GAME-BASED ENGLISH LEARNING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract:

Games has been extensively known to increase students' motivation and interest in learning English. However, its main findings and the trends in English teaching and learning for young learners are still unknown. To fill the gap, the aim of this study was to examine the application of games-based English learning for young learners. A literature analysis was conducted to several databases including Garuda, Science Direct, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Taylor and Francis, Eric, and Jour. System, and a total of 30 journals were analyzed through systematic review was used as the research methodology. The journals were analyzed utilizing a content analysis method and the data are presented in systematic diagrams and tables. The result of the study revealed that game-based English learning was very popular among Indonesian English young learners between the years 2011-2021. In 2020, the popularity of games based on English learning was very high. In addition, the most used research method in game-based English learning studies was quantitative method. Moreover, game-based English learning was most implemented at the elementary school levels, and the most learned language skill was to increase vocabulary. Further analysis of challenges, advantages and effectiveness related to the use of game-based English learning for young learners was also illustrated.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, we live in a digital world where everyone, from adults to children, can master technology in the form of gadgets and computers. We are no stranger to technology, or anything related to the internet. Rapid development and innovation make the technology very helpful for human activities, it can even be said that humans today cannot be separated from technology and the internet. Where adults use technology to make their work easier while children are used to playing games, not only that, almost everyone loves games. Nowadays, almost all modern technologies use English and students at elementary schools belong to those who make use of the technology.

Along with the development of games, not only as games, but now games innovate into a place where we can learn while playing. Many teachers or schools use games as part of the learning process, one of which is learning English. According to Hans Daeng (in Ismail, 2009: 17), game can be "an absolute activity of a child's life and is an integral part of the process of forming a child's personality". Educational games can create children who have good character. Children in general really like games, play activities are carried out by children at school as a learning process, which requires techniques or ways to teach early childhood children to learn with characters who like to play.

Haycraft (1978) argues that games are an agreeable way of getting a class to use their action in English. According to Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1984), games foster students to direct their potential towards language learning by providing relevant contexts. Games are very important for students and English teachers not only to provide fun and relaxation but also to encourage students to use their language creatively and communicatively. Although some English teachers see language games as spending a lot of time or just for fun, games also have a tremendous role in any foreign language teaching program because teachers facilitate foreign language learning, especially for young learners. According to Chang, Kuo, Chen and Hirose (2009), games are important activities in the learning environment because they can enhance memorable learning experiences, elevate mood, and make learning effective and pleasant.

Games provide many advantages for language teachers when used in the classroom. One of the advantages is that students are motivated to learn the language when they are in the game. Games motivate and absorb students into the competitive aspects of the game and try to be more active in the game than in other subjects. In other words, games stimulate students' interest in classroom activities and as a result, students become motivated and willing to learn (Avedon, 1971; Quoted in Deesri, 2002). A good teacher must know it so that they can consider how best to teach them. Moreover, Usman (2016) said that young learners of English are young learners who learn English. They are elementary school-age children who receive English lessons as local content in their schools. Before applying games-based learning in English lessons, Teachers must be aware of what interests and motivates them. Teachers can develop interesting and motivational English classes by understanding what interests our pupils (Lastari, Mustafa & Nur'Aini, 2020).

In the field of teaching English as a foreign language, creative teachers use games as a method to get students excited about learning, especially for young learners. Bakhsh (2016) in his journal entitled "Using Games as a Tool in Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners" said that young students refer to those who are 5 years old and have just entered kindergarten until 12 years old and attend elementary school. However, this opinion cannot be used as a benchmark, because of the influence of their environment, culture, and genetics. Ana (2018) argues that young students are students who learn English as a foreign language for the first six to seven years of elementary school level. Bakhsh (2016) described the younger generation of students as having difficulties in their virtual environment. They have imaginations that their teacher might misinterpret. They prefer to work in teams as well as in play. The younger generation likes to speak first without knowing the meaning. They learn not only from theory but through behavioral observations. Praise becomes motivation for those who make it very important in their development. These characteristics of young learners force English teachers to be more

creative in designing instructions to keep them interested. Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (2006) believe that games can help and encourage students to maintain their interest, assist English teachers in creating practical and meaningful language situations, and assist learners in understanding rather than learning the language in a one-way manner. So, the game is one of the strategies that can be used for motivating young learners to learn.

In the world of education, teachers are greatly helped by the existence of technology, especially teachers who teach young learners. Not surprisingly, now English teachers in Indonesia and other countries use game-based learning in teaching English to young learners. Several factors need to be considered when teaching English as a foreign language to young learners. For example, learning should be fun and natural. When teaching English as a foreign language to young learners, several considerations should be made, including learning fun and natural, using sounds before written symbols in the first stage of teaching the language, and starting with what the students already recognize to inspire association (Septida, 2020). Therefore, the use of game-based learning is suitable for use in the conditions of the digital generation like today.

Game-based learning is a learning method that uses game applications that have been specifically designed to assist in the learning process. Game-based learning development can create an environment that is motivating, fun and enhances creativity. Game-based learning can be an attractive solution for students because the development of game-based learning applications has been widely applied. There are many educational games that we can find on smartphone devices, even many are web-based applications. The teacher only needs to choose one game that is adapted to the material that we will provide. The studies of game-based learning for young learners in ELT have been extensively conducted. However, none of them focused on the main findings and trends specifically in ELT context. For this purpose of the study, the following research question were formulated, as follow:

Research Question 1 (RQ 1). What are the trends in game-based English Learning for young learners?
Research Question 2 (RQ 2). What are the main findings from the available literature?

METHOD
This study used a systematic review method, which is a literature review. Literature review contains a description of the theory, conclusion, and other research materials obtained from reference materials to be used as the ground for research activities. The findings of previous research can be checked for consistency and generalizability to various scopes or samples using systematic reviews. We have collected and read numerous articles and have analyzed 30 articles out of them focusing on game-based English learning for young learners.

Data Collection
On 19 Mei 2021, we search and navigated numerous articles from the selected national and international journals. A systematic search was conducted in the databases, such as Web of Science, Sciencedirect, ERIC, Taylor & Francis, Garuda, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Jour system. These databases were selected since they contain the highest number of education-related studies. The search terms used included 'Games

based learning for young learners', 'Game based learning for young learners in EFL', 'Games based learning for ELT young learners', 'Games based learning for ESL young learners', 'Games for young learners', 'Digital games based learning', 'Digital-game based learning for young learners in EFL', 'Digital-games based learning to young learners', 'Digital games based learning in EFL/ESL for young learners'. Only research studies were included among the results.

Data Analysis

Table 1 Subcategories of research questions

Research Question	Sub-categories
(RQ 1) What are the trends in game-based English learning for young learners?	• Year Distribution of the studies • Used research method (quantitative, qualitative, mixed, etc.) • Education levels • Countries
(RQ 2) What are the main findings from the available literature?	Studied basic language skills (speaking, reading, listening, writing) Advantages Challenges Effectiveness

Source: analyzing journal

All the studies examined in this paper were analyzed and made a matrix reference by researchers. The researchers employed the content analysis approach for the study, which is commonly used for textual analyses and enables for data comparison, contrast, and categorization (Frankael & Wallen, 2000). Microsoft Word was used to construct the analysis' results. Each item was summarized, and potential arguments relevant to the research question were identified and classified. The classification was based on characteristics such as the goals and research questions, the year, the method, the countries, the findings, and the conclusion. The form was filled with related information after a careful reading of each article. After completing the form for each study, also Microsoft word was used for making a matrix references. As seen in **Table 1,** the first research question (RQ1) and related subcategories included descriptive information which is directly stated in the reviewed articles. The second research question (RQ2) and related subcategories, on the other hand, sought detailed information about the reviewed articles. To define the advantages and challenges, the first step was to read all the studies after which the codes and categories were identified.

Our search for articles to be reviewed returned 85 articles from different databases. Upon removing the duplicates, there were 65 articles to be reviewed. After an examination of the titles and abstracts, 30 of those 65 articles were removed since they were not relevant to ELT and the games-based English learning for young learners.
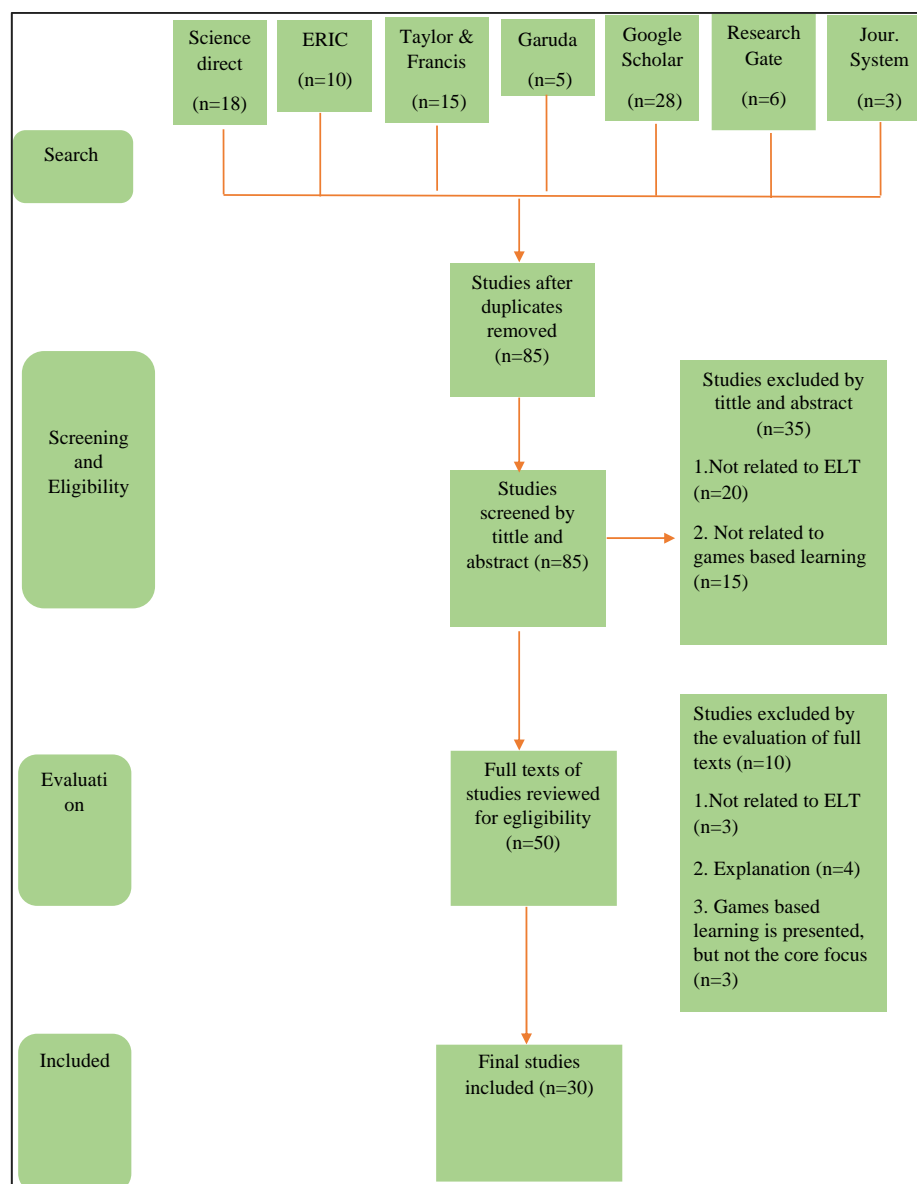
Figure 1 Diagram of systematic review process (adapted from Liberati et al., 2009)

Another three were excluded from the study since they were not written in English. The remaining 50 articles were reviewed for eligibility, and the results showed that three of the studies were not related to ELT. In addition, other six articles included only descriptive information about games-based learning method and were not scientific research studies. In three of the articles, the games-based learning was not the focus of the research, and thus they were removed from the present study. After the above-mentioned process, there finally remained a total of 30 studies to be reviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Trends in Game Based English Learning

For the purpose of answering RQ1, the following subcategories were defined and examined by the researchers: Distribution of the studies by years, Research methods used in articles, Education levels of samples, and Countries of articles. In the following section, the subcategories are described in detail.

Year distribution of the studies

The distribution of the studies referring to the game-based learning by years is shown in **Figure 3**. The first research into area was published in 2011 (n=3), After which there was a decrease and an increase in the number of the studies during the 2013 until 2021 period. Meanwhile, the most research on game-based learning is in 2020 (n= 10).
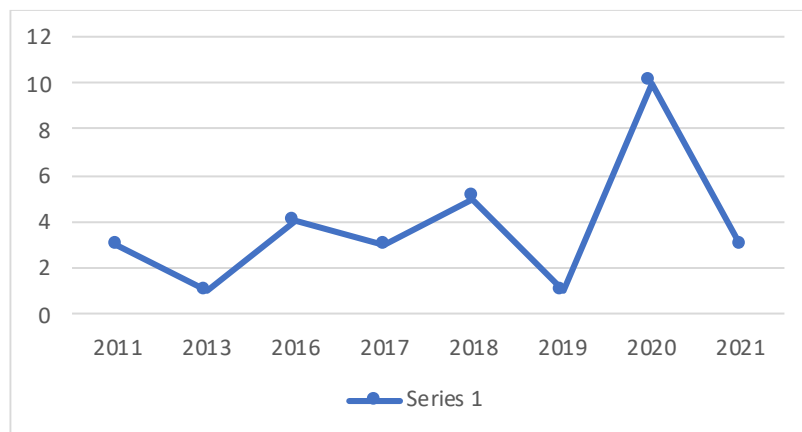
Figure 2 The number of articles by year

Research methods used in articles

As shown in **Figure 2**, the most used research method was the Quantitative (n = 15). Followed by The Qualitative method (n = 8) and The Mixed method (n=3). The least commonly used methods were The Research and Development method (n = 1), The Applied Research method (n = 1), The Prototype method (n = 1), and The Literature method (n = 1).
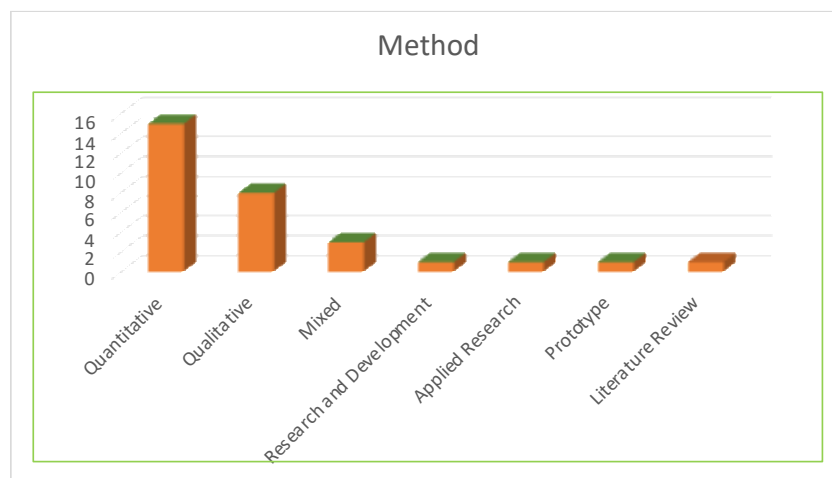
Figure 3 Research methods used in the reviewed article

Education levels of samples

Figure 4 reveals that the vast majority of articles (77%) selected Elementary/Primary School as the sample, and the remaining group is Pre-School (23%).
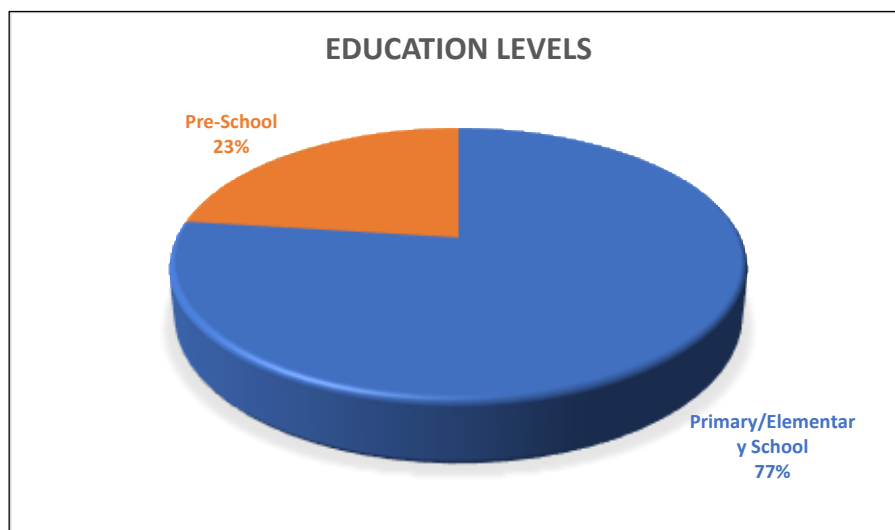
EDUCATION LEVELS

Pre-School
23%

Primary/Elementar
y School
77%

Figure 4 The education levels of the samples of the reviewed articles

Countries of articles

As shown in **Figure 5,** the country that mostly applies game-based English Learning method is Indonesia (n = 17). And, followed by countries that apply Game-Based English Learning method quite a lot are Iran (n = 4) and China (n = 3). Meanwhile, the countries that apply game-based learning the least are Poland (n = 1), Turkey (n = 1), Taiwan (n = 1), India (n = 1), Uzbekistan (n = 1), and Spain (n = 1).
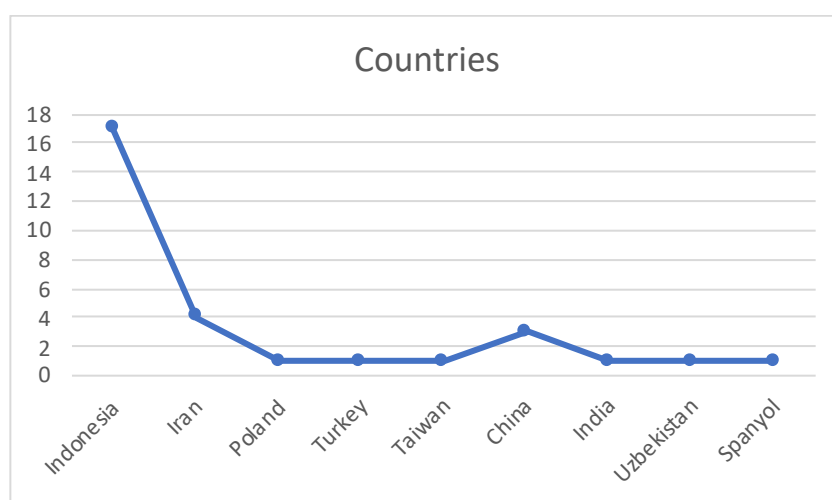
Countries

Figure 5 The articles by countries.

The main findings from the available literature

In response to RQ2, the subcategories examined by the authors included the studied basic language skills, advantages and challenges of game-based English Learning, and

effectiveness of game-based English learning. The following section covers descriptions of each category.

Studied basic language skills

As shown in **Figure 6** Of the 30 articles, almost every journal contains several skills, not just one skill in each article. The most learned skill in game based English learning is Vocabulary (n = 21). Then followed by Speaking skill (n = 5), Grammar skill (n = 4), Reading skill (n = 4), and the least is Listening skill (n = 2).
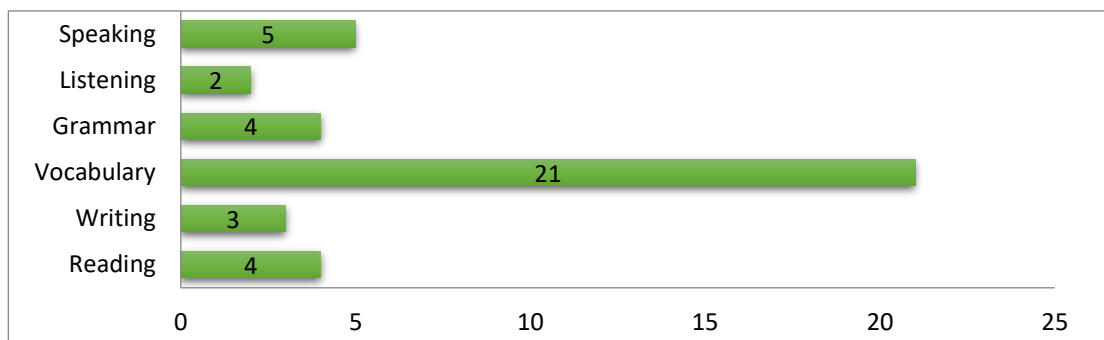

Figure 6 Studied basic language skills of reviewed articles

Advantages of Game-based English Learning

Table 2 reveals the advantages of game-based English learning. The most mentioned include increasing students' motivation (n = 13), more entertaining (n = 7), decreasing studying anxiety (n = 5), improving speaking ability (n = 5), and improving students' vocabulary (n = 4).

Table 2 The Advantages of Game Based English Learning

Advantages	f	Sample articles
Increasing students' motivation	13	Kurniati (2020), Ana (2018), Sukenasa, Shih & Surjono (2020), Aslanabadi & Rasouli (2013), Yolageldili & Arikan (2011), Halim, Hashim, & Yunus (2020), Fachriyani & Syafe'i (2018), Bahari (2020), Mahayanti, Kusuma & Wibawa (2020), Yang, Quadir & Chen (2019), Prasetya, & Patmanthara (2014), Nur, Ardita, & Oliviera (2020), dan Wulanjani (2016).
Decreasing studying anxiety	5	Yolageldili & Arikan (2011), Lastari, Mustafa, & Nur'Aini (2020), Jafarian & Shoari (2017), Mukmin & Sabata (2017), dan Aslanabadi & Rasouli (2013)
More entertaining	7	Gruss (2016), Septida (2020), Dewi & Listiowarni (2019), Muhammad, Rohayati & Hairi (2020), Jafarian & Shoari (2017), Yolageldili & Arikan (2011), dan Aslanabadi & Rasouli (2013)
Improving speaking ability	5	Aghlara & Tamjid (2011), Rusiana & Nuraeningsih (2016), Halim, Hashim & Yunus (2020), Casas i Faig (2020), Wang & Han (2021)
Improving students' vocabulary	4	Kurniati (2020), Ana (2018), Sukenasa, Shih, & Surjono (2020), dan Rusiana & Nuraeningsih (2016)
Improving their learning process and performance	3	Yang, Quadir & Chen (2019), Aslanabadi & Rasouli (2013), dan Fachriyani & Syafe'i (2018)

Increasing their english learning outcomes	2	Prilia, Ratminingsih, & Myartawan (2018) dan Kurniati (2020)
(as) effective learning tools	2	Nur, Ardita & Oliviera (2020), Bakhsh (2016)
Enhancing children's fine motor skills	1	Aghlara & Tamjid (2011)
Improving listening comprehension	1	Aghlara & Tamjid (2011)
Enhancing students' interdependence	1	Mahayanti, Kusuma & Wibawa (2020)
Enhancing unconscious acquisition of inputs	1	Wulanjani (2016)
Making creative environment	1	Prasetya & Patmanthara (2014)
Improving self-confidence	1	Aslanabadi & Rasouli (2013)

Challenges of Implementing Game Based English Learning

The process might not be as smooth as expected. **Tabel 3** reveals the most commonly reported challenges as the teacher pays less attention to the approach of student interests (n = 2), limitations in explaining content and material (n = 1), students only behave competitively without cooperative (n = 1), and inadequate facilities and technology or support for the game (n = 1).

Table 3 Challenges of Game Based Learning

Challenges	*f*	Sampel article
The teacher pays less attention to the approach of student interests	2	Yolageldili & Arikan (2011), Zhang (2018, March)
Limitations in explaining content and material	1	Jafarian & Shoari (2017)
Students only behave competitively without cooperative	1	Septida (2020)
Inadequate facilities and technology or support for the game	1	Ana (2018)

The Effectiveness of Game-based English Learning effectiveness

As shown in **Tabel 4,** a total of 24 articles measured the effectiveness of the game based english learning for young learners. 20 from 24 studies found out that game based English learning is effective for young learners, one of the studies was inconclusive since both positive and negative result were obtained, and three studies concluded that no difference for young learners.

Tabel 4 Findings of the articles about the effectiveness of the Game Based Learning

Findings	*f*	Sampel article
More Effective	20	Wang & Han (2021), Wulanjani (2016), Andreani & Ying (2019), Muhammad, Rohayati, & Hairi, (2020), Sultanova, (2011), Prilia, Ratminingsih, & Myartawan, (2018), Aghlara & Tamjid (2011), Kurniati (2020), Halim, Hashim & Yunus (2020), Yolageldili & Arikan (2011), Rusiana & Nuraeningsih (2016), Ana (2018), Gruss. (2016), Aslanabadi & Rasouli (2013), Jafarian & Shoari (2017), Mahayanti, Kusuma & Wibawa (2020), Sukenasa, Shih & Surjono, (2020), Casas i Faig (2020), Bahari

		(2020), Lastari, Mustafa, & Nur'Aini (2020), Fachriyani & Syafe'i. (2018).
More effective and / or makes no difference	1	Yang, Quadir & Chen (2019)
No Difference	3	Bakhsh (2016), Prasetya & Patmanthara (2014), Mahayanti & Wibawa (2020)

Discussion

In this study, 30 articles reviewed from web of sciencedirect, ERIC, Taylor & Francis, Garuda, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Jour system were analyzed in terms of the main findings and the trends. Based on the research that we have researched; it can be concluded that game-based learning is very helpful for teachers in the learning process for young learners in learning English.

The analysis shows that after experiencing ups and downs in the number of articles about game based English learning for young learners, a rapid increase occurred in 2020. And the perceived benefits after using this method may be one of the reasons for the increase in the number of studies. It can be seen that there is a strong interest in this topic especially in 2020, which shows an increase in popularity in the coming years but unfortunately this method is experiencing a very rapid decline in 2021. This maybe the game based English learning method is difficult to implement due to the pandemic. In the articles analyzed, the most commonly used research method is the quantitative method, which may be due to the urge to statistically examine the relationship between the use of game-based learning in English learning to young learners. Despite the high proportion of quantitative study methods, such studies are rare in the literature, research and development, applied research, and prototypes. For example, our search retrieved 30 studies that met the criteria for study in the current study. However, empirical data relating to the effects of games-based learning for young learners 24 of the 30 studies reviewed indicate that there is still a lack of research in the field.

In the study studied, the sample group that was most widely applied was elementary school students, and preschool students that used game-based English learning. At last, a review study in the literature shows that in research on educational technology, game-based learning is widely chosen by teachers to teach young learners. They prefer young learners because they are easier to give input through games as learning aids.

This systematic review reveals a number of studies on games-based learning for young learners in various countries, with Indonesia hosting the highest number of studies. Conducting more research on the use of classroom methods for young learners in countries with different cultures and educational trends could offer broad and useful insights into the topic. By preparing the media you want to use, then paying attention to extra time to control facilities, applications and interactions in the classroom. Thus, this can lead to a greater opportunity to increase unconscious inputs (Wulanjani, 2016). Systematically from the articles reviewed in this study, the most common vocabulary was investigated. The lowest language skill is listening. Studies for those language skills, however, are still rather scarce in the literature. Future research may be able to provide

deep insights into the effective use of games-based learning methods for young learners by reporting improvements in language skills.

This article states the various benefits provided by the games-based learning method in the field of learning and teaching English. The benefits that are most often obtained are motivating students, decreasing anxiety and entertaining to complete their tasks in learning English. Therefore, Games can provide a stimulating and motivating learning environment in the classroom by providing an engaging, exciting, and intriguing environment (Fachriyani & Syafe'i, 2018).

According to Jafarian & Shoari (2017), games make learning materials more interesting for students, i.e., they make uninteresting materials more exciting for them. It allows to make it easier for teachers to carry out learning activities so that students get good learning outcomes. Therefore, effective and significant results are not impossible. The articles reviewed in this study confirm that games based learning for young learners show that this method helps students improve their speaking ability, vocabulary mastery, their performance and increasing English learning outcomes. However, the research results differ from Yang, et. al. (2019) which states that the high-trait EI students, there was no significant association between gaming performance and learning performance. More specifically, the result show that the greater the gaming performance, the better the learning performance in the game for students with low characteristic EI. This may not be a big problem because the results of research with this method have stated a lot of significant results. However, the games based learning method for young learners may also cause difficulties for some teachers or students.

In the reviewed studies, the challenges encountered are the teacher pays less attention to the approach of student interests (Yolageldili & Arikan, 2011). Furthermore, Jafarian & Shoari (2017) states the challenges that limitations in explaining content and material. Also, students only behave competitively without cooperative (Septida, 2020). Other challenges and disadvantages found are facilities and technology that do not support (Ana, 2018) maybe something like this happened because the teacher wanted a games based learning method for young learners through digital media but was hampered because the facilities did not exist at the school, but such an event could be done with traditional games without involving technology. Teachers should also pay attention to whether the facilities support or not before implementing digital games.

The findings of this study can help teachers and researchers develop ideas about reverse classroom practice in education. A ubiquitous game-based English learning system, according to Liu and Chu (in Yang, J. C. et al., 2019), could boost learning motivation and performance, as well as learning effectiveness and satisfaction, so that it can provide benefits in increasing student involvement in the classroom when learning activities take place. Young learners have a higher chance of developing their ideas or ideas because they have a sense of enjoyment and pleasure when learning English. Games-based learning for young learners also pave the way for better education, especially in learning English because this method is suitable for young learners to provide comfort for students such as learning while playing. Zhang (2018) argued that the focus of a games-based approach should be on the students' interests. Therefore, the English teacher must use the right game in teaching because usually the teacher spends more time just to prepare,

explain and play without paying attention to the time to study or practice, so that there is less time to do the exercises. However, the insertion of character values in games-based learning is the right step to instill character values for early childhood (Prasetya, et.al., 2014). Maybe this can be applied to produce students with good character. Furthermore, teachers who introduce games-based learning for young learners should know how this method works and what must be achieved before starting learning to get the best learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Game-based English learning has proven to be very helpful for teachers and students in learning activities as described in the discussion above. However, just as other methods have their drawbacks, so too is this method. Based on the research we found that there are still things that need further research. Beside the advantages of using games as a learning tool, it still has some disadvantages which need to be concerned. Game based learning makes student have more anxiety because there is a pressure to choose the right answer among the group of learning. In the group of learning, students may over-active that makes a crowd while learning. Moreover, some games maybe not entertaining students anymore because the frequency of using the game. Suggestions for the future researchers might research to find solutions regarding the drawbacks of using games in learning English. And the research should not be limited to the level of young learners but can be raised to the higher level of education.

1. **Recommendations for future research**
   - There need to be more studies into implementing game-based English learning for junior high school, senior high school, and university

2. **Recommendations for practitioners**
   Educators must be able to adjust the conditions of students and teaching materials in the use of this method to have a positive impact on learning

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