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IMPLEMENTING JOYFUL LEARNING IN ECONOMICS EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Ilham Farizi ^{1)*}, Denok Mugi Hidayanti ²⁾, Neviyani ³⁾

^{1,2,3)}Pendidikan Ekonomi, Universitas PGRI Argopuro Jember

*Corresponding author email: ifrz01734@gmail.com

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Abstract

Meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences are important for fostering student engagement and learning outcomes, particularly in Economics learning, where students need to understand concepts and relate them to everyday economic phenomena. This study examined the implementation of Joyful Learning and its contribution to student engagement and learning outcomes in Economics learning. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed with an Economics teacher and Grade XI students at SMK Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation and analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation used to strengthen data credibility. The findings show that Joyful Learning created a more active, interactive, and student-centered learning process through educational games, question-and-answer activities, discussions, and other enjoyable learning activities. Students demonstrated greater enthusiasm, motivation, participation, confidence in expressing ideas, learning comfort, and ability to recall and understand Economics materials. These changes were also associated with improved learning outcomes as reflected in students' engagement, understanding, and learning behavior. The findings suggest that Joyful Learning can support Economics learning by integrating cognitive, affective, and social dimensions within meaningful classroom experiences. The study highlights its relevance as an alternative approach for creating engaging and student-centered Economics learning in secondary vocational education.

Keywords: Joyful Learning; Learning Outcomes; Economics Education; Learning Engagement; Student-Centered Learning

Abstrak. Pengalaman belajar yang bermakna dan menyenangkan penting untuk mendorong keterlibatan siswa dan hasil belajar, terutama dalam pembelajaran Ekonomi, di mana siswa perlu memahami konsep dan menghubungkannya dengan fenomena ekonomi sehari-hari. Penelitian ini meneliti penerapan *Joyful Learning* dan kontribusinya terhadap keterlibatan siswa dan hasil belajar dalam pembelajaran Ekonomi. Pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif digunakan dengan seorang guru Ekonomi dan siswa Kelas XI di SMK Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi serta dianalisis melalui kondensasi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, dengan triangulasi digunakan untuk memperkuat kredibilitas data. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa *Joyful Learning* menciptakan proses pembelajaran yang lebih aktif, interaktif, dan berpusat pada siswa melalui permainan edukatif, kegiatan tanya jawab, diskusi, dan aktivitas pembelajaran menyenangkan lainnya. Siswa menunjukkan antusiasme, motivasi, partisipasi, kepercayaan diri dalam mengungkapkan ide, kenyamanan belajar, dan kemampuan untuk mengingat serta memahami materi Ekonomi yang lebih besar. Perubahan-perubahan ini juga terkait dengan peningkatan hasil belajar yang tercermin dalam keterlibatan, pemahaman, dan perilaku belajar siswa. Temuan tersebut menunjukkan bahwa *Joyful Learning* dapat mendukung pembelajaran Ekonomi dengan mengintegrasikan dimensi kognitif, afektif, dan sosial dalam pengalaman kelas yang bermakna. Studi ini menyoroti relevansinya sebagai pendekatan alternatif untuk menciptakan pembelajaran Ekonomi yang menarik dan berpusat pada siswa di pendidikan kejuruan menengah.

Kata Kunci : *Joyfull Learning*; Hasil Pembelajaran; Pendidikan Ekonomi; Keterlibatan Pembelajaran; Pembelajaran Berpusat pada Siswa.

Background

Education increasingly requires learning environments that move beyond knowledge transmission toward active student participation, meaningful interaction, and engagement. Student engagement is particularly important because students' involvement in classroom activities is closely associated with the quality of their learning experiences (Bhardwaj et al., 2025).. Research in secondary education indicates that supportive classroom environments and teacher practices can shape students' emotional and behavioral engagement in learning. Therefore, creating classroom conditions that encourage students to participate, interact, and remain attentive is not merely a matter of classroom atmosphere but an important pedagogical concern for improving the quality of learning (Pusvitasari, 2021).

This concern is particularly relevant to Economics learning, which requires students to understand theoretical concepts while relating them to economic phenomena and decision-making in everyday life. Previous research has argued that Economics education should provide learning experiences that move beyond passive reception of concepts toward active engagement with economic problems and their practical implications (Entwistle, 2019). However, learning that remains dominated by explanation and routine question-and-answer activities may provide limited opportunities for students to explore concepts, discuss ideas, and connect economic knowledge with their experiences. The need for more engaging learning is therefore particularly important when students experience boredom, limited participation, or difficulty in understanding abstract economic concepts (Sudargini & Purwanto, 2020).

In Economics learning, learning outcomes play an important role because this subject not only requires mastery of economic concepts theoretically but also the ability of students to

analyze various economic phenomena occurring in daily life (Bowles & Carlin, 2020). The Economics subject functions to develop rational thinking skills, decision-making, and understanding of various economic activities that develop in society (Kustiandi et al., 2024). However, various studies show that Economics learning is still often conducted thru a conventional teacher-centered approach, causing students to tend to be passive and have fewer opportunities to explore their understanding independently (Telaumbanua, 2026). This condition has the potential to cause low learning outcomes because students have difficulty understanding abstract economic concepts.

One of the learning strategies deemed capable of addressing this need is Joyful Learning. The Joyful Learning strategy is an educational approach that emphasizes creating a pleasant learning atmosphere so that students can participate in learning comfortably, actively, and enthusiastically (Wulandari & Prayitno, 2026). This strategy is based on the assumption that positive emotional conditions will facilitate students in receiving, processing, and remembering the information learned. Thru Joyful learning, students not only acquire knowledge but also enjoy the ongoing learning process, making the learning experience more meaningful and free from psychological pressure (Andyanie et al., 2025).

Theoretically, Joyful Learning is related to constructivist theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is built thru learning experiences that involve the active participation of learners (Khotimah et al., 2025). In this approach, learners are given the opportunity to interact with their learning environment thru various engaging and challenging activities. Furthermore, humanistic theory also explains that the learning process will be more optimal if learners are in a comfortable emotional state and have positive learning experiences (Amini et al., 2025). Therefore, the implementation of Joyful Learning is believed to enhance learning outcomes because students are actively involved in the learning process.

In Economics learning, Joyful Learning can be realized thru various learning activities that involve simulations, educational games, group discussions, economic case studies, or other contextual activities related to the students' lives. The use of these activities allows students to understand economic concepts in a more concrete and applicative manner. Research shows that learning that integrates elements of enjoyment and active learning experiences can significantly enhance students' motivation and conceptual understanding (Khotimah et al., 2025). Thus, Joyful Learning has the potential to become one of the effective strategies for improving student learning outcomes in Economics subjects.

Recent empirical studies provide further evidence of the potential of Joyful Learning. Research by Utami & Yuliyanto (2020) shows that learning designed to be enjoyable can enhance students' conceptual understanding and learning motivation. Similar findings were reported by Tsai et al., (2020), who found that the use of enjoyable activity-based learning

strategies significantly influenced the improvement of students' learning outcomes. Additionally, Tambunan et al., (2020) showed that a pleasant learning atmosphere could enhance students' attention and concentration, making the learning process more effective. These findings suggest that Joyful Learning can create conditions that support both students' active involvement and their understanding of learning materials. Although these studies provide important evidence regarding measurable learning effects, they provide less insight into how Joyful Learning is enacted in everyday classroom practice, how students experience the learning process, and how changes in engagement and learning behavior emerge within a secondary Economics classroom.

This limitation is important because the effectiveness of an engaging learning approach cannot be understood solely through outcome measures. Classroom implementation involves teacher practices, student responses, interaction patterns, learning activities, and the emotional conditions created during instruction. A qualitative perspective can therefore provide a more contextualized understanding of how Joyful Learning operates in an authentic classroom setting and how students' engagement, participation, confidence, comfort, and understanding develop during the learning process. This perspective is particularly relevant to secondary vocational education, where students encounter learning demands that require both conceptual understanding and active participation in classroom activities. Accordingly, examining Joyful Learning in a vocational Economics classroom can complement the predominantly outcome-oriented evidence available in previous studies.

Against this background, this study examines the implementation of Joyful Learning in Economics learning among Grade XI students at SMK Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember. The study focuses on how Joyful Learning is implemented through interactive classroom activities and how the approach is reflected in students' engagement and learning outcomes. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study seeks to provide an empirically grounded account of classroom practices, student responses, and learning changes observed during the implementation of Joyful Learning. In doing so, the study contributes contextual evidence on the pedagogical processes through which enjoyable and participatory learning can support student-centered Economics education in a secondary vocational school context.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine how Joyful Learning was implemented and how students responded to the learning process in an authentic Economics classroom. A qualitative descriptive design was selected because the study sought to provide a contextual and practice-oriented account of classroom activities, teacher practices, student participation, and learning responses rather than to test a causal

relationship statistically. This approach enables educational phenomena to be described based on participants' experiences and naturally occurring classroom interactions. The study was conducted in Grade XI Economics learning at SMK Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember, with the research context selected because the teacher and students were directly involved in the implementation of Joyful Learning (Bazen et al., 2021).

The participants consisted of one Economics teacher and 12 Grade XI students at SMK Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember who were directly involved in the implementation of Joyful Learning. Participants were selected purposively because they had direct experience with the Economics learning activities under investigation. The teacher was selected as the key informant because of their role in planning and implementing the learning strategy, while the students were selected to provide information about their participation, learning experiences, motivation, comfort, understanding, and responses during classroom activities. Data were obtained through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The researcher served as the primary instrument and was supported by an observation guide and semi-structured interview guide. The observation guide focused on the implementation of Joyful Learning, teacher–student interaction, student participation, classroom atmosphere, enthusiasm, attention, confidence, and learning behavior. The interview guide covered the teacher's implementation of the strategy and students' experiences regarding motivation, engagement, learning comfort, participation, understanding of Economics materials, and perceived changes in learning. Documentation was used to complement the observational and interview data through relevant learning materials, student assignments, classroom activities, and available records of students' learning outcomes. (Lim, 2025).

Data collection was conducted over four Economics learning sessions, with each session lasting approximately 90 minutes. First, the researcher observed classroom activities to document how Joyful Learning was implemented and how students responded to interactive activities such as educational games, question-and-answer sessions, discussions, and other enjoyable learning activities. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Economics teacher and selected students after the learning activities to clarify and deepen information identified during observations; each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes. Third, relevant documentation was collected to provide supporting evidence of the learning process and students' learning outcomes. Data analysis was conducted continuously using three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, observation notes, interview data, and documents were selected, organized, coded, and grouped according to themes related to Joyful Learning implementation, learning environment, motivation, engagement, comfort,

memory retention, understanding, and learning outcomes. The resulting data were displayed thematically to identify recurring patterns and relationships across data sources. Conclusions were then developed and verified by comparing evidence from observations, interviews, and documentation. Source triangulation was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings by examining the consistency of information obtained from different data sources, consistent with the qualitative approach employed in this study (Peel, 2020).

Result and Discussion

Result

The findings identified two interconnected aspects of the implementation of Joyful Learning: changes in classroom engagement and changes in students' learning responses. Observation, interview, and documentation data indicated that the learning process involved interactive activities, including educational games, question-and-answer sessions, and group discussions. Across these activities, students were observed to participate more actively, demonstrate greater enthusiasm and attention, and show increased confidence in expressing ideas. Interview and documentation data further indicated changes in students' motivation, learning comfort, understanding, and ability to recall Economics materials. The findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Empirical Patterns of Joyful Learning Implementation and Student Responses

Theme	Observed/Reported Pattern	Evidence Source	Interpretation
Interactive learning activities	Students actively participated in educational games, Q&A, and discussions	Observation, interview	Interactive activities created more opportunities for students to respond and participate
Learning environment	Students appeared more attentive and less bored during learning	Observation, interview	Enjoyable activities supported a more comfortable classroom atmosphere
Student motivation	Students showed greater enthusiasm and interest in participating	Observation, interview	Positive learning experiences encouraged willingness to engage
Student engagement	Students participated more actively in individual and collaborative tasks	Observation, interview	Joyful activities increased behavioral involvement in learning
Learning confidence	Students became more willing to express opinions and answer questions	Observation, interview	A less pressured classroom environment appeared to encourage verbal participation
Understanding and retention	Students were able to explain and recall learning materials more easily	Interview, documentation	Active and enjoyable activities appeared to support students' processing and retention of content

Learning outcomes	Documentation and participant accounts indicated positive changes in learning responses	Documentation, interview	The observed changes suggest that Joyful Learning supported learning outcomes through increased engagement and understanding
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Discussion

The increased participation observed during educational games, question-and-answer sessions, and discussions suggests that the main contribution of Joyful Learning was not simply making the classroom more enjoyable, but altering the opportunities available for students to participate in the learning process. When classroom activities required students to respond, discuss, and interact rather than only listen to explanations, participation became more visible and sustained. This finding indicates that enjoyment functioned as a pedagogical condition that facilitated student involvement rather than as an instructional objective in itself. From this perspective, Joyful Learning may be understood as a mechanism through which classroom interaction becomes more participatory and less dominated by teacher explanation. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that active and supportive learning environments can strengthen student engagement (Bond et al., 2021).

The findings can be interpreted through a constructivist perspective because students were not positioned merely as recipients of Economics information. Instead, educational games, discussions, and question-and-answer activities required students to respond to situations, exchange ideas, and articulate their understanding (Nasrulloh & Amal, 2024).. The significance of these activities lies in the opportunity they provide for students to connect new information with their existing understanding through interaction. Thus, the observed shift toward active participation is not simply a behavioral change; it indicates a change in how learning opportunities were structured. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing the role of active participation and interaction in supporting meaningful learning (Saleem et al., 2021).

The observed reduction in boredom can be interpreted in relation to the structure of the learning activities. Students were exposed to varied forms of participation rather than remaining engaged with a single mode of instruction throughout the lesson (Kholili, 2023).. The alternation between games, questions, discussion, and interaction appeared to sustain students' attention and reduce visible signs of disengagement. This finding suggests that the contribution of Joyful Learning to classroom comfort may derive partly from variation in activity and opportunities for participation. Previous research similarly indicates that supportive and engaging learning environments are associated with stronger student engagement and more positive learning experiences (Heilporn et al., 2021).

The observed increase in students' willingness to ask questions, respond to prompts, and express opinions also indicates a shift in the teacher's classroom role. Rather than organizing learning primarily around explanation, the teacher facilitated activities that required students to interact with the content and with one another (Ayu Wulandari et al., 2025). This shift is important because student-centered learning does not depend solely on reducing teacher explanation; it requires teachers to deliberately create opportunities for students to participate in meaning-making activities. The present findings therefore suggest that the teacher's facilitation of interactive activities was an important condition supporting the observed engagement patterns. This interpretation is consistent with research highlighting the role of teacher-supported participation in creating meaningful learning experiences (Berti et al., 2025).

Based on the overall findings, it can be understood that the implementation of the Joyful Learning strategy not only affects the technical aspects of learning execution but also has a broader significance in building a positive learning culture. A pleasant learning atmosphere allows students to feel comfortable, valued, and have greater opportunities to engage in the learning process. These conditions ultimately create a more meaningful learning experience and support the achievement of learning objectives more effectively. Therefore, the researcher argues that the success of implementing Joyful Learning lies in its ability to integrate cognitive, affective, and social aspects into a cohesive learning experience. In the context of Economics learning at SMK Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember, this strategy can serve as a relevant alternative to meet students' needs for a more interactive, enjoyable, and holistic approach to developing their potential.

The findings suggest that changes in students' learning outcomes were closely associated with changes in their engagement, motivation, and understanding during the learning process. Students who became more active in participating in activities also demonstrated greater willingness to complete tasks, respond to questions, and explain Economics concepts. This pattern indicates that the observed learning changes should not be interpreted as the direct result of enjoyment alone. Rather, enjoyment appears to have operated alongside increased participation and cognitive involvement, creating conditions in which students could engage more actively with the learning material. In Economics learning, where students are expected to connect concepts with economic situations, such active involvement may be particularly important for developing meaningful understanding (Nasir, 2023).

The findings can also be interpreted from a humanistic perspective because students' emotional experiences were closely connected with their participation in learning. Students reported and demonstrated greater comfort and willingness to participate when classroom

activities were perceived as enjoyable and less pressured. This suggests that emotional comfort may function as a facilitating condition for engagement: students who feel sufficiently comfortable may be more willing to ask questions, express ideas, and participate in activities (Kempen et al., 2024). Thus, the affective dimension of Joyful Learning should not be separated from its cognitive dimension, because emotional comfort may create the conditions necessary for students to engage more deeply with learning content. This interpretation is consistent with studies emphasizing the relationship between supportive learning environments, motivation, and engagement (Dalimunthe et al., 2024).

The research findings also show that students become more active in participating in learning, more consistent in completing tasks, and more confident in expressing opinions and answering questions. These conditions indicate that Joyful Learning not only affects learning outcomes in the cognitive aspect but also impacts the affective aspect of students (Ida Yeni Rahmawati et al., 2024). These results are in line with the research by Uzoamaka Metu (2024), which found that positive learning experiences can enhance student engagement in learning and strengthen the quality of the learning process they undergo. Similar findings were also reported by Rezai et al., (2025) who explained that a learning environment that provides opportunities for students to participate actively contributes to the improvement of students' motivation, confidence, and academic achievement. Therefore, the improvement in learning outcomes found in this study can be understood as a consequence of the enhanced quality of the learning experiences obtained by students during the learning process.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the relationship between Joyful Learning and students' learning outcomes is better understood as a process rather than as a direct effect. Interactive activities increased opportunities for participation; greater participation created more opportunities for students to discuss, respond, and process Economics concepts; and these experiences were reflected in students' reported and observed understanding and retention of learning materials (Bond et al., 2021).. This process-oriented interpretation is important because it explains why enjoyable learning activities may be meaningful in Economics education: their value lies not simply in creating positive emotions, but in connecting emotional comfort with active engagement and cognitive involvement (Boedeker et al., 2024).

Overall, the findings suggest that the value of Joyful Learning lies in the integration of affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions of learning. Enjoyable classroom activities created a more comfortable environment, while interactive participation provided students with opportunities to engage with Economics content more actively. The observed changes in motivation, participation, confidence, understanding, and retention therefore indicate that Joyful Learning may support learning outcomes through an interconnected process of

emotional comfort, active engagement, and cognitive involvement. This interpretation extends previous outcome-oriented discussions of Joyful Learning by highlighting the classroom processes through which students experience and respond to the approach.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Joyful Learning can provide a meaningful pedagogical approach for Economics education by creating classroom conditions that encourage active participation, interaction, and student engagement. Rather than functioning merely as a technique for making lessons enjoyable, Joyful Learning was reflected in a shift toward more participatory learning experiences in which students had greater opportunities to respond, discuss, express ideas, and engage with Economics content. The findings also indicate that students' motivation, learning comfort, confidence, understanding, and retention were closely associated with their engagement during the learning process. The scientific contribution of this study lies in providing contextual and process-oriented evidence on how Joyful Learning operates within an authentic secondary Economics classroom. The findings suggest that its educational value is better understood as an interconnected process in which emotional comfort and enjoyable activities create opportunities for behavioral engagement, while sustained engagement supports students' cognitive involvement and understanding. This perspective complements previous outcome-oriented studies by highlighting the classroom processes through which Joyful Learning may support learning outcomes, particularly in a vocational secondary education context.

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