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Teachers' Perspectives on the Use of Physical Games in English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This study explores teachers' perspectives on the use of physical games in English language teaching within school-based EFL contexts. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight secondary school English teachers who had experience using physical games in their classrooms. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in teachers' perceptions and experiences. The findings reveal that teachers generally perceive physical games as a beneficial instructional approach, particularly for supporting vocabulary learning, speaking practice, and students' motivation and engagement. Teachers reported that physical games encouraged active participation and reduced students' anxiety in using English. However, the study also identifies several challenges in implementing physical games, including classroom management difficulties, limited instructional time, large class sizes, and restricted physical space. To address these challenges, teachers employed various adaptive strategies, such as selecting simpler games, establishing clear classroom rules, and modifying activities to fit contextual constraints. The study highlights that teachers' perspectives on physical games are both positive and pragmatic. The findings suggest that physical games can be effectively integrated into English language teaching when they are carefully planned, contextually adapted, and aligned with instructional objectives. This study contributes to the understanding of physical games from the perspective of teacher cognition and offers practical insights for sustainable implementation in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *Physical Games; Teacher Perspectives; English Language Teaching; Efl*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi perspektif guru terhadap penggunaan *physical games* dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris pada konteks EFL berbasis sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap delapan guru bahasa Inggris tingkat sekolah menengah yang memiliki pengalaman menggunakan *physical games* dalam pembelajaran. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola utama dalam persepsi dan pengalaman guru. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru secara umum memandang *physical games* sebagai pendekatan pembelajaran yang bermanfaat, khususnya dalam mendukung pembelajaran kosakata, keterampilan berbicara, serta meningkatkan motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa. Guru juga menilai bahwa *physical games* dapat membantu menciptakan suasana belajar yang lebih menyenangkan dan mengurangi kecemasan siswa dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris. Namun demikian, penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi sejumlah tantangan dalam penerapan *physical games*, antara lain keterbatasan waktu pembelajaran, manajemen kelas, jumlah siswa yang besar,

dan keterbatasan ruang kelas. Untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut, guru menerapkan berbagai strategi adaptif, seperti memilih permainan yang sederhana, menetapkan aturan yang jelas, serta memodifikasi aktivitas agar sesuai dengan kondisi kelas. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa perspektif guru terhadap penggunaan *physical games* bersifat positif namun tetap realistis. Temuan penelitian ini mengindikasikan bahwa *physical games* dapat diintegrasikan secara efektif dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris apabila dirancang secara terencana, disesuaikan dengan konteks pembelajaran, dan selaras dengan tujuan pembelajaran.

Kata Kunci: *Physical Games; Perspektif Guru; Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris; Efl*

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A. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) at the school level faces various challenges, particularly in maintaining student motivation and engagement in the learning process. Many students consider English difficult and boring, which may be influenced by classroom practices that continue to emphasize memorization of vocabulary and grammar and rely heavily on textbook-based instruction (Harmer, 2007). Such learning conditions often limit students' opportunities for meaningful language use, encouraging teachers to seek more interactive and student-centered approaches that can sustain participation and engagement. In a motivational perspective, learner engagement is closely related to classroom activities that provide enjoyment, involvement, and meaningful participation, particularly in foreign language learning contexts (Dörnyei, 2001).

One approach that has gained attention in EFL classrooms is the use of physical games in English teaching. Physical games involve purposeful physical movement integrated with language learning objectives, such as role-playing, simulations, or group activities that require students to move and interact with peers. This approach aligns with Total Physical Response (TPR), which emphasizes the relationship between physical activity and language comprehension, particularly for young learners and school-age students (Asher, 2009). Through embodied learning, physical movement is believed to support comprehension while reducing learners' stress during language use.

In language teaching, physical games are often viewed as enjoyable activities that provide a break from focused study while still offering opportunities for language processing. Previous studies suggest that games can increase students' motivation, lower

anxiety, and create a more positive classroom atmosphere (Krashen, 1985; Wright et al., 2006). Furthermore, physical games are considered effective for supporting speaking practice and vocabulary learning because they encourage learners to use language in immediate communicative contexts and promote interaction and cooperation (Nation, 2001; Uberman, 1998). Such interaction is particularly relevant in school settings, where learners benefit from structured peer engagement during language learning activities (Cameron, 2001). Activities that require learners to interact, respond, and use language for meaningful purposes can be viewed as pedagogical tasks that support language development through use rather than explanation alone (Ellis, 2008).

Despite the widely reported benefits of physical games in relation to student learning outcomes, the perspectives of teachers as the primary implementers remain insufficiently explored, especially in school-based EFL contexts. Teachers play a crucial role in selecting appropriate games, managing classroom dynamics, and adapting activities to instructional objectives and learner characteristics. Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness, feasibility, and challenges of using physical games can strongly influence whether this approach is sustained in everyday teaching practice (Borg, 2015). In classroom practice, teachers' instructional choices are shaped by their pedagogical beliefs, classroom realities, and perceptions of what works effectively in specific learning contexts (Richards, 2015). Therefore, understanding teachers' perspectives is essential to evaluate not only the perceived benefits of physical games but also their practicality under real classroom conditions.

Previous research indicates that while some teachers regard physical games as an effective strategy for increasing student participation, others highlight challenges related to preparation time, classroom management, and instructional constraints (Nor et al., 2025; Amalia et al., 2023). In addition, contextual factors such as large class size and limited classroom space may further affect how physical games are implemented and adapted. These differing experiences suggest that teachers' perspectives are shaped not only by pedagogical beliefs but also by contextual realities (Copland et al., 2014). Consequently, research examining teachers' perspectives on the use of physical games in English teaching is crucial for identifying both opportunities and barriers to effective implementation.

Based on this rationale, this study aims to examine teachers' perspectives on the use of physical games in English language teaching, focusing on perceived benefits, implementation challenges, and classroom relevance in EFL settings. The findings are expected to contribute empirically to the understanding of physical games from the perspective of teacher cognition and to provide practical insights for developing feasible and context-sensitive English teaching strategies.

B. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. A qualitative design was chosen because the study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives on the use of physical games in English teaching, including their experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges faced in classroom practice. The participants consisted of eight English teachers at the secondary school level. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the following criteria: (1) having at least two years of English teaching experience, and (2) having used or currently using physical games in English instruction. To protect confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized using codes G1–G8.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to obtain in-depth information about teachers' perceptions of (a) the effectiveness of physical games, (b) their impact on student motivation, engagement, and confidence, and (c) challenges in implementation, including classroom management, time constraints, class size, and limited classroom space. The interview guide was developed based on the literature review and research background, while maintaining flexibility to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and audio recordings were made with participants' consent.

Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved several stages: (1) transcribing the interview recordings, (2) repeatedly reading the transcripts to gain an overall understanding, (3) coding meaningful segments relevant to the research focus, (4) grouping codes into categories and major themes, and (5) interpreting patterns and drawing conclusions. This process resulted in four key themes: (1) teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of physical games, (2) the impact of physical games on student motivation and engagement, (3) challenges in implementing physical games, and (4) teachers' strategies for overcoming obstacles.

To enhance credibility, this study applied source triangulation by comparing responses across participants. In addition, member checking was conducted by asking selected participants to review the interview summaries to confirm that the interpretations reflected their intended meanings. These procedures were implemented to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the findings. This study adhered to research ethics. All participants received information about the research objectives and interview procedures before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was ensured through anonymized coding (G1–G8) and the exclusion of identifying information from the report.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Results

Based on in-depth interviews with eight English teachers (G1–G8), four major themes emerged regarding teachers' perspectives on the use of physical games in English teaching: (1) teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of physical games, (2) the impact of physical games on students' motivation and engagement, (3) challenges in implementing physical games, and (4) teachers' strategies for overcoming obstacles. These themes capture both teachers' positive evaluations and the practical conditions that shape how physical games are implemented in everyday classroom contexts.

1) Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Physical Games

The interview findings indicate that the majority of teachers perceived physical games as an effective approach for helping students understand English materials, particularly vocabulary and speaking. Teachers explained that physical involvement supported learning by encouraging kinesthetic engagement rather than relying solely on verbal explanation. One teacher noted that when students were actively involved in movement, comprehension and retention improved, stating that *"if students are encouraged to move while learning, they understand and remember the material more quickly"* (G2). Another teacher added that physical games allowed students to use English more naturally, *"without feeling like they are being tested"* (G5), suggesting that games reduced the pressure often associated with formal language use.

However, some teachers emphasized that the effectiveness of physical games depended on careful planning and alignment with learning objectives. When games were not clearly connected to lesson content, teachers perceived that learning outcomes were

less optimal. As one teacher explained, *"if the game is not tailored to the material, the results are less than optimal"* (G4). This indicates that teachers did not view physical games as inherently effective, but rather as instructional tools whose value depended on pedagogical design.

2) The Impact of Physical Games on Students' Motivation and Engagement

All teachers reported that physical games increased students' motivation and participation in English learning. Teachers observed that students became more enthusiastic, more willing to speak, and less bored during lessons when physical games were used. For example, one teacher reported that *"usually, passive students become more willing to participate through games"* (G1), indicating that games helped broaden student involvement. Another teacher described how games transformed the classroom atmosphere, noting that *"the class becomes more lively, and students seem to enjoy the learning process"* (G6).

In addition to increased engagement, teachers noted that physical games helped reduce students' anxiety when using English, particularly among learners who were afraid of making mistakes. One teacher explained that *"the children are less afraid of making mistakes because the focus is on playing, not grades"* (G3). This suggests that teachers perceived physical games as creating a low-pressure environment that encouraged risk-taking in language use.

3) Challenges in Implementing Physical Games

Despite the perceived benefits, teachers also identified several challenges in implementing physical games. The most frequently mentioned obstacles were classroom management, time constraints, and large class sizes. Teachers explained that active movement sometimes made classes harder to control, especially in large groups. As one teacher stated, *"if the class is large, it can sometimes be difficult to control"* (G4). Another teacher highlighted time limitations, explaining that *"lesson time is limited, while games require time for preparation and explanation"* (G8), which could reduce time for other instructional activities.

Limited classroom space was also identified as a constraint that affected the implementation of physical games. One teacher noted that *"the classroom is narrow, so movement is limited"* (G2). This condition influenced the type of games teachers could

realistically use, requiring them to adjust or avoid activities involving extensive movement.

4) Teachers' Strategies for Overcoming Obstacles

To address these challenges, teachers described several practical strategies. One common approach was selecting simpler games that were easier to manage. As one teacher explained, *"I choose games that are simple but still have movement elements"* (G6), indicating a balance between engagement and control. Another teacher emphasized the importance of classroom rules, stating that *"the rules must be clear from the start to maintain a conducive classroom environment"* (G1).

Teachers also reported modifying physical games to fit spatial and time constraints. In some cases, games were adapted so students could participate while seated. One teacher explained, *"I modify the games so they can be played sitting down"* (G5). These adaptations demonstrate that teachers adjusted the level of physical movement while preserving interaction and participation.

These results show that teachers generally held positive perceptions of physical games in English teaching. Physical games were perceived as supporting students' motivation, engagement, and confidence, while requiring careful planning and contextual adaptation to address classroom constraints.

2. Discussion

This study examined teachers' perspectives on the use of physical games in English language teaching, focusing on perceived effectiveness, student engagement, implementation challenges, and adaptive strategies. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers generally perceived physical games as a pedagogically valuable approach, particularly for supporting vocabulary learning, speaking practice, and student motivation. At the same time, teachers' positive perceptions were consistently accompanied by practical considerations related to classroom conditions, indicating that the effectiveness of physical games is highly context-dependent.

The results indicate that teachers viewed physical games as effective in facilitating students' understanding of English materials, especially vocabulary and speaking skills. This finding resonates with principles of Total Physical Response (TPR), which emphasize the role of physical movement in enhancing language comprehension through embodied learning (Asher, 2009). Teachers in this study perceived that physical

involvement helped make learning more concrete and memorable, particularly for students who struggled with purely verbal instruction. In a similar vein, research on games in EFL classrooms reports that games can support a classroom atmosphere characterized by enjoyment and motivation, provided they are introduced appropriately and connected to learning goals (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016).

Nevertheless, this study also showed that teachers did not perceive physical games as universally effective. Their effectiveness was seen as contingent upon careful alignment with instructional objectives. This finding challenges overly optimistic assumptions that games automatically produce learning gains and supports the view that games may lose instructional value when implemented primarily as entertainment rather than as goal-oriented pedagogy (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). Importantly, evidence from a meta-analysis on digital game-based second-language vocabulary learning also highlights that outcomes can vary depending on research design and moderating conditions, indicating that game-based interventions can be effective but not consistently so across contexts and implementation choices (Tsai & Tsai, 2018).

In terms of affective outcomes, all participating teachers reported that physical games increased students' motivation and classroom engagement. Teachers observed that students became more enthusiastic, participative, and confident in using English. This aligns with theoretical perspectives suggesting that lowering affective barriers can foster a more supportive emotional environment for language learning (Krashen, 1985). In addition, empirical research has reported that game-based learning can reduce anxiety while increasing motivation among EFL learners (Ahmed et al., 2022). However, it is also important to interpret these benefits carefully. Increased motivation does not necessarily guarantee improved learning outcomes unless game activities are supported by clear language targets and teacher facilitation—an emphasis that is consistent with teachers' own statements in this study regarding the need for planning and alignment.

Despite these perceived benefits, the study identified several challenges in implementing physical games, including classroom management difficulties, limited instructional time, large class sizes, and restricted physical space. These challenges reflect practical constraints commonly encountered in school-based EFL contexts, where interactive methods must be balanced with maintaining order and meeting instructional objectives within limited time (Scrivener, 2011; Hayes, 1997). Teachers in this study

emphasized that physical games could become counterproductive if classroom control was not maintained, suggesting that active learning strategies may introduce additional classroom demands rather than reducing teacher workload.

Importantly, teachers did not view these challenges as reasons to avoid physical games altogether. Instead, they adopted adaptive strategies such as simplifying game mechanics, setting clear rules, and modifying activities to fit spatial and temporal constraints. These practices reflect teachers' pedagogical agency and practical knowledge, supporting the concept of teacher cognition, which highlights how teachers' beliefs and contextual awareness shape instructional decision-making (Borg, 2015). Overall, this discussion highlights that teachers' perspectives on physical games are both optimistic and pragmatic. While physical games are perceived as beneficial for enhancing motivation, engagement, and communicative use of English, their successful implementation depends on contextual adaptation, classroom management skills, and alignment with learning goals. These findings suggest that professional development and institutional support are crucial to ensuring that physical games function as effective pedagogical tools rather than incidental classroom activities.

D. CONCLUSION

This study investigated teachers' perspectives on the use of physical games in English language teaching within school-based EFL contexts. The findings indicate that teachers generally hold positive perceptions of physical games, particularly in relation to their potential to enhance students' motivation, engagement, and confidence, as well as to support vocabulary learning and speaking practice. At the same time, the study demonstrates that teachers' positive views are accompanied by a realistic awareness of classroom constraints, including limited instructional time, classroom management challenges, large class sizes, and restricted physical space. These findings suggest that while physical games are perceived as beneficial, their effectiveness is not automatic and depends largely on how well activities are planned, managed, and aligned with instructional objectives.

Importantly, this study highlights teachers' adaptive strategies in responding to these challenges. Teachers modified physical games by simplifying rules, adjusting movement requirements, and tailoring activities to fit classroom conditions. This adaptability reflects teachers' pedagogical agency and underscores the role of teacher

cognition in shaping instructional practices. Rather than rejecting physical games due to contextual limitations, teachers sought practical ways to integrate them meaningfully into their teaching.

Thus, this study concludes that physical games can function as an effective pedagogical tool in English language teaching when implemented thoughtfully and contextually. The findings imply that teacher training programs and professional development initiatives should focus not only on introducing game-based methods but also on equipping teachers with skills to adapt such activities to diverse classroom realities. Future research may explore students' perspectives or examine classroom-based observations to complement teachers' reported experiences and provide a more comprehensive understanding of physical game implementation in EFL contexts.

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