

Students' Perceptions of a Google Forms-Based Escape Room for Learning the Past Tense: A Case Study at SMA Negeri 4 Cirebon

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Abstract: *This study explores the use of a Google Forms-based Escape Room as a tool for teaching the simple past tense in an EFL classroom with limited technological resources. Conducted at SMA Negeri 4 Cirebon, the study involved 34 tenth-grade students who participated in a series of Escape Room activities designed to enhance grammar learning. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and non-participant observations. Findings reveal that the majority of students found the Escape Room method enjoyable, motivating, and helpful for understanding past tense rules, particularly verb forms and time adverbs. Many students reported increased confidence and better memory retention after the activity. However, challenges such as internet connectivity issues, game mechanics, and confusion over past tense usage were also noted. Thematic analysis shows that while the method promoted engagement and provided contextualized grammar practice, individual learning preferences and technical barriers influenced student experiences. This study suggests that a Google Forms-based Escape Room is a feasible and effective strategy for grammar instruction in low-tech environments and provides insights for educators seeking to implement gamified learning with minimal resources.*

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of grammar, particularly the simple past tense, is a vital component of language learning. This tense is used to describe actions or events that occurred in the past (Harmer, 2007), yet mastering it can be challenging for students, especially when distinguishing between regular and irregular verbs (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). While traditional grammar instruction may be effective in certain contexts, it often fails to engage students or address their diverse learning preferences. As a result, many students face difficulties in fully grasping grammar concepts. To address these challenges, educators are increasingly turning to more interactive and engaging methods that encourage active participation and deeper understanding.

Game-based learning has emerged as one such approach, offering a dynamic and engaging environment for students. Gamification in digital learning environments has been positively received by pre-service teachers in Indonesia, reflecting a growing acceptance of interactive

educational technology (Asitah, Suyitno, & Nusantara 2025). Specifically, game-based digital media has been shown to foster collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking in classroom settings (Arzfi, Montessori, & Rusdinal, 2025). These activities provide students with opportunities to solve puzzles and complete tasks that reinforce their understanding in an engaging and collaborative way. The use of Google Forms as a platform for such games has gained traction as a low-tech solution, particularly in schools with limited internet access or technological resources.

Based on four months of teaching experience at SMA Negeri 4 Cirebon, a school with limited infrastructure where some classrooms are situated in forested regions with unreliable internet connectivity, The researcher observed firsthand the challenges of integrating technology into the classroom. Despite these limitations, the researcher found that Google Forms, due to its accessibility and simplicity, emerged as a feasible tool for creating interactive learning experiences. Unlike other more complex game-based applications, Google Forms allowed the researcher to develop an escape room activity that students could easily engage with, even in a low-tech environment. This experience motivated the researcher to explore the potential of Google Forms-based escape rooms method for teaching the simple past tense, as it represents a practical and engaging alternative to traditional grammar instruction, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

The academic importance of this research lies in its exploration of an accessible, low-tech method for teaching grammar in schools where technology resources are limited. Research has shown that game-based learning can significantly enhance student engagement and understanding of grammar (Klopfer et al., 2009; Wang, 2019). However, much of the research has focused on high-tech environments with reliable internet access, leaving a gap in the literature regarding how these methods can be adapted for schools with unreliable connectivity. Google Forms offers an innovative solution for this issue, providing a platform for creating interactive escape room games without requiring constant internet access. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining how Google Forms can be leveraged to teach the simple past tense in a way that is engaging, interactive, and accessible, even in rural or under-resourced schools.

Previous studies have highlighted the positive impact of gamification on student motivation and learning outcomes (Rahmi, Rimenda, & Ariyanti 2024; Arzfi, Montessori, & Rusdinal, 2025). Moreover, research by DiLiberto, Luken, and Sugar (2024) suggests that Google Forms can be used to design effective escape room activities, offering a flexible and cost-effective solution for teachers. Their study also found that escape room activities can successfully boost student engagement and support the development of cultural literacy. Similarly, Widhianto, Burhanuddin, and Nurhayati (2021) emphasize that Google Forms is an easy-to-use platform that allows educators to create interactive learning experiences without the need for expensive or specialized software. Supporting this, Rosseli, R (2023) investigated the use of digital escape rooms and found that they can lead to improved scores on formal grammar tests. Despite these advantages, there is still limited research specifically examining the use of Google Forms in grammar instruction, particularly in settings with unreliable internet access. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how Google Forms can be used to create an escape room activity for teaching the simple past tense.

Moreover, in language learning, Nurbaety and Hartini (2020) revealed that one of the factors that influenced students' demotivation may be connected to the learning environment, which is often perceived as dull or uninspiring. Boring learning materials can significantly reduce student engagement and motivation, further hindering their ability to understand complex

grammar rules. By introducing interactive and game-based activities like the Google Forms-based escape room, this study aims to combat such demotivation and create a more engaging learning environment.

The main objective of this research is to explore students' perceptions of using a Google Forms-based Escape Room for learning the simple past tense. The study will examine the challenges and benefits that students experience when engaging with this interactive method. By investigating the effectiveness of this approach, the research aims to provide valuable insights into how technology-based game methods can support grammar learning in classrooms with limited technological resources. As Rosseli, R (2023) explains, digital escape rooms in grammar teaching can significantly enhance both knowledge retention and student motivation. The findings will also offer practical recommendations for teachers working in similar settings, helping them make English lessons more engaging and interactive.

This research will be conducted at SMA Negeri 4 Cirebon, where unreliable internet access and limited technological infrastructure pose significant challenges for implementing digital learning tools. The study's context is crucial because it reflects the reality faced by many schools in rural or underserved areas, where access to high-tech resources is limited. In the Indonesian context, gamification has been adapted to accommodate infrastructural limitations in higher education settings (Panis, Setyosari, Kuswandi, & Yuliati, 2020). By focusing on Google Forms, this study offers a practical, low-tech solution that can be easily implemented in classrooms with limited resources, thus contributing to the broader conversation on how technology can support grammar instruction in challenging educational contexts.

In summary, this study investigates the use of Google Forms for creating an escape room activity to teach the simple past tense, focusing on the challenges and benefits students experience with this method. The research aims to answer the following questions: (1) What challenges do students face when learning using the Google Forms-based Escape Room for the past tense? and (2) What benefits do students perceive from using this method in learning English? The findings will provide insights into how game-based methods can enhance grammar learning and offer practical recommendations for improving grammar instruction in schools with limited technological resources.

METHOD

A qualitative case study design was selected for this research to enable an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon within its natural context. As a qualitative approach, it emphasized understanding the meanings that students construct from their experiences, particularly in relation to the Escape Room method as a tool for learning grammar. This design allowed for the collection of rich, descriptive data through observations, interviews, and reflective responses, capturing students' perspectives and emotional engagement. Case studies are especially well-suited for qualitative inquiries that aim to explore complex, context-bound phenomena (Creswell, 2013). The focus on a single class and their interaction with a specific learning method further justified the use of this approach.

Participants

The participants in this study were 34 students from the X2 class of SMA Negeri 4 Cirebon. These students were selected through convenience sampling, as they were readily available and willing to participate in the study. The students, aged between 15 and 16 years, were enrolled in an English course where past tense grammar was being taught. The choice of this specific class

was driven by the objective of examining how a particular group of students, at a similar academic level, engaged with the Escape Room method. Given that qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalization, a sample of 34 students was sufficient to provide rich, detailed insights into the learning experience. Although the sample size is small, it was deemed appropriate for qualitative research where the emphasis is on depth rather than breadth (Merriam, 2009).

Data Collection

Three main methods were used to collect data for this study:

- **Questionnaire:** A Likert scale questionnaire was distributed to the students after each Escape Room session. The questionnaire aimed to assess their perceptions of the Escape Room in terms of its ease of use, enjoyment, and effectiveness in helping them understand past tense grammar. The Likert scale allowed the students to express their level of agreement or disagreement with various statements regarding the game (Sugiyono, 2020). This method provided quantitative data on the students' attitudes toward the Escape Room, allowing for an analysis of trends in their perceptions.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of students to explore their experiences in more depth. This method provided a more flexible format for gathering qualitative data, allowing students to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings about the Escape Room. The interviews were guided by open-ended questions but allowed room for participants to share additional insights. Semi-structured interviews are particularly valuable in qualitative research because they offer an in-depth understanding of individual perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Dörnyei, 2007).
- **Non-Participant Observation:** To further triangulate the data, non-participant observation was conducted. This method allowed the researcher to gain direct insight into students' engagement, interactions, and behaviors during the Escape Room sessions without influencing the learning process. According to Julmi (2020), observation is a method for obtaining direct information from an observed situation, whether through active participation (participant observation) or mere observation without involvement (non-participant observation). By employing non-participant observation, the researcher could capture authentic classroom dynamics and students' responses to the Escape Room without interfering in the learning activities.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire, interviews, and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. The Likert scale responses were quantitatively analyzed to identify general trends, such as how many students found the Escape Room engaging or helpful in learning grammar. The interview and observation data were then analyzed qualitatively to identify key themes and patterns in the students' feedback and behaviors (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Triangulation was used to compare the results from all three data sources, ensuring consistency and providing a more holistic understanding of the students' perceptions. The thematic analysis focused on identifying recurring themes related to students' engagement with the Escape Room, their difficulties with past tense grammar, and their overall enjoyment of the method. This approach allowed for a detailed exploration of students' experiences and provided a nuanced understanding of how they perceived the effectiveness of the learning activity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The purpose of this study was to explore students' perceptions of using the Google Forms-based Escape Room method in learning the past tense. The data was collected through a questionnaire and interviews with 34 students. The findings indicate that this innovative method, though generally well-received, presented both benefits and challenges.

Students' Perceptions of the Escape Room Method

The majority of students (91.2%) found the Escape Room method either helpful or very helpful. Specifically, 55.9% of students considered it very helpful in their understanding of past tense grammar, and 35.3% thought it was helpful. The method was perceived as engaging and interactive, with many students appreciating the gamified learning environment. These findings support the idea that game-based learning, when well-designed, can improve students' engagement and motivation in language learning.

Table 1. Perceptions of the Escape Room Method

Perception Statement	Very Helpful (%)	Helpful (%)	Neutral (%)	Not Helpful (%)	Strongly Not Helpful (%)
The Escape Room method helped me learn past tense	55.9% (19)	35.3% (12)	8.8% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)

One notable unexpected finding was the neutrality expressed by 8.8% of the students. While the majority found the method to be helpful, the few who were neutral may indicate that some students did not fully connect with the gamified approach. This finding suggests that personal learning preferences play a significant role in how students respond to game-based learning methods. It is possible that these students preferred more traditional methods or faced external factors that influenced their experience (e.g., distractions or technical issues).

Technical Challenges

While the majority of students found the method beneficial, some technical difficulties were reported. About 20.6% of students experienced connectivity issues during the Escape Room activity, which interrupted their participation. Additionally, 5.9% of students mentioned problems with game mechanics, such as difficulty navigating the puzzles or issues with responses not being recorded properly. This suggests that despite the positive engagement, technical barriers remain a challenge for some students in using technology-based learning methods.

Table 2. Technical Challenges Faced

Technical Challenge	Percentage (%)
Internet connectivity issues	20.6% (7)
Difficulty understanding or using the game mechanics	5.9% (2)
Struggles with grammar comprehension	17.6% (6)

These findings are consistent with previous literature on the challenges faced by students when using technology in education. As several studies have noted, issues such as poor internet connection and technical difficulties can hinder the effectiveness of digital learning tools (Hidayah, 2022). Although these challenges were not pervasive, they should be addressed to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to benefit from such methods.

Impact on Grammar Understanding and Confidence

The results suggest that the Escape Room method positively impacted students' understanding of past tense grammar. Over half of the students (61.8%) reported that the Escape Room helped them better understand how to use past tense verbs correctly. Additionally, 41.2% of students agreed that their ability to remember past tense forms was improved after completing the Escape Room activity. The gamified experience seems to have reinforced their understanding through repeated practice in an engaging format.

Moreover, student confidence in using past tense grammar increased as a result of the Escape Room activity. A majority (64.7%) of students felt more confident in using past tense correctly after completing the activity. This aligns with the findings of previous studies on gamification in language learning, which suggest that gamified methods can increase learners' confidence by providing them with low-stakes opportunities to practice and receive immediate feedback (Yildirim & Tuncer, 2021).

Table 3. Impact on Grammar Understanding and Confidence

Perception Statement	Very Helpful (%)	Helpful (%)	Neutral (%)	Not Helpful (%)	Strongly Not Helpful (%)
The Escape Room helped me understand past tense	5.9% (2)	61.8% (21)	32.4% (11)	0% (0)	0% (0)
I feel more confident in using past tense	11.8% (4)	50% (17)	38.2% (13)	0% (0)	0% (0)

The increase in confidence is a noteworthy finding, as language learners often struggle with self-confidence when it comes to applying grammatical rules in real-world contexts. This result suggests that the Escape Room method, through its structured yet flexible design, offers a non-threatening environment for students to practice and improve their language skills.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a Google Forms-based Escape Room method in helping students learn past tense grammar. The findings indicate that the method is effective in enhancing students' understanding, engagement, and confidence with past tense forms. However, some technical challenges and individual variations in student responses were also observed.

Relating Findings to Literature

These findings are consistent with the broader body of research on game-based learning, which suggests that gamification can increase student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes (Anderson & Smith, 2020). In particular, the high levels of engagement reported by students support previous studies that show how games can make grammar learning more enjoyable and less intimidating (Yildirim & Tuncer, 2021).

However, the technical difficulties students faced were also anticipated, as issues such as poor internet connectivity remain common barriers to digital learning, particularly in the Indonesian context (Hidayah, 2022). These challenges were not widespread, but they do highlight the need for reliable technology infrastructure when implementing digital learning methods.

Possible Explanations for the Findings

The positive impact of the Escape Room method on students' grammar understanding and confidence may be explained by several factors. First, the interactive and competitive elements of the Escape Room provide an engaging context for learning. According to Deci & Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, motivation increases when learners feel competent and autonomous. The Escape Room method likely provided students with a sense of mastery over past tense grammar, reinforcing their confidence in their abilities.

Another possible explanation for the positive outcomes could be the immediate feedback provided through the Escape Room format. When students make mistakes, they are prompted to reflect on their choices and correct them, which aligns with research on the importance of timely feedback in language learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This feedback loop not only improves grammar comprehension but also enhances self-efficacy in applying the grammar rules correctly.

Interestingly, a small proportion of students expressed neutral attitudes toward the Escape Room method, which may point to individual learning preferences. It is possible that students who preferred more traditional or passive learning methods did not find the Escape Room as engaging or effective. Future studies could explore how different student profiles (e.g., learning style, technological proficiency) influence the effectiveness of gamified methods.

While the findings confirm the overall effectiveness of the Escape Room method, a few important observations from the data analysis offer further insight. First, although students reported increased motivation and engagement, the absence of post-activity assessment means that the actual impact on long-term grammar retention remains unclear. Future studies would benefit from including pre- and post-tests to measure learning outcomes more precisely.

Furthermore, the presence of neutral responses suggests that not all students were equally engaged. This could relate to individual learning preferences. Students who prefer structured or teacher-led instruction may find gamified approaches less effective. A deeper understanding of student learning profiles—such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic preferences—may help tailor the activity for broader appeal.

Interestingly, students expressed enjoyment of the Escape Room compared to traditional grammar exercises, though the study did not directly compare both methods. Including a control group using conventional exercises could provide a clearer picture of the added value of gamification.

Finally, while interviews revealed excitement and enthusiasm, students also offered implicit suggestions—such as simplifying navigation, improving visual cues, or adding more time flexibility. These insights underline the importance of user-centered design in creating digital learning games, especially for students unfamiliar with such formats.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

One limitation of this study is the small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the sample size to include a more diverse group of students, including those from different educational backgrounds and proficiency levels.

Additionally, while the technical issues observed in this study were minor, future implementations of the Escape Room method should focus on minimizing these challenges by ensuring better technological support and providing clearer instructions on how to navigate the game.

Future research could also explore the long-term impact of game-based learning methods like the Escape Room on grammar retention and language proficiency, as well as how students'

individual differences (e.g., motivation, prior knowledge) affect their learning outcomes. Exploring other grammar topics through the Escape Room method could also provide a broader understanding of its effectiveness in various aspects of language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study provides evidence that the Google Forms-based Escape Room method can be an effective and engaging way to help students learn past tense grammar. The findings suggest that the method not only enhances students' understanding of past tense forms but also increases their confidence and motivation to use the language.

However, technical difficulties and individual differences must be considered when implementing such methods in the future. To maximize the impact of game-based learning, educators should ensure that the technology is accessible and that students' learning preferences are taken into account.

Beyond its immediate impact, this study also highlights several considerations for future practice. Teachers are encouraged to combine gamified tools like Google Forms with formative and summative assessments to better track student progress. Understanding student learning styles and preferences can also help in customizing digital games to suit a wider range of learners.

The findings suggest that the method is well-suited for low-tech educational settings; however, technical preparedness—such as clear game instructions and internet stability—should be prioritized. Student feedback also indicates a desire for repeated use of Escape Room activities, suggesting potential for its integration into various grammar topics beyond the past tense.

In future implementations, involving students in the co-design of escape room elements could increase ownership and learning effectiveness. By addressing these aspects, educators can build more inclusive, engaging, and meaningful grammar learning experiences.

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