

Students' Perceptions toward English Learning Activities in Elementary Schools in Baubau City

Nurhayati

Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FKIP, Universitas Muslim Buton, Baubau, Indonesia

E-mail: nurhayatihudi@gmail.com

Hasrida Ardin

Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FKIP, Universitas Muslim Buton, Indonesia

E-mail: hasridaardin332@gmail.com

Hartinawanti

Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar, Universitas Muslim Buton, Baubau, Indonesia

E-mail: tina53344@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines elementary school students' perceptions of English learning activities in Baubau City using a quantitative descriptive survey design. A 4-point Likert questionnaire (18 items across five categories: interest and motivation, classroom learning activities, media and materials, teacher interaction, and confidence/engagement) plus two open-ended items was administered to 35 elementary school students. The overall mean perception score was 3.23 on a 1–4 scale, interpreted as "Positive." Teacher interaction was the most positively perceived category ($M = 3.50$, "Very Positive"), driven particularly by students' response to teacher praise ($M = 3.69$). Media and materials was also rated Very Positive ($M = 3.31$). By contrast, classroom learning activities scored lowest among the five categories ($M = 3.05$), driven largely by one item — learning English through songs — which received the lowest mean ($M = 2.43$) and lowest agreement rate (42.9%) of all 18 items. Open-ended responses, condensed by the researcher into representative categories during data entry, indicated a preference for flashcards and role-play activities, and identified vocabulary retention, pronunciation, and fear of making mistakes as recurring difficulty categories

Keywords: Students' perceptions, English learning activities, elementary school, Likert survey.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Published
July 27th 2026



ARTICLE LICENCE

© 2026 Semiotika
Urban dan Budaya
(Urban and Cultural
Semiotics)

Under the license CC
BY-SA 4.0



1. Introduction

English is taught as a compulsory local-content subject in elementary schools across Baubau City, Southeast Sulawesi. How young learners perceive the specific activities used to teach English through games, songs, storytelling, role-play, visual media, and teacher-led interaction is closely tied to their motivation and engagement (Lena & Nikolov, 2025; Wallace & Leong, 2020; Said et al., 2021). Understanding students' perceptions directly, rather than inferring them solely from performance outcomes, allows teachers to identify which specific activities are working well and which may need to be redesigned.

The position of English within the Indonesian elementary curriculum has shifted several times over the past decade and remains, formally, an elective rather than a core subject. Under the Kurikulum Merdeka, English at the primary level is offered at each school's discretion, contingent on the availability of qualified teachers and adequate facilities (Falah et al., 2023). In practice, this elective status has meant that English is frequently taught by classroom teachers without a background in English education, a longstanding challenge already documented for Indonesian primary schools more broadly (Zein, 2012; Sulistiyo et al., 2019; Prihandoko et al., 2019; Anggawirya et al., 2021; Dalyan et al., 2025). Because the subject's implementation is left largely to individual schools and teachers, the specific mix of learning activities students actually experience about and how engaging or effective they find those activities can vary considerably from one school to another, which is precisely why direct, locally grounded evidence on students' perceptions is needed rather than assumptions drawn from national-level policy discussions.

Young learners also bring particular characteristics to the language classroom that make activity design especially consequential. Elementary-age children have shorter attention spans than older learners, respond strongly to concrete, sensory, and playful input, and are more willing to participate when the classroom atmosphere feels safe and enjoyable rather than evaluative (Musthafa, 2010; Anggriyani et al., 2026; Ritonga et al., 2024; Andini, 2021). This is one reason why the literature reviewed in specific activity types, such as games, songs, role-play, visual media, so consistently to motivation outcomes: for this age group, the format of instruction is not incidental to learning but a central part of it.

Despite this, much of the available evidence on young Indonesian learners' experience of English instruction comes from national-level policy analyses or from studies conducted in Java, where the concentration of research institutions and prior studies is highest (e.g., Falah et al., 2023, in West Java). Comparatively little is known about how elementary students in smaller regional cities outside Java, such as Baubau, in Southeast Sulawesi, perceive the English learning activities they actually experience in their own classrooms. This is a meaningful gap: local factors such as resource availability, teacher background, and the linguistic environment outside school may

shape both the activities used and how students respond to them in ways that differ from the more heavily studied urban Javanese context.

This study addresses that gap by investigating elementary school students' perceptions of English learning activities in Baubau City across five dimensions: interest and motivation, classroom learning activities, media and materials, teacher interaction, and confidence/engagement. It also draws on two open-ended items to capture, in summarized form, which activities students prefer and what they find difficult. In doing so, the study aims to provide locally grounded evidence that can inform how English learning activities are selected and refined in this specific context, complementing the broader national literature on young learner motivation with direct evidence of students' own perceptions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies

A substantial body of research reports positive effects of games, songs, and interactive activities on young EFL learners' motivation. Coyle and Gracia (2014) found that songs enhanced L2 vocabulary acquisition among preschool children, while Suwartono and Rahadiyanti (2012) reported that song-based media increased Indonesian students' participation in learning English grammar structures. More recent Indonesian studies report similar findings: Zulfa and Utami (2021) found songs and educational games improved elementary students' English learning outcomes; Sholihah et al. (2024) reported that songs positively affected students' motivation to learn English; and Salsabila et al. (2025) found that songs combined with educational games increased elementary students' learning motivation. On the role of teachers, Peng (2021) reviewed evidence that teacher praise fosters EFL students' academic motivation and engagement, while Lena and Nikolov (2025) found that young Indonesian learners' perceptions of their teachers positively predicted their motivation and task engagement. More broadly, within the Indonesian multilingual context, Purba (2022) and Roosman (2022) document the phonological and cross-linguistic challenges Indonesian learners face in acquiring English, which is relevant to interpreting students' self-reported difficulties with pronunciation and vocabulary in the present study.

Most of this prior work, however, either isolates a single activity type (typically songs) and measures its effect alone, or draws its sample from students in Java and other well-studied urban contexts (e.g., Falah et al., 2023, in West Java); none of it measures several categories of classroom activity side by side within one sample, and none is set in a smaller regional city outside Java such as Baubau. What distinguishes the present study is precisely this combination: it measures students' perceptions across five categories of activity simultaneously within a single sample, which allows a direct within-sample comparison of which specific activities are perceived most and least positively, rather than evaluating any one activity type in isolation, and it does so in a

previously unstudied regional setting rather than replicating the Java-centered evidence base.

2.1.1 Theoretical Basis

a. Conceptual Framework

This study draws on three complementary theoretical frameworks. First, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) frames learners' perceptions of their environment, including specific instructional activities, as one of three reciprocally interacting determinants of behavior, alongside personal factors such as self-efficacy beliefs and the environment itself. From this perspective, students who perceive classroom activities positively are expected to show stronger engagement and confidence, and vice versa.

Second, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) proposes that motivation is strengthened when three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy (a sense of choice and ownership over one's learning), competence (a sense of being capable), and relatedness (a sense of connection with others, including teachers and peers). This framework maps directly onto the five categories measured in the present questionnaire: Category D (Interaction with Teachers) most directly reflects relatedness and teacher-provided competence support; Category E (Confidence and Engagement) reflects students' perceived competence; and Categories B and C (Classroom Learning Activities and Media/Materials) reflect the extent to which instruction is experienced as autonomy-supportive and intrinsically engaging rather than repetitive or imposed. Category A (Interest and Motivation) is intended to capture the resulting motivational outcome of these three needs being met.

Third, Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis holds that low anxiety and an enjoyable classroom atmosphere lower the "affective filter" and facilitate language acquisition, while a high affective filter, for example, fear of making mistakes, impedes it. This is directly relevant to interpreting students' self-reported difficulties in Section 4.3, several of which (fear of making mistakes, embarrassment when speaking) describe affective-filter-raising experiences rather than purely cognitive difficulties.

b. Empirical Evidence

Taken together, these frameworks generate a testable expectation: interactive, low-anxiety, autonomy-supportive activities (games, role-play, visual media, encouraging teacher feedback) should be perceived more positively than activities experienced as repetitive, difficult, or anxiety-inducing, and teacher behavior that supports relatedness and competence (praise, patience, willingness to help) should be among the most positively rated dimensions rather than a peripheral factor. Prior findings support this general pattern: Peng (2021) and Lena and Nikolov (2025) both link teacher praise and perceived teacher support directly to EFL learners' motivation and engagement, while multiple studies on song- and game-based instruction (Coyle & Gracia, 2014; Suwartono & Rahadiyanti, 2012; Zulfa & Utami, 2021; Sholihah et al., 2024; Salsabila et al., 2025)

report generally positive effects of such activities on young learners' motivation. This study tests these expectations directly against Baubau elementary students' self-reported perceptions, rather than assuming the pattern applies uniformly to every activity — a distinction that matters, as Section 4.2 shows.

3. Method

This study used a quantitative descriptive survey design.

Participants. Participants were 35 elementary school students in Baubau City, drawn from three elementary schools and consisting of 14 male and 21 female students. Students were selected using purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016): eligibility was limited to students currently enrolled in an English class at the elementary level, so that all participants had direct, recent experience of the classroom activities the questionnaire asked about.

Instrument. Data were collected using an 18-item questionnaire on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). A 4-point (even-numbered) scale was used deliberately to avoid a neutral midpoint, which is common practice when surveying young respondents who may otherwise default to a middle option. The items were organized into five categories, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaire Categories, Item Ranges, and Example Items

Category	Construct Measured	Items	Example Item
A	Interest and Motivation in Learning English	1–4	“I want to be able to speak English fluently.”
B	Classroom Learning Activities	5–9	“I enjoy learning English through games.”
C	Media and Learning Materials	10–12	“Pictures, videos, or word cards help me understand the lesson.”
D	Interaction with Teachers	13–15	“The teacher praises me when I answer correctly.”
E	Confidence and Engagement	16–18	“I dare to try speaking English in front of the class.”

Two additional open-ended items asked students which activity they liked best and what they found difficult or unenjoyable; these were not scored on the Likert scale.

Instrument Reliability. To assess internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was computed directly from the 35 respondents' raw item-level data. The overall 18-item

scale showed excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .944$). At the category level, reliability was excellent for Category D, Interaction with Teachers ($\alpha = .968$), Category E, Confidence and Engagement ($\alpha = .967$), and Category C, Media and Learning Materials ($\alpha = .927$); good for Category B, Classroom Learning Activities ($\alpha = .818$); and questionable for Category A, Interest and Motivation ($\alpha = .670$), following the conventional interpretation bands of George and Mallery (2003) ($\geq .9$ excellent, $.8-.9$ good, $.7-.8$ acceptable, $.6-.7$ questionable). The comparatively low reliability for Category A indicates its four items may not be measuring a single unified construct as consistently as the other categories; this is noted as a limitation and a candidate for item revision in any future use of this instrument, and results for Category A should be interpreted with somewhat more caution than the other four categories.

Data Analysis. Likert responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (N, mean, minimum, maximum, standard deviation, and percentage of agreement, i.e., proportion answering "Agree" or "Strongly Agree") computed per item and per category, alongside Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency as reported above. Mean scores were interpreted using an interval-based scale (interval = [maximum - minimum] / number of categories = $[4 - 1] / 4 = 0.75$): 1.00–1.75 = Not Positive, 1.76–2.50 = Less Positive, 2.51–3.25 = Positive, 3.26–4.00 = Very Positive. For the two open-ended items, students' spoken/written responses were condensed by the researcher into a small set of representative response categories during data entry, rather than retained as individual verbatim transcripts; this condensation is consistent with the data reduction stage described by Miles and Huberman (1994), applied at the point of data collection rather than afterward.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents students' perceptions of English learning activities in three parts, followed by a discussion that interprets the findings jointly. Section 4.1 reports the mean perception score for each of the five questionnaire categories, showing that perceptions were positive overall but varied by category. Section 4.2 examines the single most notable exception to that positive pattern: the comparatively low rating given to song-based instruction. Section 4.3 reports the recurring categories in students' open-ended responses about their preferred activities and difficulties. The Discussion subsection then connects these findings to the theoretical framework and prior literature introduced in Section 2, and considers their practical implications.

4.1 Perception by Category

Table 1 presents the mean perception score for each of the five categories (N = 35).

Table 2. Mean Perception Score by Category

Category	Items	Mean	Interpretation
A. Interest and Motivation	4	3.23	Positive
B. Classroom Learning Activities	5	3.05	Positive
C. Media and Learning Materials	3	3.31	Very Positive
D. Interaction with Teachers	3	3.50	Very Positive
E. Confidence and Engagement	3	3.03	Positive
Overall (all 18 items)	18	3.23	Positive

Overall, students' perceptions of English learning activities were positive ($M = 3.23$). Interaction with teachers was the most positively perceived category ($M = 3.50$, Very Positive), consistent with Peng's (2021) and Lena and Nikolov's (2025) findings that teacher behavior, particularly praise and encouragement, is closely tied to young learners' motivation. This was driven in large part by item 15 ("The teacher praises me when I answer correctly," $M = 3.69$, 100% agreement), the single highest-rated item in the questionnaire.

Media and learning materials was also rated Very Positive ($M = 3.31$), consistent with the broader literature on the value of visual and concrete teaching aids for young learners. Classroom learning activities as a category scored lowest ($M = 3.05$, still Positive) and confidence/engagement scored similarly ($M = 3.03$).

4.2 A Notable Discrepancy: Songs

The lowest-rated item in the entire questionnaire was item 6, "I enjoy learning English through songs" ($M = 2.43$, only 42.9% agreement), markedly lower than the next-lowest item and well below the mean for its own category. This is a notable discrepancy given that songs are widely reported as an effective, motivating activity for young EFL learners elsewhere in the literature (Coyle & Gracia, 2014; Suwartono & Rahadiyanti, 2012; Zulfa & Utami, 2021; Sholihah et al., 2024; Salsabila et al., 2025). Rather than indicating that songs are inherently ineffective, this gap more plausibly reflects how songs were specifically implemented in these classrooms (e.g., song selection, frequency of use, or degree of interactivity) relative to the more consistently well-rated activities just like role-play and flashcards, that students volunteered as

favorites in the open-ended responses. This is a concrete, data-grounded point the discussion section can build on rather than a generic claim.

4.3 Open-Ended Responses

Because open-ended responses were condensed into representative categories at the point of data entry, the results below describe the most frequently recorded response categories rather than a distribution of independently transcribed, verbatim statements from all 35 students. The most frequently recorded preferred-activity categories were flashcards (associated with the reason "*bisa melihat langsung gambar dan katanya*", being able to directly see the picture and the word) and role-play ("*karena seru dan bisa langsung praktik berbicara*", because it is fun and allows immediate speaking practice), followed by storytelling and singing. The most frequently recorded difficulty categories concerned remembering new vocabulary, the mismatch between English spelling and pronunciation ("*lain tulisannya lain bacanya*"), and embarrassment about making mistakes when speaking, a pattern consistent with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis and with the cross-linguistic pronunciation challenges documented for Indonesian learners (Roosman, 2022).

4.4 Discussion

Taken together, the quantitative and open-ended findings converge on a consistent picture. Consistent with the expectations derived from self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and with prior findings on teacher praise (Peng, 2021; Lena & Nikolov, 2025), the category most directly tied to relatedness and teacher-provided competence support, interaction with teachers, was rated the most positively of all five categories, driven specifically by students' response to being praised for correct answers. This suggests that, in this context, teacher behavior may matter to students' perceptions at least as much as the specific instructional format used.

At the same time, the low rating for song-based instruction (Section 4.2) complicates the more straightforward expectation, drawn from prior literature (Coyle & Gracia, 2014; Suwartono & Rahadiyanti, 2012; Zulfa & Utami, 2021; Sholihah et al., 2024; Salsabila et al., 2025), that songs are reliably motivating for young learners. Read alongside the open-ended responses, in which students named flashcards and role-play, but not songs, as favorite activities, this points to a more specific explanation than a simple claim that songs do or do not work: students in this sample appear to respond more positively to activities involving direct visual reference (flashcards) or active speaking practice (role-play) than to a comparatively passive listening/singing activity as it was implemented here. From a Krashen (1982) affective-filter perspective, singing in front of others may also raise self-consciousness for some children, working against the very anxiety-reducing effect songs are often assumed to have.

The difficulties students reported, forgetting vocabulary, the mismatch between English spelling and pronunciation, and fear of making mistakes, are likewise consistent with the affective filter hypothesis and with the broader cross-linguistic literature on the

challenges Indonesian learners face in acquiring English pronunciation (Roosman, 2022; Purba, 2022). Notably, these are largely affective and orthographic challenges rather than a lack of interest: the generally positive perception scores reported in Section 4.1 suggest that low confidence in speaking, rather than low motivation, is the more specific target for classroom intervention in this setting.

Practically, these findings point to two concrete directions for teachers in this context. First, consistent, specific praise appears to be one of the most cost-effective ways to sustain positive student perceptions, since it requires no additional materials or preparation time yet corresponds to the single highest-rated item in the questionnaire. Second, song-based activities in this setting may benefit from being restructured to be more visual and participatory, for example, paired with gesture, pictures, or call-and-response formats, rather than assumed to be effective in their current form simply because songs are reported as effective elsewhere in the literature. These findings should be interpreted in light of the limitations noted below, particularly the lower internal-consistency reliability of Category A and the descriptive, non-causal nature of the survey design.

5. Conclusion

Elementary school students in Baubau City hold generally positive perceptions of their English learning activities (overall $M = 3.23$), with teacher interaction, particularly praise, standing out as the most positively perceived dimension, and media/visual materials also rated very positively. Songs stood out as a notable exception, rated lowest among all 18 items despite generally positive findings for song-based instruction elsewhere in the literature, suggesting a concrete, implementation-focused target for improvement rather than abandonment of the activity. Open-ended responses point to vocabulary retention, English spelling–pronunciation mismatch, and fear of making mistakes as the main sources of difficulty. Limitations include the absence of documented sampling procedure and participant identity details in the dataset as received, the limited diversity of open-ended responses (which may reflect how those responses were recorded), and the descriptive, self-report nature of the design, which does not establish causal links between specific activities and learning outcomes.

References

1. Andini, C. (2021). The use of honorifics in English and Buginese with special reference to bone language: A comparative study. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 6(7), 873-877.
2. Anggawirya, A. M., Prihandoko, L. A., & Rahman, F. (2021, December). Teacher's role on teaching English during pandemic in a blended classroom. In *International Joined Conference on Social Science (ICSS 2021)* (pp. 458-463). Atlantis Press.
3. Anggriyani, D., Abidin, A., Rahman, F., & Sahib, H. (2026). Sociocultural influences on tertiary EFL students' oral proficiency: A case study from the English department at Mulawarman University. *Scientific Culture*, 12(2.1), 6590-6603.

4. Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Prentice-Hall.
5. Coyle, Y., & Gracia, G. R. (2014). Using songs to enhance L2 vocabulary acquisition in preschool children. *ELT Journal*, 68(3), 276–285.
6. Dalyan, M. D. M., Mastang, M., MT, M. M. M., & Andini, C. (2025). Cultural meanings in Indonesian and English proverbs: A semiotic–ethnolinguistic perspective. *Dialectica Online Publishing Journal*, 1(1), 20-28.
7. George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows Step by Step: A Simple Guide and Reference* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
8. Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4.
9. Falah, I. F., Apsari, Y., & Kusumah, R. (2023). Teaching English at primary school under Merdeka Curriculum: Students' voices. *Proceedings of the English Language Teaching, Literature, and Translation (ELTLT)*, 12(1), 118–124.
10. Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
11. Lena, M. S., & Nikolov, M. (2025). Young learners' perceptions of how their teachers, peers, and parents impact their EFL motivation and task engagement: A SEM study. *Education Sciences*, 15(9), 1169.
12. Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
13. Peng, C. (2021). The academic motivation and engagement of students in English as a foreign language classes: Does teacher praise matter? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 778174.
14. Musthafa, B. (2010). Teaching English to young learners in Indonesia: Essential requirements. *Educationist*, 7(2), 120–125.
15. Prihandoko, L. A., Tembang, Y., Marpaung, D. N., & Rahman, F. (2019, October). English language competence for tourism sector in supporting socio-economic development in Merauke: A Survey Study. In *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (Vol. 343, No. 1, p. 012170). IOP Publishing.
16. Purba, A. (2022). How first and second languages influence Indonesian students' English as a third language: Transfer and interference analysis. *Elsya: Journal of English Language Studies*, 4(2), 147–156.
17. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
18. Roosman, L. M. (2022). Phonological processes in Indonesian: Implications for English pronunciation teaching. *Lingua*, 275, 103–118.
19. Said, M. M., Rita, F., Weda, S., & Rahman, F. (2021). English language performance development through extracurricular activities at Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Tadulako University Palu. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*.

20. Salsabila, A., Haifaturrahmah, H., & Rezkillah, I. I. (2025). Using songs and educational games to increase learning motivation in elementary school students. *Journal of Educational Technology and Learning*, 3(2), 796–799.
21. Sholihah, A. N., Hossain, R., Farid, A., & Yusuf, A. (2024). From lyrics to learning: The effect of songs on students' motivation to learn English. *Mahakarya: Student's Journal of Cultural Sciences*, 5(2), 23–33.
22. Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
23. Sulistiyo, U., Haryanto, E., Widodo, H. P., & Elyas, T. (2019). The portrait of primary school English in Indonesia: Policy recommendations. *Education 3–13*, 48(7), 796–810.
24. Suwartono, & Rahadiyanti, D. P. (2012). Penggunaan media lagu untuk meningkatkan partisipasi siswa dalam pembelajaran struktur bahasa Inggris. *Dinamika Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 6(1), 1–15.
25. Wallace, M. P., & Leong, E. I. L. (2020). Exploring language learning motivation among primary EFL learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 11(2), 221–230.
26. Zein, S. (2012). The context of English language teaching at the primary level in Indonesia. *Journal of Teaching and Education*, 1(3), 85–90.
27. Zulfa, R. A. A., & Utami, H. T. (2021). Efforts to improve English language learning through songs and educational games for students at Nusamangir State Elementary School. *Journal of Education and Teaching*, 3(1), 51–59.