

The Management of Indonesian Language Learning Based on Joyful Learning for Eighth-Grade Students at SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes in the 2025/2026 Academic Year

Ginanjar Muktiharja ¹, Sukini ², Agus Yuliantoro ^{3*}

¹ Universitas Widya Dharma Klaten, Indonesia, e-mail : hardjocom@gmail.com

² Universitas Widya Dharma Klaten, Indonesia, e-mail : sukini@unwidha.go.id

³ Universitas Widya Dharma Klaten, Indonesia, e-mail : agusyuliantoro04@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author : agusyuliantoro04@gmail.com

Abstract. This study aimed to describe the management of Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes in the 2025/2026 academic year. This study employed a qualitative approach with a single case study design. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and open-ended questionnaires. The findings showed that the implementation of Joyful Learning had been conducted systematically through planning, implementation, and evaluation processes integrated with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers applied varied learning methods, interactive activities, and learning media to create an active, communicative, and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Learning evaluation was carried out continuously by emphasizing students' participation and learning processes. The implementation of Joyful Learning was supported by teacher competence, school support, and adequate facilities, although several obstacles such as differences in students' characteristics, literacy abilities, and limited learning time were still encountered. Overall, Joyful Learning contributed positively to improving student engagement and the quality of Indonesian language learning.

Keywords: Indonesian Language Learning; Joyful Learning; Learning Management; Qualitative Study; Student Engagement.

1. Introduction

Indonesian language learning plays an important role in developing students' literacy skills, critical thinking, and communication abilities. Through Indonesian language learning, students are expected to be able to understand information, process ideas, and express opinions both orally and in writing properly. These abilities are an important part of facing the demands of 21st-century learning which emphasizes critical, creative, collaborative, and communicative thinking skills.

However, the literacy condition of students in Indonesia still shows various problems. Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that Indonesian students' reading literacy ability is still below the average of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. The low literacy ability indicates a gap between national educational goals and learning conditions in schools. In addition, students' low interest in reading and writing skills also become challenges in Indonesian language learning.

As an effort to improve the quality of learning, the government implements the Merdeka Curriculum which emphasizes student-centered learning. The Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for teachers in designing contextual, flexible, and student-oriented learning. One of the main approaches in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is deep learning, namely learning that encourages students to understand material meaningfully and sustainably.

Deep learning is based on three main principles, namely mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. The principle of joyful learning emphasizes the importance of a pleasant learning atmosphere so that students feel comfortable, active, and motivated in participating in learning. A pleasant learning atmosphere is considered capable of increasing student engagement so that learning becomes more effective and meaningful.

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Nevertheless, the implementation of joyful learning in Indonesian language learning at the junior high school level has not been fully optimal. In practice, learning is still often dominated by conventional teacher-centered methods. Teachers mostly use lecture and assignment methods, while students tend to become passive listeners. This condition causes the learning atmosphere to become less interactive and less able to build active student engagement.

In addition, monotonous learning often makes students easily bored and less motivated to participate in Indonesian language learning. Low student engagement can be seen from the lack of participation in discussions, low confidence in expressing opinions, and lack of enthusiasm in participating in learning activities. In fact, student engagement is one of the important factors determining learning success because it is related to students' learning motivation and learning outcomes.

This condition was also found at SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes, especially among eighth-grade students. Based on the results of the preliminary observation conducted by the researcher in January 2026, data showed that out of 32 students, only about 6–8 students or around 20–25% actively participated in learning activities, such as asking questions, answering questions, and expressing opinions. Most of the other students tended to be passive and only listened to the teacher's explanation without active involvement in the learning process.

The results of preliminary interviews with the Indonesian language teacher showed that the teacher still experienced difficulties in creating an active and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Learning activities were still dominated by lectures and practice exercises, while the use of interactive learning media was still limited to textbooks and whiteboards. This condition caused students to become easily bored so that learning motivation and student engagement in learning became less optimal.

The gap between the ideal learning conditions in the Merdeka Curriculum and the factual conditions in the classroom indicates the need for a more innovative and enjoyable learning approach. One approach considered relevant is joyful learning. The joyful learning approach is able to create an active, comfortable, interactive, and meaningful learning atmosphere so that it can increase learning motivation, student engagement, and students' interest in participating in Indonesian language learning.

However, the success of implementing joyful learning does not only depend on the use of learning methods, but also on the learning management carried out by the teacher. Learning management becomes an important foundation in organizing the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of learning so that learning objectives can be achieved effectively. Therefore, the implementation of joyful learning requires systematic and well-directed learning management.

In addition to the existence of a practice gap, this study is also based on a theoretical gap and a knowledge gap. Studies on joyful learning have mostly been applied in early childhood education or certain subjects, while research regarding Indonesian language learning management based on joyful learning at the junior high school level is still relatively limited. In addition, research examining the implementation of joyful learning from the aspect of learning management, starting from planning, implementation, to evaluation, is also still limited.

Based on several relevant studies, the implementation of joyful learning has been proven to provide positive impacts on both the learning process and learning outcomes. Rahmawati (2021), in a study on the implementation of joyful learning in education, found that this approach was able to increase students' active participation and learning outcomes. These findings indicate that an enjoyable learning atmosphere can encourage students' optimal engagement in the learning process [1]. In addition, Prasetyo (2022), in a study regarding learning management and learning motivation, stated that proper learning management can improve students' learning motivation. The findings are relevant to this study because they emphasize the importance of systematic learning management in creating an effective and meaningful learning process [2]. Another study conducted by Sari (2023) regarding enjoyable learning atmospheres in Indonesian language learning showed that enjoyable learning could improve students' language skills [3]. These findings support the implementation of joyful learning in Indonesian language learning, which requires students to actively develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Furthermore, Wulandari (2022), in a study on game-based learning at the junior high school level, found that educational games could improve students' emotional and cognitive engagement, thereby supporting the principles of joyful learning in creating active and enjoyable learning [4].

Meanwhile, Nugroho (2023) stated that interactive learning could improve students' self-confidence and communication skills [5]. This study is relevant to Indonesian language learning based on joyful learning because it emphasizes the importance of active interaction and communication in the learning process.

The selection of SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes as the research location was based on several academic considerations. First, the school has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum so that ideally it has implemented the principles of deep learning. Second, based on the preliminary survey results, there was a gap between curriculum demands and classroom learning practices. Third, there has been no research specifically examining Indonesian language learning management based on joyful learning at the school.

Based on the description above, this research is important to conduct in order to obtain an in-depth description of Indonesian language learning management based on joyful learning among eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes in the 2025/2026 academic year. This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Indonesian language learning that is active, meaningful, and enjoyable.

2. Literature Review

Learning management is the process of managing learning activities systematically in order to achieve learning objectives effectively and efficiently. George R. Terry (2010) explains that management consists of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling activities to achieve predetermined objectives [6]. Mulyasa (2018) states that learning management is the teacher's ability to utilize all learning components, including students, methods, media, environment, and evaluation, in order to achieve learning objectives effectively [7]. Rusman (2017) explains that learning management is the process of managing the interaction between students, educators, and learning resources within a learning environment designed systematically and purposefully [8]. Furthermore, Abdul Majid (2013) explains that learning management is the teacher's effort in organizing and managing the learning process starting from the planning, implementation, to evaluation stages in order to create learning that is active, creative, effective, and enjoyable [9]. According to Arifin and Nurdin (2024), the main functions of learning management include planning, organizing, actuating, and evaluating learning activities [10].

Learning management, joyful learning, and Indonesian language learning are three interconnected concepts in the learning process at the junior high school level. In its implementation, learning management requires an approach capable of creating an active and enjoyable learning atmosphere; therefore, the joyful learning approach is used as a learning strategy that emphasizes meaningful, interactive, and enjoyable learning experiences. In joyful learning, the implementation of learning is carried out through activities that actively involve students, such as discussions, educational games, storytelling, ice breaking, and other collaborative activities [7]. The implementation of joyful learning is highly relevant to Indonesian language learning in junior high schools because Indonesian language learning not only emphasizes mastery of language theory, but also listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills actively. Therefore, proper learning management using the joyful learning approach is expected to improve students' engagement, motivation, and language skills optimally.

3. Proposed Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aimed to understand in depth the phenomenon of Indonesian language learning management based on joyful learning within the natural context of the school without manipulating the research variables. The research design used was an instrumental case study as proposed by Robert E. Stake, stating that a case is used to understand a broader issue (Robert E. Stake). The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes in the 2025/2026 academic year with the research focus covering the planning of Indonesian language learning based on joyful learning.

The implementation of Indonesian language learning based on joyful learning, the evaluation of Indonesian language learning based on joyful learning, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of joyful learning in Indonesian language learning. The main subject of the study was the eighth-grade Indonesian language teacher, while the supporting subjects consisted of eighth-grade students, the principal, and the vice principal for curriculum affairs. The selection of research subjects was carried out using a purposive sampling technique so that the data obtained would be relevant and in-depth according to the research focus.

Data collection techniques were conducted triangulatively through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and open-ended questionnaires. Participatory observation was carried out to directly observe the activities of teachers and students during the learning process. In-depth interviews were conducted semi-structurally with the Indonesian language teacher, the principal, the vice principal for curriculum affairs, and eighth-grade students to obtain information regarding planning, implementation, evaluation, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of joyful learning. Documentation studies were conducted through the analysis of teaching modules, learning instruments, teaching journals, assessment lists, photos of learning activities, and other documents relevant to the study. Open-ended questionnaires were used to determine students' perceptions of the atmosphere of Indonesian language learning based on joyful learning. The stages of data analysis included data collection, data condensation, data presentation, as well as conclusion drawing and verification through presenting data in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, tables, and charts so that the research findings could be scientifically accountable.

4. Results and Discussion

Planning of Indonesian Language Learning Based on Joyful Learning

The results of the study showed that the planning of Indonesian language learning at SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes in the 2025/2026 academic year had been systematically arranged and referred to the Merdeka Curriculum policy. These findings were obtained based on the analysis of learning planning documents, particularly the eighth-grade Indonesian language teaching modules, and were strengthened by in-depth interviews with subject teachers and preliminary observations of the learning process conducted by the researcher during the odd semester.

Based on the results of document analysis, the Indonesian language teacher had prepared teaching modules completely and systematically, including learning objectives, learning objective flow (Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran / ATP), teaching materials, learning activity steps, as well as forms and assessment techniques. The learning objectives were formulated clearly and aligned with the phase D learning outcomes, while the learning objective flow was arranged sequentially from basic competencies toward more complex competencies. This indicates that the teacher had understood the principles of learning planning in the Merdeka Curriculum which emphasize meaningful and sustainable learning.

Furthermore, the results of the study also showed that the learning planning had consciously and systematically integrated the Joyful Learning approach. In planning based on Joyful Learning, teachers not only focused on achieving academic competencies, but also considered students' psychological aspects, such as learning comfort, sense of security, and students' learning interest. This was reflected in the selection of varied and non-monotonous learning strategies and methods.

The teacher designed learning activities that actively involved students, including small group discussions, language games (language games), the use of visual media such as pictures and multimodal texts, and simple reflection activities at the end of learning. These activity variations were designed to avoid boredom while also providing space for students with different learning styles. Based on the interview results, the teacher stated that the activity variations were planned so that students would enjoy participating in Indonesian language learning and would not consider it a difficult or boring subject.

In addition, during the planning stage, the teacher also consistently designed opening activities in the form of ice breaking. The ice breaking activities were planned in the form of light games, word guessing, or trigger questions related to students' daily experiences.

The purpose of these activities was to create a relaxed classroom atmosphere, build closeness between teacher and students, and prepare students' emotional conditions before entering the core material. Observation results showed that these opening activities were able to increase students' attention and learning readiness from the beginning of the lesson.

Thus, the results of this study indicate that the planning of Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning at SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes had been carefully designed, not only oriented toward curriculum demands, but also toward creating enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences for students. This comprehensive planning became an important foundation for the implementation of effective and humanistic learning.

Implementation of Indonesian Language Learning Based on Joyful Learning

The implementation of Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning in the eighth grade of SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year took place in a relatively conducive, communicative, and participatory atmosphere. These findings were obtained through the researcher's direct observations during several learning meetings, and were supported by field notes recording teacher and student activities during the teaching and learning process.

Based on observation results, the teacher opened the lesson with initial activities designed to attract attention and build students' emotional engagement. These opening activities took the form of trigger questions or short games related to the learning material. Examples of trigger questions used by the teacher included: "Have you ever read a story whose character resembles yourself?", "In your opinion, why can a story feel interesting enough to be read until the end?", or "If you became a character in the text we are going to study today, what would you do?". These questions encouraged students to relate the material to personal experiences, making them more prepared and enthusiastic in participating in learning.

During the learning process, the teacher acted more as a facilitator and learning companion rather than the sole source of information. The teacher provided opportunities for students to discuss in small groups, express opinions orally, and collaborate in completing assigned tasks. During discussion activities, the teacher did not directly provide right or wrong answers, but instead asked follow-up questions to explore students' understanding, such as "Why do you think so?" or "Are there any different opinions?". This pattern shows that the teacher encouraged students to think critically and confidently express ideas.

The interaction between teacher and students took place in a two-way manner, meaning that not only the teacher actively spoke and explained the material, but students were also actively involved in the learning communication process. Students were given space to ask questions, respond to teacher explanations, and respond to classmates' opinions. The teacher also responsively addressed students' questions and opinions by providing reinforcement, clarification, and simple feedback. Thus, learning was not one-way or merely lecture-based, but involved dynamic dialogue between teacher and students.

Observation results also showed that the classroom atmosphere tended not to be rigid, marked by fluid communication and close relationships between teacher and students. The teacher used casual but polite language, occasionally inserting light humor or examples close to students' daily lives. Students appeared unhesitant to ask questions or express opinions without fear of making mistakes. In addition, flexible seating arrangements during group discussions and students' more relaxed facial expressions indicated that the classroom atmosphere was not tense or pressured.

The use of learning media also supported the creation of a Joyful Learning atmosphere. The teacher used printed media, such as reading texts and student worksheets, as well as simple digital media, such as slide presentations or visual images displayed through projectors. These media helped students understand the material more concretely and attractively, so that learning did not only focus on verbal explanations.

Overall, the observation results in the eighth grade of SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes showed that the implementation of Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning was able to create an active, communicative, and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Students appeared more confident in expressing opinions, participating in discussions, and showing interest in the learning material. This indicates that the Joyful Learning approach not only influenced the classroom atmosphere, but also improved the quality of interaction and student participation in learning.

Evaluation of Indonesian Language Learning

Based on the results of the study, the evaluation of Indonesian language learning in the eighth grade of SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year was carried out continuously and did not only focus on the final learning outcomes. These findings were obtained through observation of learning activities, analysis of evaluation documents, and interviews with Indonesian language teachers.

Before the implementation of a two-way and continuous evaluation approach, the initial condition of learning evaluation tended to be oriented toward final outcomes. Evaluation was mostly conducted through written assignments or daily tests focusing on students' cognitive achievement. Under these conditions, students generally only received final scores without adequate explanations regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their learning outcomes.

Students' learning processes during learning activities had not yet become the main focus in evaluation activities. Along with the implementation of Joyful Learning-based learning, teachers began changing the evaluation pattern to become more process-oriented and participatory. Evaluation was not only conducted at the end of learning, but integrated into every stage of learning activities. Teachers actively observed students' engagement, participation in discussions, ability to collaborate in groups, and confidence in expressing opinions during the learning process.

The forms of evaluation used became more varied, including individual assignments, group assignments, presentation of discussion results, and simple reflections conducted at the end of learning. These reflections usually took the form of oral questions or short written responses, such as "What new thing did you learn today?" or "Which part of today's lesson did you like the most and why?". Through these reflections, students were invited to become aware of the learning process they had gone through, not merely pursue final scores.

The teacher also provided direct feedback on students' work, both orally and in writing. The feedback given was not judgmental, but emphasized reinforcement and improvement, for example by expressing appreciation for students' efforts and providing concrete suggestions to improve learning outcomes. This feedback pattern encouraged two-way evaluative interaction, in which students could respond to, ask questions about, or clarify the assessment results given by the teacher.

Learning evaluation therefore functioned not only as a tool to measure learning achievement, but also as a means to understand students' levels of comprehension and improve subsequent learning strategies. Teachers used evaluation results as reflection material to adjust methods, media, and learning activities so that they better suited students' needs.

Thus, the evaluation approach implemented in Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning showed a shift from one-way and result-oriented evaluation toward meaningful, humanistic, and process-centered evaluation. This approach aligns with the principles of Joyful Learning, which emphasize that enjoyable, reflective, and participatory learning processes play an important role in improving learning quality.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Joyful Learning

The implementation of Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning in the eighth grade of SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes was influenced by several supporting and inhibiting factors. These factors were obtained from classroom observations, interviews with Indonesian language teachers, and documentation of learning activities.

One of the main supporting factors in implementing Joyful Learning was teacher competence. Teachers had a fairly good understanding of the concept of Joyful Learning, especially regarding the importance of creating a pleasant, comfortable, and actively engaging learning atmosphere. This understanding was reflected in the teacher's ability to choose varied learning methods, use communicative language, and adjust learning activities to students' conditions. Teachers were also able to adapt the principles of Joyful Learning into Indonesian language learning without neglecting curriculum demands.

The next supporting factor was the support from the principal. The principal provided space and freedom for teachers to innovate in learning, including implementing the Joyful Learning approach.

This support was realized through school policies encouraging the use of creative learning methods and providing opportunities for teachers to participate in professional development activities. This support made teachers feel more confident and motivated to implement student-centered learning.

In addition, the availability of facilities and infrastructure also became a supporting factor in implementing Joyful Learning. The school had fairly adequate facilities, such as comfortable classrooms, textbooks, and simple learning support devices, including printed and digital media. These facilities helped teachers present learning materials more attractively and variably, so that students did not easily become bored during the learning process.

On the other hand, the study also found several inhibiting factors in implementing Joyful Learning. One inhibiting factor was the difference in students' characteristics. In one class, there were students who were active and confident in expressing opinions, but there were also students who tended to be passive and less confident. These differences caused not all students to immediately participate actively in learning activities designed based on Joyful Learning.

Another inhibiting factor was limited learning time. The available time allocation was sometimes insufficient to implement all Joyful Learning activities optimally, especially discussion and reflection activities. Teachers had to adjust time allocation so that learning objectives could still be achieved without reducing the essence of enjoyable learning.

In addition, students' varying literacy abilities also became a separate challenge. Differences in reading and text comprehension abilities caused some students to require more intensive assistance. This condition required teachers to be more patient and creative in arranging learning strategies so that all students could participate well in learning.

Despite facing these obstacles, teachers attempted to adjust learning strategies. Teachers divided students into heterogeneous groups, provided more assistance to students who needed it, and simplified materials without reducing learning meaning. These efforts were carried out so that learning could continue effectively and the objectives of Joyful Learning could be achieved.

Thus, it can be concluded that the success of implementing Joyful Learning is not only determined by teacher readiness, but also by support from the school environment and the teacher's ability to manage various obstacles arising in the classroom. The Joyful Learning approach can still be implemented effectively if supported by cooperation between teachers, schools, and students.

Discussion

The discussion based on the results of this study indicates that the management of Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning in the eighth grade of SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes in the 2025/2026 academic year had been implemented in a planned and systematic manner. The learning planning prepared by the teacher demonstrated conformity with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize flexibility, meaningfulness, and student-centered learning. The preparation of complete and structured teaching modules not only functioned as administrative completeness, but also became guidelines for the implementation of learning that supported the creation of an enjoyable and meaningful learning atmosphere.

The integration of the Joyful Learning approach into learning planning showed that the teacher was not only oriented toward achieving academic competencies, but also paid attention to students' psychological aspects. The planning of varied learning activities, such as group discussions, language games, the use of visual media, and reflection activities, reflected the teacher's efforts to accommodate differences in students' characteristics and learning styles. This is in line with the concept of Joyful Learning, which emphasizes the importance of comfort, security, and happiness in the learning process so that students can participate optimally.

The implementation of Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning also showed a shift in the teacher's role from being the center of information to becoming a facilitator and learning companion. The two-way interaction established between teachers and students enabled active and dialogic communication to occur. Students not only listened to the teacher's explanations, but were also given opportunities to ask questions, express opinions, and respond to their classmates' opinions.

This condition supported the formation of participatory learning and encouraged students to think critically and confidently express ideas. A non-rigid classroom atmosphere also strengthened the implementation of Joyful Learning. The use of casual but polite language, accompanied by light humor and examples close to students' daily lives, created a positive learning climate. Students appeared more relaxed, unafraid of making mistakes, and more willing to participate in learning activities. This indicates that a positive emotional atmosphere plays an important role in increasing student engagement and learning comfort.

In terms of learning evaluation, the results of the study showed a shift from evaluation oriented toward final outcomes to evaluation emphasizing the learning process. Evaluation was carried out continuously and integrated into learning activities, enabling teachers to monitor students' development more comprehensively. Providing direct feedback and learning reflection helped students understand the learning processes they had undergone, while also serving as a means for improving subsequent learning activities. This evaluation approach is in line with the principles of Joyful Learning, which view evaluation as part of the learning process rather than merely an assessment of outcomes. The success of implementing Joyful Learning was also influenced by various supporting factors, such as teacher competence, support from the principal, and the availability of facilities and infrastructure.

Teachers' competence in understanding and adapting the concept of Joyful Learning became a key factor in creating enjoyable and meaningful learning. Support from the principal provided opportunities for teachers to innovate, while adequate facilities supported the smooth implementation of learning activities.

On the other hand, this study also found several inhibiting factors, including differences in students' characteristics, limited learning time, and varying literacy abilities. These factors required teachers to possess good adaptability and classroom management skills. Teachers' efforts in adjusting learning strategies indicated that the implementation of Joyful Learning requires flexibility and creativity so that learning can continue effectively despite various obstacles.

Overall, this discussion shows that the management of Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning does not only focus on learning methods, but also includes planning, implementation, evaluation, as well as the integrated management of supporting and inhibiting factors. The Joyful Learning approach has proven capable of creating learning experiences that are more enjoyable, meaningful, and student-centered, thereby contributing positively to improving the quality of Indonesian language learning.

5. Conclusions

Based on the results of the study and discussion regarding the management of Indonesian language learning based on Joyful Learning in the eighth grade of SMP Negeri 1 Kalikotes in the 2025/2026 academic year, it can be concluded that the implementation of Joyful Learning had been carried out systematically through planning, implementation, and evaluation processes that were integrated with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers were able to create a conducive, communicative, participatory, and meaningful learning atmosphere through varied learning methods, media, and activities. Evaluation was conducted continuously by emphasizing students' learning processes, participation, and development during learning activities. The implementation of Joyful Learning was supported by teacher competence, school support, and adequate facilities, although several obstacles were still found, such as differences in students' characteristics, varying literacy abilities, and limited learning time. Overall, the implementation of Joyful Learning contributed positively to improving the quality of Indonesian language learning and increasing student engagement in the learning process.

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