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Students' Challenges and Coping Strategies in Baamboozle-Supported EFL Writing Activities at an Indonesian Islamic Senior High School

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Abstract: *This study explored five students' reported challenges and coping strategies during Baamboozle-supported EFL narrative-writing activities at MAN 2 Parepare, Indonesia. A qualitative descriptive design employed individual semi-structured interviews with five Grade XI students selected purposively from willing participants who completed the instructional sequence. Indonesian interview transcripts were analyzed deductively within four predefined categories: technical, cognitive and linguistic, emotional, and participation and collaboration challenges. The activities linked timed group questions on narrative structure and story sequencing with written drafting. The accounts illustrated in the findings describe connectivity difficulties, unfamiliar vocabulary, initial shyness and fear of mistakes, and differences of opinion in groups. SPS reported following the game through a peer's device when the connection lagged. AAM described contextual guessing, peer consultation, discussion, and voting. FA retrospectively reported greater comfort after repeated participation, interpreted as individual adaptation rather than a deliberate coping strategy. The findings provide contextual detail about managing participation during writing-oriented game activities; they do not establish writing gains, anxiety reduction, or resolution of underlying barriers. Access alternatives, vocabulary clarification, and structured group participation are presented as teacher considerations inferred from the accounts, whose effectiveness requires further examination.*

Keywords: *Baamboozle; Coping Strategies; EFL Writing; Gamification; Learning Challenges*

INTRODUCTION

Writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) requires learners to coordinate linguistic knowledge, idea development, organization, and revision. For senior high school students, these demands can make writing appear difficult and can reduce their willingness to participate when classroom activities rely heavily on individual written products. As a result, digital game-based learning

has attracted attention as a way to vary classroom interaction and provide immediate prompts, feedback, and opportunities for participation. Baamboozle is one such platform. It lets teachers organize question-and-answer activities in a game-like format, often with teams, scores, time limits, and projected tasks. In writing instruction, teachers can use these features to review vocabulary, text structure, grammar, and content before or during the production of a written text.

Studies of educational gamification have frequently emphasized positive outcomes such as motivation, engagement, participation, and achievement. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that gamification can support cognitive, motivational, and behavioral learning outcomes, although its effects depend on design and context (Sailer and Homner, 2020). In language learning, games may lower the monotony of repeated practice and offer a meaningful reason to retrieve linguistic knowledge. Nevertheless, game elements do not guarantee a uniformly positive experience. Competition, public performance, time pressure, technology failure, and uneven access may also create barriers. Dichev and Dicheva (2017) therefore caution that gamification's educational value depends on implementation rather than novelty alone.

In the Indonesian EFL context, educators have used technology-supported writing to increase interaction and motivation. For example, Dollah et al. (2021) found that Padlet could support EFL learners' motivation and writing achievement, demonstrating the pedagogical potential of a digital platform when aligned with a writing task. More recently, Muhammad et al. (2026) reported moderate overall student motivation during Baamboozle-supported English writing at MAN 2 Parepare, with enjoyment and pride rated higher than obligation-driven motivation. Their findings matter because they show that students can respond positively to Baamboozle without showing uniformly high motivation across all indicators. The present study extends that line of inquiry by examining the difficulties students experienced during implementation rather than treating positive motivation as evidence that the activity was free from obstacles.

Muhammad et al. (2026) examined motivation using questionnaire responses from the same broader research project and instructional sequence. The present article examines a different question through interviews with five students who also participated in the motivation study. The interview data have not been used in another publication. The shared setting enables a contextual connection between the publications, while their data sources and analytical purposes remain distinct.

Research on gamification has examined motivational and learning outcomes and identified possible difficulties associated with competition and participation. Findings across different platforms and settings, however, offer limited detail about how students manage difficulties during Baamboozle-supported narrative-writing activities. Muhammad et al. (2026) did not investigate interview accounts of challenges and coping strategies. The remaining question concerns how participating students describe access constraints, language difficulties, emotional experiences, and group coordination during gameplay and associated writing tasks, and the actions they report taking in response.

The present study focuses on students' reported challenges and coping strategies during Baamboozle-supported activities within EFL narrative-writing instruction. The activities connected game questions about narrative structure and story sequencing with short narrative drafting. Accordingly, the study asks: What challenges do students at MAN 2 Parepare report experiencing during these activities, and what coping strategies do they report using? The inquiry examines experiences within the instructional sequence rather than evaluating instructional effectiveness or measuring writing gains.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gamification and Baamboozle in EFL writing

Gamification refers to using game-design elements in non-game learning contexts. Points, teams, timed responses, visible progress, competition, and immediate feedback can structure participation and make practice more salient. Game-based learning and gamification are not identical, but both can change how learners engage with instructional content. Their effectiveness depends on whether the activity directs attention toward the learning objective rather than toward winning alone (Hung et al., 2018; Sailer & Homner, 2020). In EFL writing, a platform such as Baamboozle does not replace the recursive work of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Instead, it can support specific stages, including vocabulary activation, recognition of text organization, sentence construction, and collaborative preparation for writing.

In the present study, Baamboozle was integrated into narrative-writing instruction through questions about story events and narrative structure. Students identified the functions of events within orientation, complication, resolution, and, where applicable, re-orientation, and considered their sequence in the story. During or after gameplay, students used the displayed prompts and story points to draft short narrative texts individually or collaboratively in notebooks or worksheets. Baamboozle provided prompts for identifying and organizing narrative content and for written production. The teacher subsequently provided feedback on the drafts. Revision within the platform was not documented as a task, and the contribution of the sequence to writing development was not measured.

Research on gamification suggests potential benefits for language learning, although the outcomes examined vary across studies. Sailer and Homner (2020) synthesized cognitive, motivational, and behavioral learning outcomes, while Chan and Lo (2024) reviewed evidence concerning English language learning and learners' attitudes. More specifically, Muhammad et al. (2026) reported moderate overall motivation during Baamboozle-supported writing at MAN 2 Parepare, with enjoyment and pride rated more highly than obligation-driven motivation. Together, these studies suggest that favorable responses can coexist with variation across motivational dimensions. Evidence about motivation or broader learning outcomes, however, provides only a partial account of the difficulties students encounter while completing activities.

The literature also identifies tensions within gamified learning. Dichev and Dicheva (2017) questioned assumptions that gamification consistently produces educational benefits, while Almeida et al. (2023) documented undesirable effects associated with competition, points, and leaderboards. Li et al. (2024) reported a small positive effect on intrinsic motivation alongside challenges concerning perceived competence and autonomy. These findings qualify broad claims about benefits: enjoyment does not necessarily indicate that learners feel capable, comfortable, or equally able to participate. Differences in platforms, educational levels, and instructional arrangements also limit direct application to a particular Baamboozle-supported writing classroom. The present inquiry addresses how students describe and manage difficulties under those local conditions.

Research on gamification and learner motivation suggests that educational value needs to be considered alongside the conditions under which learners participate. Motivation and learning outcomes provide a basis for examining Baamboozle, while leaving questions about the practical difficulties learners describe during writing activities. An interview-based examination can add detail about those experiences and responses in a particular classroom.

Analytical framework

Technical access concerns connectivity and device arrangements that may affect opportunities to follow a digital activity. Al-Fraihat et al. (2020) discuss system quality in the evaluation of e-learning. Within the present framework, interview questions concerned participants' own accounts of access difficulties and responses, rather than an independent assessment of infrastructure or platform performance.

Cognitive and linguistic challenges concern understanding instructions, unfamiliar vocabulary, and narrative concepts while responding to game questions. Nation (2018) provides a vocabulary-learning perspective for interpreting accounts of contextual guessing and language assistance. The dimension directs attention to perceived comprehension difficulties; it does not operationalize or measure cognitive overload.

Emotional challenges concern feelings associated with participation, including shyness and fear of mistakes. Research on undesirable consequences of game elements provides a rationale for attending to emotional pressure as well as enjoyment (Almeida et al., 2023). A reported change in comfort requires separate interpretation from a deliberate action taken to manage a difficulty.

Participation and collaboration challenges concern negotiating answers and coordinating contributions within a group. Sociocultural and cooperative-learning perspectives make interaction relevant to the analysis (Vygotsky, 1978; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The interview inquiry examines how participants described collaboration, without assuming that group work demonstrated equitable participation or developed collaborative skills.

The four dimensions served as a priori analytical categories and informed both the interview guide and deductive grouping of responses. Descriptive codes

identified particular difficulties and coping actions within each dimension. The interview structure therefore shaped the scope of the accounts elicited; the four overarching categories were not wholly emergent themes.

Previous research has reported motivational and learning benefits of gamification alongside difficulties associated with competition and participation. How students experience and manage difficulties during Baamboozle-supported narrative-writing activities remains insufficiently understood. Investigating challenges and coping strategies can clarify aspects of participation that motivation scores alone do not capture. The four a priori dimensions organize attention to access, comprehension, emotional experience, and group interaction. Attention to both difficulties and coping actions within each dimension connects the interview questions and analysis to the research question while preserving differences among participants' accounts.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive design was used to provide a detailed account of students' reported challenges and coping strategies. Qualitative description seeks an account that remains close to participants' everyday descriptions (Sandelowski, 2000). Here, that orientation shaped the selection of students with direct instructional experience, interview questions about concrete difficulties and responses, and descriptive organization within four predefined categories. Interpretation remained grounded in the interview accounts rather than claims about observed behavior or measured writing development.

Participants and Sampling

Five Grade XI students from class XI.A2 at MAN 2 Parepare, identified by the codes FA, AAM, IYA, RFA, and SPS, were selected through purposive sampling. Eligibility required participation in the complete Baamboozle-supported writing sequence and willingness to take part in an interview. The researcher selected five students from the eligible volunteers to obtain detailed accounts from multiple perspectives. All five had experienced the same instructional sequence, including questions on narrative structure and story sequencing and associated writing tasks. Their direct experience provided a relevant basis for discussing challenges and coping actions. The sample was intended to support a focused contextual description rather than represent the entire class. Participants were studying English as a foreign language; no independently established proficiency classification is assigned in this article.

Instructional Context

A typical session focused on identifying and reconstructing narrative structure based on a legend. Students worked in groups of five to identify and sequence events in relation to orientation, complication, resolution, and, where applicable, re-orientation. The teacher used a laptop and projector to display the Baamboozle board, while students also accessed the game link through personal

or shared mobile phones. Mobile access required an internet connection, providing the context for accounts of using personal data and sharing devices.

For example, a question presented the event "Malin Kundang leaves his village to seek fortune in the city" and asked students to identify its place in the narrative structure. Groups had one minute per question to discuss and formulate an answer. The teacher gave immediate feedback to confirm responses or clarify misunderstandings. During or after gameplay, students used the prompts and story points to draft short narrative texts, individually or collaboratively, in notebooks or teacher-provided worksheets. The teacher subsequently provided corrections and reinforcement on written drafts.

The five participants' accounts are interpreted in relation to mobile access, groups of five, one-minute response limits, and associated narrative-writing tasks. The classroom arrangements situate the reported experiences. The school's Islamic identity identifies the institutional setting, and religious or cultural causes of difficulties were not investigated.

Dataset Provenance

The interview dataset was collected within the same broader research project and instructional sequence as the questionnaire dataset reported by Muhammad et al. (2026). All five interviewees also participated in that motivation study. The project, setting, and participants therefore overlap, but the articles analyze different datasets and questions. The earlier publication examined motivation using questionnaire responses and did not use interviews. This article examines interview accounts of challenges and coping strategies; it does not reanalyze the questionnaire dataset. Neither these interview transcripts nor the quotations have been used in another publication. To avoid redundant reporting, the earlier publication is acknowledged, its findings serve as literature context, and the empirical findings here are confined to the interview accounts relevant to the current question.

Research Instruments

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide to explore reported challenges and coping strategies during Baamboozle-supported narrative-writing activities. Questions were organized around the four predefined dimensions and addressed the difficulties participants encountered and how they responded. Before data collection, the supervisor and validator reviewed the guide for alignment with the research question, coverage of the four dimensions, and clarity of language.

Data Collection Procedures

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in Indonesian on 26 September 2025 in the school hall after the classroom learning activities. Each lasted approximately 10–13 minutes. The researcher conducted the interviews and had also taught the Baamboozle-supported lessons and assessed students' written work. Interviews were audio-recorded and accompanied by written notes. The

researcher prepared transcripts using application-assisted and manual transcription and checked them against the recordings.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a deductive thematic approach, drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006). Familiarization involved careful reading and review of the complete Indonesian transcripts to understand the content and nuances of students' responses. The researcher identified keywords and meaningful points concerning difficulties and responses, assigned descriptive codes, and grouped them directly under the relevant predefined categories. Category development involved elaborating descriptive content within this framework rather than generating four new overarching themes inductively.

Categorization and interpretation were checked against the complete transcripts to retain relevant information and preserve participants' meanings. Contrasting accounts were retained during analysis. For reporting, differences and shared experiences require attribution to the relevant participants rather than inference from the interview structure. FA's retrospective report of comfort was distinguished from deliberate coping actions. Table 1 illustrates the relationship between extracts, descriptive codes, and a priori categories.

Table 1. Interview extracts, descriptive codes, and analytical categories

Interview extract	Initial descriptive codes	A priori analytical category
AAM: "Beberapa kata sulit, tapi saya bisa menebak atau bertanya kepada teman."	Unfamiliar vocabulary; contextual guessing; peer assistance	Cognitive and linguistic challenges
AAM: "Kami berdiskusi singkat dan melakukan voting jika berbeda pendapat."	Differences of opinion; discussion and voting	Participation and collaboration challenges
FA: "Awalnya malu dan takut salah, tapi setelah beberapa kali bermain jadi lebih santai."	Initial shyness and fear of mistakes; greater comfort over time	Emotional challenges

Translation Procedures

Coding and categorization were conducted entirely on the original Indonesian transcripts. Only selected quotations used to illustrate findings were translated into English by the researcher. Digital tools served solely as dictionary and grammar-checking aids rather than automatically translating complete passages. Each translation was compared with the Indonesian transcript for contextual meaning, emotional nuances, and intended expressions. The transcripts and translations were also reviewed by a peer or research supervisor to check for possible shifts in meaning. Indonesian extracts are presented alongside English translations to retain access to the original wording.

Credibility and Reflexivity

Credibility procedures included checking transcripts against recordings, checking categorization and interpretation against complete transcripts, retaining contrasting accounts, and presenting attributed quotations. The researcher translated selected quotations and compared them with the Indonesian originals; peer or supervisor review supported checking of transcripts and translations. These procedures are distinguished from member checking or independent review of all analytical decisions.

The researcher's roles as instructor, assessor, and interviewer provided familiarity with the activities but may have influenced students' willingness to express criticism or negative experiences. Participation in the interviews was voluntary. Nevertheless, this instructional relationship is acknowledged as a possible influence on both students' responses and the researcher's interpretations.

Research Ethics

Institutional permission was obtained from Universitas Negeri Makassar and MAN 2 Parepare. The research followed the university's educational research ethics guidance but did not undergo formal review by an ethics committee. All five interviewees were under 18 and provided written assent after an explanation of the purpose and procedures. Interview participation was voluntary. Students were informed that they could decline participation, skip questions, or withdraw at any time without effects on academic grades. The assurance was relevant because the researcher also taught and assessed their written work.

Participant codes rather than full names are used in reporting. Recordings and transcripts were stored in the researcher's password-protected cloud account with two-factor authentication. Access was restricted to the principal researcher and research supervisors for verification purposes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings concern the five participants' reported experiences within the instructional sequence. Four a priori categories organize the analysis. Quotations currently available for illustration come from SPS, AAM, and FA; Table 2 makes their contribution to each category explicit. The displayed evidence does not establish the prevalence of a difficulty across all five participants. Accounts from IYA and RFA are not assigned to categories in the table without identifiable supporting extracts.

Table 2. Participant-attributed interview evidence and boundaries of interpretation

Analytical category	**Participant and interview evidence**	**Reported response and interpretation**
Technical challenges	SPS: "Kadang jaringan ngelag, jadi saya ikut melihat permainan di tab teman." ["Sometimes the connection lags, so I follow the game on a friend's device."]	Following the game through a peer's device when direct access lagged. Individual account; the technical cause is not

		established.
Cognitive and linguistic challenges	AAM: "Beberapa kata sulit, tapi saya bisa menebak atau bertanya kepada teman." ["Some words are difficult, but I can guess their meanings or ask friends."]	Contextual guessing and peer assistance. Individual account of vocabulary difficulty; no demonstrated cognitive overload or vocabulary gain.
Emotional challenges	FA: "Awalnya malu dan takut salah, tapi setelah beberapa kali bermain jadi lebih santai." ["At first, I felt shy and afraid of making mistakes, but after playing several times, I felt more relaxed."]	Retrospective change in comfort, interpreted as adaptation rather than an identified deliberate coping action.
Participation and collaboration challenges	AAM: "Kami berdiskusi singkat dan melakukan voting jika berbeda pendapat." ["We discuss briefly and vote when we have different opinions."]	Discussion and voting to negotiate disagreement. The account does not establish equal participation or improved collaborative skill.

Note. All quotations derive from individual interviews at MAN 2 Parepare on 26 September 2025. The table maps the excerpts available for reporting, not the complete distribution of experiences across the five interviews. No entry denotes that unquoted participants did not experience a difficulty.

Technical Challenges

SPS described a connection difficulty and following the game through a peer's device when direct access lagged.

> **SPS:** "Kadang jaringan ngelag, jadi saya ikut melihat permainan di tab teman."
>
> *["Sometimes the connection lags, so I follow the game on a friend's device."]*
>
> *Individual interview, MAN 2 Parepare, 26 September 2025.*

The quotation supports an account of disrupted access and a response used to continue following the activity. It does not identify whether the disruption arose from the network, device, or another cause. Viewing another screen describes reported continuity of participation; it does not establish that access conditions were equivalent or that an underlying barrier was resolved.

Al-Fraihat et al. (2020) discuss system quality in digital learning, providing a basis for considering access alongside instructional design. SPS's statement adds a concrete local example, rather than an infrastructure audit or evidence of platform malfunction. Teachers and school administrators may consider reviewing connectivity and shared-device arrangements before similar

activities. Any recommendation for alternative access remains an inference requiring examination.

Cognitive and Linguistic Challenges

AAM reported difficulty understanding some vocabulary and described guessing meanings or asking peers as responses.

> **AAM:** "Beberapa kata sulit, tapi saya bisa menebak atau bertanya kepada teman."
>
> *["Some words are difficult, but I can guess their meanings or ask friends."]*
>
> *Individual interview, MAN 2 Parepare, 26 September 2025.*

The account identifies a perceived language difficulty and reported actions for managing comprehension. AAM described using contextual information and peer assistance, but the quotation does not establish subsequent retention or accurate use of the words in writing. Although the session included a one-minute response limit, the quotation does not identify time pressure as the cause of the difficulty. Cognitive overload and its effects on learning were not measured.

Contextual guessing and consultation can be considered in relation to Nation's (2018) discussion of vocabulary learning. AAM's statement concerns an immediate response, while vocabulary development would require additional evidence across time. Teachers may consider opportunities to clarify unfamiliar words and consult peers before drafting. The effectiveness of such arrangements was not tested.

Emotional Challenges

FA described initial shyness and fear of mistakes, followed by greater comfort after repeated participation.

> **FA:** "Awalnya malu dan takut salah, tapi setelah beberapa kali bermain jadi lebih santai."
>
> *["At first, I felt shy and afraid of making mistakes, but after playing several times, I felt more relaxed."]*
>
> *Individual interview, MAN 2 Parepare, 26 September 2025.*

FA's retrospective account describes an individual change in perceived comfort. It does not describe intentionally using repeated participation to cope with nervousness; adaptation is therefore reported separately from deliberate strategies. The experience is not generalized to the other participants. Group responses and a one-minute limit were features of the instructional setting, but FA did not identify public answering, competition, scores, or time as the source of the feelings described.

Dichev and Dicheva (2017) caution against assuming uniform benefits from gamification. FA's account provides a local example of why participation should be examined through learners' experiences rather than assumed to be emotionally comfortable. The quotation does not establish anxiety reduction caused by Baamboozle. Teachers may consider constructive responses to errors and opportunities for preparation, while future inquiry would need to examine how particular game features relate to emotional experience.

Participation and Collaboration Challenges

AAM described differences of opinion during group participation and reported discussion and voting as ways of reaching a decision.

> **AAM:** "Kami berdiskusi singkat dan melakukan voting jika berbeda pendapat."
>
> *["We discuss briefly and vote when we have different opinions."]*
>
> *Individual interview, MAN 2 Parepare, 26 September 2025.*

The account identifies deliberate group actions taken in response to disagreement. It supports an interpretation of negotiated answers but does not show whether every group member contributed equally, whether voting improved answer quality, or whether collaborative skills developed. The quotation does not establish domination by particular students or a preference shared by all interviewees for smaller groups.

Johnson and Johnson (2009) emphasize structured interaction and individual accountability in cooperative learning. AAM's description illustrates negotiation within one reported experience, while leaving individual contribution unassessed. Teachers may consider role rotation and opportunities to explain reasoning as possible ways to structure participation. These are pedagogical suggestions rather than strategies demonstrated effective in the interviews.

Contextual Contribution

The study provides participant-attributed detail about managing participation in a narrative-writing sequence that combined timed questions and written drafting. SPS's account illustrates following the game through a peer's device; AAM described contextual guessing, peer consultation, discussion, and voting; FA described an individual change in comfort. Peer support appeared in access and vocabulary accounts, but the examples do not establish causal relationships between categories or a pattern shared by all five participants.

The interview evidence complements the questionnaire-based motivation findings reported by Muhammad et al. (2026) by describing particular difficulties and responses during the same instructional sequence. The contextual contribution concerns participation in activities oriented toward writing. Whether coping actions supported the quality of later drafts remains an open empirical question. Additional participant-attributed evidence would be needed to establish how the illustrated experiences compare with IYA's and RFA's accounts.

Pedagogical Considerations

The reported experiences suggest that teachers may consider reviewing access arrangements, clarifying vocabulary, and structuring group decisions before or during similar writing activities. SPS's account provides a reason to consider alternative ways of following the game when connections fail. AAM's statements suggest attending to opportunities for language assistance and group negotiation. FA's account suggests the value of examining emotional comfort over repeated participation. Flexible timing, role rotation, and low-technology alternatives remain possible future interventions whose effectiveness was not tested.

Team answers and participation in gameplay should be distinguished from independent writing competence. A group response may include assistance and negotiated reasoning. When an assessment concerns individual writing, the teacher needs individual written work evaluated against relevant criteria. The present interviews do not validate game scores as measures of writing ability or establish how the proposed arrangements affect written performance.

CONCLUSION

The interview accounts illustrate how particular participants reported managing difficulties during Baamboozle-supported narrative-writing activities at MAN 2 Parepare. Within four predefined categories, SPS described managing disrupted access through a peer's device, while AAM reported contextual guessing, peer consultation, discussion, and voting. FA's account of greater comfort after repeated participation is interpreted as individual adaptation rather than a deliberate coping action. The study offers contextual detail about participation in a sequence linking game questions with narrative drafting. It does not establish whether the reported coping actions improved writing competence or resolved underlying barriers. Teaching suggestions are derived from the accounts and require further examination.

The study draws on retrospective interviews with five students from one class. The published excerpts currently illustrate three participants and cannot establish the distribution of experiences across the full interview sample. No unquoted participant is assumed to share or lack an experience. The four categories also reflect the interview protocol. Classroom behavior, writing development, cognitive overload, and changes in anxiety were not independently assessed. The researcher's roles as instructor, assessor, and interviewer may have influenced disclosure and interpretation.

Future research could include participants from additional classes or schools to examine similarities and differences across settings. Systematic observation could examine how reported coping actions and group contributions occur in practice. Individual writing samples collected across the sequence would address the absence of direct writing-performance evidence. Repeated interviews could examine emotional comfort beyond FA's retrospective account. Interviewers without teaching or assessment responsibilities could help address the potential influence of the researcher's dual role. For the present dataset, a fuller cross-participant evidence map requires verification against all five complete transcripts.

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