprimdn.ac.id

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Abstract

This paper explores students' and teachers' perceptions of gamification in English language learning and teaching at SMA Negeri 1 Sunggal, Indonesia. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected from 72 students and 2 English teachers through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. Findings showed that both students and teachers perceived gamification positively, recognizing its capacity to increase motivation, engagement, and learning effectiveness, particularly in grammar and vocabulary. Gamified tools such as Quizizz made lessons more interactive, enjoyable, and student-centered. However, challenges such as limited internet connectivity, time constraints, and teachers' digital competence hindered effective implementation. The study concludes that gamification is most effective when supported by sufficient infrastructure, professional training, and balanced instructional design.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi siswa dan guru terhadap gamifikasi dalam pembelajaran dan pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di SMA Negeri 1 Sunggal, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan dari 72 siswa dan 2 guru Bahasa Inggris melalui kuesioner, wawancara, dan observasi kelas. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa baik siswa maupun guru memersepsikan gamifikasi secara positif, dengan mengakui kemampuannya dalam meningkatkan motivasi, keterlibatan, dan efektivitas pembelajaran, khususnya pada tata bahasa dan kosakata. Alat-alat tergamifikasi seperti Quizizz menjadikan pelajaran lebih interaktif, menyenangkan, dan berpusat pada siswa. Namun, tantangan seperti keterbatasan koneksi internet, kendala waktu, dan kompetensi digital guru yang masih terbatas menghambat implementasi yang efektif. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa gamifikasi paling efektif apabila didukung oleh infrastruktur yang memadai, pelatihan profesional, dan desain instruksional yang seimbang.

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A. Introduction

In recent years, gamification has become an innovative pedagogical strategy that has reshaped the dynamics of English Language Teaching (ELT). It refers to the use of game design elements such as points, levels, badges, leaderboards, and immediate feedback in non-game contexts to enhance engagement and motivation (Deterding et al., 2011). Within the educational domain, these elements have been widely adopted to encourage learners' active participation, persistence, and enjoyment in the learning process. By transforming traditional, teacher-centered classrooms into interactive and student-centered environments, gamification has emerged as a promising tool to foster motivation, engagement, and autonomy among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Arufe Giráldez et al., 2022; Hamari et al., 2014).

Research in language education has consistently highlighted the benefits of gamified learning in enhancing both cognitive and affective domains of learning. Hamari et al. (2014), in their meta-analysis, demonstrated that gamification can significantly improve learners' motivation and performance through the integration of competition, rewards, and feedback mechanisms. Similarly, Cheng et al. (2025) found that EFL learners engaged in gamified reading instruction exhibited higher levels of enjoyment, self-efficacy, and reading comprehension than those taught through conventional methods. These findings confirm that gamification can effectively transform routine language learning tasks into enjoyable and meaningful experiences that foster deeper learning. Beyond motivation, gamification also enhances learner autonomy by allowing students to control their learning pace, monitor their progress, and engage with peers collaboratively (Panmei & Waluyo, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) provides a robust framework to explain the motivational mechanisms underlying gamification. SDT emphasizes that intrinsic motivation develops when individuals' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied. Gamified environments support these needs through features such as self-paced challenges, immediate feedback, and peer competition, all of which reinforce learners' sense of agency and accomplishment (Hamari et al., 2014). In addition, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory offers complementary insight by emphasizing the importance of social interaction and collaboration in learning. Gamified platforms that enable students to compete or collaborate with classmates align with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where knowledge is co-constructed through social mediation. Hence, gamification not only stimulates motivation but also facilitates the social construction of language skills.

The global adoption of gamified learning has accelerated with technological advances and the widespread use of mobile learning platforms such as Quizizz, Kahoot!, and Duolingo. These tools allow learners to participate in interactive quizzes and competitions that make learning more engaging and accessible (Putra & Priyatmojo, 2021). In EFL contexts, gamification has been shown to improve vocabulary acquisition, grammar retention, and speaking fluency by transforming repetitive drills into rewarding challenges (Sari & Avifah, 2023; Zou, 2020). Students are more likely to engage in sustained learning activities when they perceive them as enjoyable, interactive, and socially connected (Armanda & Priyana, 2025). Thus, gamified learning environments bridge the gap between entertainment and education, making language learning both effective and emotionally satisfying. Recent research in Indonesia has demonstrated the effectiveness of gamified mobile applications, with Suherman et al. (2024) finding that Duolingo significantly enhanced motivation and engagement among Indonesian university students through its competitive leaderboard system and achievement-based rewards. Similarly, Pahlevi et al. (2024) showed that technology-enhanced learning tools, such as augmented reality-based storybooks, improved English learning outcomes by increasing student engagement and providing interactive learning experiences.

Despite these promising outcomes, the implementation of gamification in educational practice is not without challenges. Teachers' perceptions of gamified instruction remain mixed due to

various pedagogical and technical constraints. Luo (2024) found that teachers' intention to use gamified tools largely depends on their perceived ease of use and usefulness. Similarly, Kristriani et al. (2022) reported that limited digital literacy, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient institutional support are major barriers to technology integration in EFL classrooms. Teachers who are less familiar with digital pedagogy may feel unprepared to incorporate gamification effectively into their lesson plans (Titania, 2024). Consequently, while students often express enthusiasm for gamified learning, teachers may struggle to sustain its implementation without proper training and resources. This gap between technological potential and classroom reality underscores the need for professional development in digital pedagogy and institutional investment in technological infrastructure.

In the Indonesian educational context, the integration of gamification has gained momentum in response to post-pandemic digitalization and the national push toward 21st-century learning skills (Fatimah et al., 2023). Schools and universities increasingly employ online and mobile platforms to enhance English learning experiences (Chan & Lo, 2022). However, most local studies focus on vocabulary and reading comprehension (Panmei & Waluyo, 2022; Sari & Avifah, 2023), leaving grammar instruction, a skill often regarded as rule-based and less engaging, relatively underexplored. This imbalance limits the comprehensive understanding of gamification's potential across different language components. Furthermore, existing research frequently examines either students' or teachers' perspectives in isolation, resulting in a fragmented picture of classroom realities (Trinh et al., 2022). Few studies have investigated both groups simultaneously, which is essential for a holistic understanding of how gamified learning functions in practice.

In particular, the context of public senior high schools in Indonesia remains underrepresented in the literature. These institutions often face infrastructural limitations, large class sizes, and varying degrees of technological readiness, factors that significantly affect the success of gamified instruction (Luo, 2024). Understanding how teachers and students in such contexts perceive gamification can provide valuable insights into both its pedagogical potential and practical challenges. Comparative analysis between these two groups' perceptions can also illuminate how motivational, affective, and technical factors interact to shape learning outcomes.

Therefore, this study aims to explore students' and teachers' perceptions of gamification in English language learning and teaching, with a particular focus on grammar instruction at SMA Negeri 1 Sunggal, North Sumatra, Indonesia. By analyzing how both groups perceive motivation, engagement, and learning effectiveness in gamified classrooms, the study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical promise and classroom application. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of research on gamified pedagogy by providing context-specific evidence from the Indonesian EFL setting. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of aligning technological innovation with pedagogical goals, teacher readiness, and institutional support to ensure that gamification serves as a meaningful and sustainable approach to language learning.

B. Method

This research utilized a descriptive qualitative design to investigate the perspectives of students and teachers regarding gamification in English language education at SMA Negeri 1 Sunggal, North Sumatra, Indonesia. A qualitative methodology was chosen to facilitate a comprehensive examination of participants' life experiences and perspectives about gamified training (Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, 2016). This methodological selection corresponds with the interpretivist paradigm, prioritizing the comprehension of phenomena from the viewpoints of participants (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2018).

The participants included 72 eleventh-grade students (ages 16-17) and two English instructors from SMA Negeri 1 Sunggal. Purposive sampling was utilized to guarantee that all individuals had engaged in gamified learning activities, specifically through Quizizz, during English grammar

instruction (Patton, 2015). The educators were chosen for their active implementation of gamification techniques and their readiness to engage in the research.

Data were gathered using three methods: classroom observations (12 sessions over four weeks), semi-structured interviews (12 student focus groups and 2 individual teacher interviews), and questionnaires distributed to all 72 students. The observation methodology concentrated on student engagement behaviors and teacher facilitation techniques during gamified lessons. Interview enquiries examined perceptions regarding the influence of gamification on motivation, engagement, and educational results. The questionnaires had Likert-scale items and open-ended questions that investigated experiences with gamified learning (Dörnyei, 2007). All instruments were tested and validated by two specialists before implementation.

The data analysis adhered to (Braun & Clarke, 2006) thematic analysis approach, encompassing six phases: familiarization, first coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. Interview transcripts and observation notes were inductively coded to discern emerging patterns, which were subsequently organized into overarching themes. NVivo 12 software enabled data management. Trustworthiness was established via data source triangulation, participant member checking, peer debriefing among researchers, and comprehensive contextual and findings description (Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, 1985; Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, 2016). Ethical approval was secured, and all subjects granted informed permission with guarantees of confidentiality

C. Results and Discussion

The examination of qualitative data derived from classroom observations, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with 72 students and two English teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Sunggal identified four principal themes: (1) increased motivation and engagement, (2) enjoyable and interactive learning experiences, (3) challenges in implementation, and (4) teacher preparedness and institutional support. These findings underscore the intricacy of gamified learning in English language schools, illustrating the coexistence of pedagogical advantages with contextual and infrastructural limitations.

1. Enhanced Motivation and Engagement

A key finding was that gamified learning markedly improved students' motivation and involvement in classroom activities. During observations, students exhibited considerable enthusiasm while engaging in gamified activities on platforms like Quizizz. They engaged in vigorous competition while exhibiting mutual support, fostering a dynamic and collaborative learning environment. Survey results indicated that over 80% of students concurred or strongly concurred that gamified sessions enhanced their motivation to study English more successfully. One student remarked that "learning through games renders English more enjoyable and stimulating," while another elucidated that "the point system and leaderboard motivate me to improve with each attempt."

These findings align with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which asserts that motivation escalates when learners' psychological demands for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The prompt feedback and progress metrics in gamified platforms fulfil the desire for competence, whereas options for peer rivalry and collaboration cater to relatedness. Hamari et al. (2014) and Cheng et al. (2022) showed analogous findings, indicating that gamified learning augments learners' motivation via positive reinforcement and interactive feedback. Educators corroborated these findings, seeing that even usually lethargic students engaged more actively during gamified lessons.

2. Enjoyable and Interactive Learning Experience

A common finding was that gamification converted the learning process into a pleasurable and interactive experience. Students characterized gamified sessions as “enjoyable,” “distinct,” and “less anxiety-inducing” compared to conventional grammar training. They indicated that learning through games alleviated anxiety and facilitated a deeper comprehension of grammatical principles in context. Classroom observations indicated that students exhibited laughter, engaged in discussions on answers, and provided mutual encouragement, reflecting a healthy emotional environment. This discovery corresponds with Zou (2020), who highlighted that gamification alleviates learners' anxiety and fosters emotional involvement via playful learning experiences.

Teachers also viewed gamification as a means to cultivate a friendly and collaborative school environment. A teacher noted that “students were enthusiastic and even requested to repeat the games after class,” indicating the inherent pleasure derived from participatory activities. This observation corroborates Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which asserts that learning is facilitated by social contact. The collaborative aspect of gamified assignments enabled students to collectively develop knowledge while preserving a sense of friendly rivalry. According to Armanda and Priyana (2025), the balance between competitiveness and collaboration improves participation and group cohesion in EFL classrooms.

3. Challenges in Implementation

Considering its beneficial results, certain obstacles arose in the successful implementation of gamified training. Technical challenges, notably inadequate internet connectivity and restricted access to digital devices, were among the most commonly cited impediments. About one-third of students encountered connectivity problems during class, which occasionally led to frustration and disengagement. Educators faced challenges with time management, since the preparation of gamified sessions and the resolution of technological issues diminished the time allotted for content delivery. A teacher remarked that “internet delays frequently squander class time,” highlighting the infrastructural limitations of digital systems in Indonesian public schools.

These findings align with prior research by (Luo, 2024) and (Kristiani et al., 2022), which indicated that insufficient infrastructure and restricted digital literacy impede the effective implementation of gamification in EFL contexts. Furthermore, several students acknowledged being preoccupied by the competitive aspect of the games, prioritizing victory above comprehending the educational content. This concern reflects the warning articulated by (Kawattipa & Tangkiengsirisin, 2024), who discovered that heightened rivalry in gamified learning can elevate anxiety and divert focus from educational goals. Consequently, although gamification improved engagement, its efficacy relied on precise instructional design and equal technological access.

4. Teacher Readiness and Institutional Support

The efficacy of gamification was additionally affected by educators' digital proficiency and institutional backing. The two participating educators exhibited varying degrees of preparedness: one was proficient in using gamified technologies, whereas the other necessitated support in navigating digital platforms. This discrepancy influenced classroom execution and student experience. Educators concurred that institutional backing via training and technical resources was essential for maintaining gamified instruction. A teacher expressed, “I wish to utilize these tools more frequently, but I require guidance and improved internet access.”

The findings align with Titania (2024) and Luo (2024), who highlighted that educators' adoption of gamified learning is contingent upon perceived ease of use, perceived utility, and organizational support. In the absence of professional development and dependable infrastructure, even enthusiastic instructors may find it challenging to adopt gamified pedagogy effectively. The findings further substantiate the assertion by Kristriani et al. (2022) that continuous digital literacy

training and administrative support are crucial for fostering sustainable innovation in English Language Teaching (ELT). The synthesis of these studies indicates that gamification is most effective when pedagogical innovation is bolstered by sufficient infrastructure and teacher proficiency. The study emphasizes that technology by itself does not ensure engagement; its effectiveness relies on purposeful instructional design and supportive surroundings.

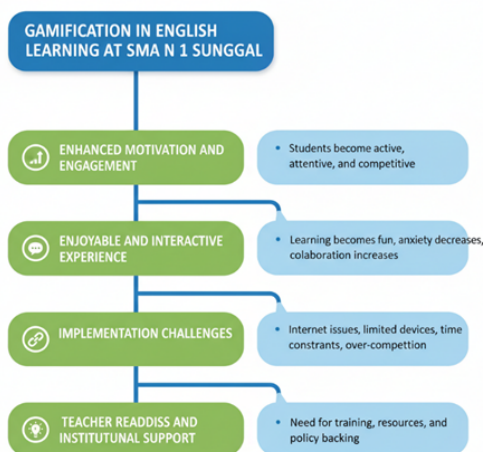


Figure 1. Summary of Thematic Findings

The findings of this study align with prior research highlighting the motivating advantages of gamification in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education (Hamari et al., 2014; Arufe Giráldez et al., 2022). The enthusiasm and readiness of students to engage in gamified tasks demonstrate that competition, feedback, and prizes enhance intrinsic motivation by fulfilling the needs for autonomy and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, the emotional satisfaction demonstrated by learners underscores the significance of the emotive domain in language acquisition, as posited by Zou (2020).

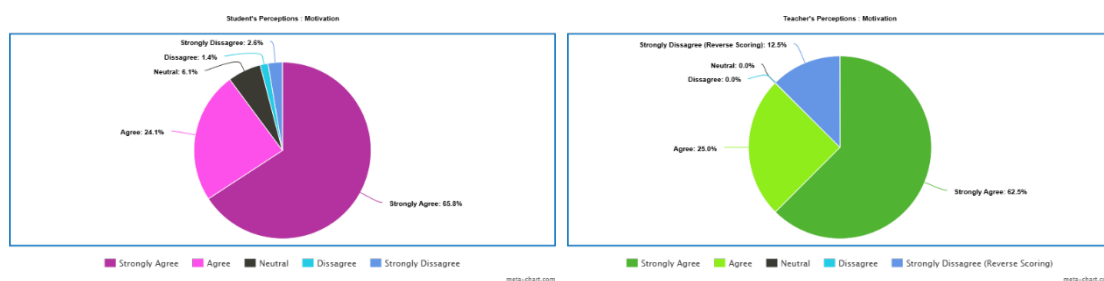


Figure 2. Students' and Teachers' Perception on Motivation

The comparative study of the charts indicates significant similarities and disparities between teachers' and students' opinions of gamification regarding motivation, engagement, and learning results. Initially, concerning motivation, both groups demonstrated exceptionally favorable sentiments. Over half of the educators (62.5%) and learners (65.8%) "strongly agreed" that gamified training markedly enhanced their motivation to study English, with 24.1% expressing "agreement." This striking resemblance indicates that both educators and learners regard

gamification as an effective motivational instrument that enhances the educational experience. These findings support prior study by Hamari et al. (2014), which demonstrated that gamified learning amplifies intrinsic motivation via competition, prizes, and feedback systems that fulfil learners' psychological requirements for competence and achievement.



Figure 3. Students' and Teachers' Perception on Engagement

Regarding engagement, both groups exhibited favorable trends, albeit with slightly greater variability. Among educators, 67.5% “strongly agreed” and 12.5% “agreed” that gamification improved engagement, with student responses reflecting a similar distribution. These findings indicate a reciprocal recognition that gamified lessons promote active engagement and focus during classroom activities. A minority of 3.5% expressed dissent, suggesting that involvement may vary based on circumstances such as internet stability, task design, or competition intensity. This corresponds with Deci and Ryan’s (2000) Self-Determination Theory, highlighting that engagement is maintained when learners see autonomy, competence, and relatedness, characteristics that effective gamification can satisfy.

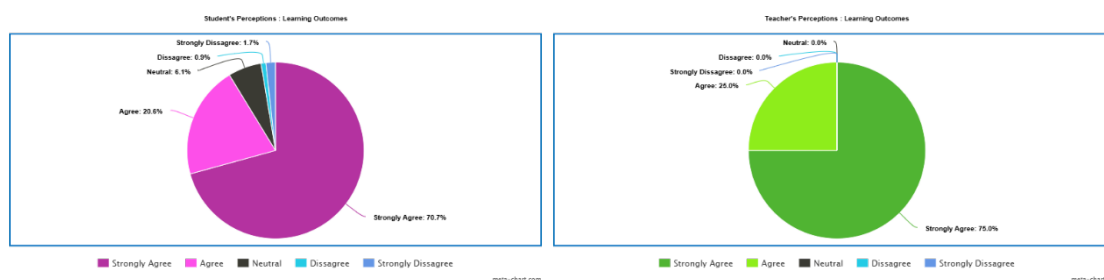


Figure 4. Students' and Teachers' Perception on Learning Outcome

The patterns in perceptions of learning outcomes were well linked between educators and students. Approximately 72.85% of both groups “strongly agreed” and 22.8% “agreed” that gamification favorably impacted learning results, especially in grammar and vocabulary proficiency. This similarity indicates that both parties acknowledge the educational benefits of gamified learning in enhancing understanding and retention. Nevertheless, around 6.1% of students expressed neutrality, 0.9% indicated disagreement, and 1.7% remained in severe disagreement, potentially expressing apprehensions of shallow learning or inadequate technological preparedness. The results align with the findings of Cheng et al. (2022), who indicated that although gamified methods enhance learning outcomes, their efficacy is contingent upon consistent integration and a balanced instructional design. The strong correlation between teachers' and students' perceptions reflects a mutual confidence regarding gamification's potential to improve motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes in EFL classes.

The results indicate that gamification promotes collaborative learning in accordance with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural concepts. Students not only competed but also assisted their peers, thereby reinforcing social connections and collaborative involvement. The duality of competition and collaboration reflects the findings of Armanda and Priyana (2025), who observed that well-structured gamified designs promote teamwork while preserving individual contributions.

The cited issues of technical difficulties, unequal device access, and restricted class time highlight the structural disparities prevalent in developing educational institutions. These findings align with those of Luo (2024) and Kristriani et al. (2022), who observed that effective gamification necessitates both pedagogical preparedness and systemic support. In the absence of adequate training and infrastructure, gamified learning may devolve into a fragmented or shallow experience rather than a transformative one.

This study also provides insight on teacher confidence and professional identity. The dependence of fewer tech-savvy teachers on help illustrates how digital breakthroughs might unnecessarily marginalize educators lacking technology proficiency. Titania (2024) highlighted that the successful incorporation of gamification relies on educators' digital self-efficacy and institutional support. Ongoing training and mentorship are crucial for maintaining innovation.

Ultimately, although the majority of students conveyed favorable sentiments, a minority indicated experiencing anxiety or distraction due to heightened competitiveness. This discovery underscores the necessity for a balanced gamification design that integrates competitive and collaborative components to ensure inclusivity and psychological comfort. (Kawattipa & Tangkiengsirisin, 2024) recommend that educators prioritize learning objectives rather than grades to maintain gamification as a supporting rather than a stressful educational experience.

D. Conclusion

This research investigated the attitudes of students and teachers regarding gamification in English language learning at SMA Negeri 1 Sunggal. The findings indicated that both groups regarded gamified instruction favorably, recognizing its contribution to improving motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. Platforms such as Quizizz enhanced lessons by making them more interactive, engaging, and focused on students. Gamification incentivizes learners via points, levels, and leaderboards, aligning with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which underscores autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental components of intrinsic motivation. Educators observed heightened engagement and involvement, whilst learners experienced enhanced confidence and enthusiasm.

Gamification enhanced classroom interaction and collaboration, reinforcing Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory of learning through cooperation. Notwithstanding the advantages, obstacles such as time constraints, technological difficulties, and unequal access to devices occasionally impeded implementation. Both educators and learners concurred that gamification enhanced vocabulary and grammar acquisition via repetition and feedback, however excessive competition can lead to distraction. Gamification was effective when bolstered by sufficient infrastructure, teacher readiness, and a well-structured classroom environment.

Educators ought to intentionally include gamification into lesson plans that match with educational objectives, striking a balance between competitiveness and collaboration. Ongoing training in digital pedagogy is crucial for the efficient and inclusive application of gamified tools. Students are urged to expand gamified learning outside the classroom to promote autonomy and regular practice. Institutions must enhance technical infrastructure, supply equipment and internet connectivity, and deliver consistent training to foster innovation in English instruction. Future research should encompass wider situations and investigate the long-term impacts of gamification on certain language abilities to enhance comprehension of its influence on communicative competence and emotional development.

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Author Information

Darman Pangaribuan

PUI PT ELT On Linguistics, Literature and Translation, Universitas Prima Indonesia
Jl. Sampul No 3, Medan, Indonesia
Email: darmanpangaribuan@unprimdn.ac.id
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4064-2576>

Kenny

English Language Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Prima Indonesia
Jl. Sampul No 3, Medan, Indonesia
Email: kho.kenny6@gmail.com
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0832-390X>

Vincent Tanadi

English Language Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Prima Indonesia

Jl. Sampul No 3, Medan, Indonesia

Email: vincenttanad@gmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9100-9573>

Gilbert Sidabutar

English Language Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Prima Indonesia

Jl. Sampul No 3, Medan, Indonesia

Email: gilbertsidabutar16@gmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7459-6134>

Rebecha R Sibuea

English Language Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Prima Indonesia

Jl. Sampul No 3, Medan, Indonesia

Email: rebechasibuea0205@gmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1009-819X>

Kartina Rahmadhani Rambe

Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar, STKIP Pangeran Antasari

Jl. Sampul No 3, Medan, Indonesia

Email: kartinarambe@gmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3729-2621>



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