

THE ROLE OF GAME-BASED LEARNING IN IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILL

Muxlisa Azim kizi Ruziyeva

Master's degree student of UzSWLU

muxlissalimova34@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research delves into the essential role that consistent practice plays in enhancing students' speaking abilities, shedding light on the critical need to boost fluency. The utilization of game-based learning techniques emerges as a key strategy in bolstering speaking skills, as it immerses learners in engaging and interactive activities conducive to ongoing practice and improvement. The interactive nature of games enables learners to receive immediate feedback, empowering them to promptly address errors and refine their speaking capabilities. Moreover, this dynamic pedagogical approach fosters a sense of self-assurance among students, cultivating a sustained enthusiasm for active participation and deep engagement in the learning journey.

Keywords: game-based learning, English language learners, speaking skills, engagement, contextual learning, interactive practice, personalized learning, progress tracking, online teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills encompass the ability to effectively communicate thoughts, ideas, and information through speech. This entails clear articulation, proper pronunciation, accurate word choice, and grammatical correctness. Effective speaking goes beyond mere verbal expression; it also involves attentive listening, appropriate responses, and engaging in meaningful conversations. Enhancing speaking abilities is crucial for effective communication in various settings such as professional environments or social interactions. Improved speaking skills enable individuals to express themselves confidently, establish connections with others, engage in discussions, collaborate effectively, and articulate ideas persuasively.

Learning a new language can be a challenging endeavor, particularly when it comes to improving speaking skills. For English language learners (ELLs), effective practice in speaking is essential for achieving fluency and confidence in communication. According to Harmer (2001), the ability to communicate through speech is crucial for humans, as it is challenging to exist without engaging in either monologues or dialogues. Traditional language learning methods often struggle to

engage students and provide meaningful opportunities for speaking practice. However, with the rise of technology and innovative teaching approaches, game-based learning has emerged as a powerful tool for enhancing ELLs' speaking abilities. According to The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1995), games are defined as “Games are described as activities that are organized and typically include a specific task or goal, a set of rules, competition among players, and communication using spoken or written language.” (p. 89) Game-based learning involves the use of games, simulations, and interactive activities to facilitate learning and skill development. In the context of language learning, games provide an engaging and immersive environment where students can practice speaking in a fun and interactive manner. Chen (2007) agrees with this idea, indicating that games are effective because they can quickly grab students' attention, which in turn boosts their motivation and improves their English skills. These games can range from simple vocabulary quizzes to complex role-playing simulations, depending on the learning objectives and students' proficiency. Language game is fusion of language and play (Rooyackers, 2002). Moreover, it serves as a helpful method to enhance children's vocabulary learning in a way that mimics the natural process of play, as suggested by Angelova & Lekova (1995), Atake (2003), and Deng (2006).

Game-based learning stands out for its ability to inspire and involve students. Unlike traditional language learning methods that often rely on memorization and repetitive tasks, which can quickly become boring and disheartening, games provide a dynamic and interactive learning experience. This captures students' interest and encourages them to actively participate. By integrating elements of competition, exploration, and problem-solving, games create a sense of excitement and challenge that motivates students to enhance their speaking abilities. Whether it's through virtual reality simulations, multiplayer games, or language learning apps with gamified features, students are attracted to the immersive and enjoyable aspects of game-based learning. This leads to higher levels of engagement and better retention of language skills.

Games offer learners a context-rich environment to practice language skills authentically. Through role-playing, simulations, and interactive storytelling, students engage in real-life scenarios that require English use. This contextual learning approach helps them grasp language nuances in various contexts, enhancing vocabulary and grammar retention. For instance, a restaurant-themed role-playing game may prompt students to act as waiters, chefs, or customers, using relevant vocabulary and phrases. This immersion not only teaches language but also cultural awareness and communication strategies crucial for effective spoken English.

Another major benefit of game-based learning is its provision of interactive speaking practice opportunities. Through challenges, collaborative activities, or virtual exchanges, games urge students to actively converse and express themselves in English. Language apps like Duolingo and Rosetta Stone incorporate speaking exercises, prompting students to repeat phrases, engage in dialogues, and record their speech for feedback. Similarly, multiplayer games such as Minecraft and Among Us allow English communication while problem-solving together.

Game-based learning's flexibility and customization are also advantageous. Educators can tailor activities to individual learners' needs and interests, aligning with their proficiency levels and learning goals. Puzzle game enthusiasts might benefit from word searches, while storytelling lovers could excel in narrative role-playing games, creating characters and plots in English. By offering choices and autonomy, game-based learning empowers students to control their learning pace and experience.

Games often use gamification elements like points and rewards to motivate students and track progress. Clear goals and immediate feedback encourage continued practice and improvement. Educators can use analytics to monitor performance, identify strengths and weaknesses, and adjust teaching strategies. This sustained engagement and progress tracking enhance language learning outcomes, enabling students to set and monitor their improvement goals.

METHODS

This research was conducted online with pre-intermediate level students, particularly 7th-grade pupils from school 279. Fifteen students agreed to participate, as this online research does not disturb their studying. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of game-based learning. Quantitative data is collected through pre- and post-tests on speaking skills, while qualitative data is collected through interviews to understand students' experiences with game-based learning. A mixed-method study allowed me to explore both the depth (through qualitative data) and breadth (through quantitative data) of a research problem, providing a more comprehensive understanding than either method alone.

In the planning stage, I observed working sheets for pupils, questionnaires, pre and post tests and different type of games which can improve English language learners fluency in the online educational environment. The lesson plan is crafted to maximize learning success.

In the acting part of the lessons, various games were used during the twelve sessions, each lasting 80 minutes. At the start, I assessed students with a brief presentation, introductions, and small talk. Then, to warm them up, we played tongue

twister games to increase their focus and motivation. Games like word association, interviews, storytelling, and charades were chosen based on the lesson's content. Next, I set learning goals, presented material, grouped students, recorded their performances, concluded, and gave tests.

During the observing phase, I watched how students participated and analyzed what worked well or did not. Finally, in the reflecting stage, I assessed the observation results. Various methods were used to gather data, including observation, interviews, and pre-test & post - test. Interviews were done every four lessons to understand how students felt about the games. Data was transcribed, sorted, analyzed, and interpreted to meet the research goals.

RESULTS

3.1 The Result of Post Observational Note

Initially, I encountered challenges with time management and other aspects, but swiftly rectified them to avoid recurrence in subsequent phases. Similarly, students initially felt confused, embarrassed, and apprehensive about speaking. They struggled to articulate their thoughts, opinions, and ideas, as well as pronouncing new vocabulary, and lacked motivation for game-based learning. These issues were addressed and analyzed, leading to the implementation of game-based learning as a solution to resolve them. That is why I can claim that game-based learning can have positive impact on students' fluency.

3.2 The Result of Post Questionnaire

Table 1. The result of post questionnaire

No	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Students become more interested in speaking after using games in lessons.	46	45	6	3
2	Students find it easier to express themselves after practicing with games.	56	38	5	1
3	Students enjoy learning through fun games.	38	50	8	4
4	Students are motivated to improve their English-speaking skills and study harder.	32	52	9	7
5	Students feel more confident speaking after practicing with games.	51	30	14	5

3.3 The Result of Post Test

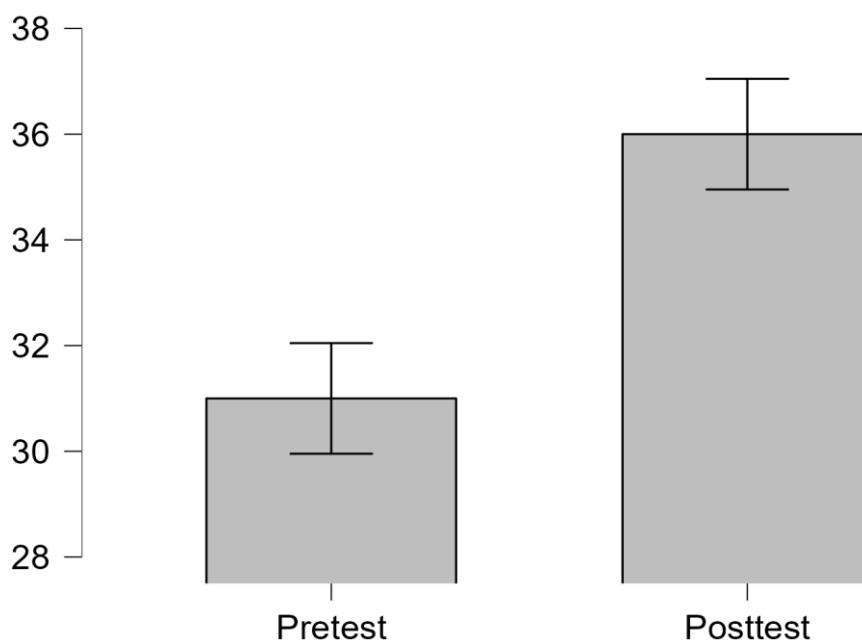
The students' speaking skills got better over time, according to their scores. Here are the scores from all the 15 students.

Table 2. The improvement score from pre-test to the post-test.

Descriptives

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Pretest	15	31.000	6.601	1.704	0.213
Posttest	15	36.000	7.606	1.964	0.211

The following figures are the result of the mean score improvement and percentage per test.

Bar Plots**Pretest – Posttest****3.4 The Result of Post Interview**

On Monday, April 15, 2024, I conducted a post-interview after completing twelve lessons to understand students' perspectives on improving fluency in English through game-based learning. I asked questions about their experiences in English class, challenges with interactive games, and their opinions on the effectiveness of these games in English speaking activities. The students reported feeling more confident, participating more, and being more enthusiastic and fluent in English compared to before. They believed that interactive games create a conducive learning environment, making learning enjoyable, reducing boredom and stress. They expressed the importance of continuing these games, emphasizing their positive impact on English speaking activities in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

Before the research began, students had an average speaking score of 31 in the preliminary Study. The mean score of the post test was 36. An increase from a mean score of 31 in the pre-test to 36 in the post-test suggests improvement or progress in students' fluency was being measured by the test. It indicates that, on average, participants performed better after game-based learning took place between the pre-test and post-test.

Based on the information gathered from observation, taking notes, testing, and questionnaire, it was discovered that students had fun and challenging activities to get better at speaking. To help with this, teachers should be really creative in giving students lots of chances to use language and practice speaking. Since this research suggests that learning through games can help improve speaking fluency, using these methods could be a good option in English language classrooms, especially for speaking practice.

The research found that students learned and spoke without feeling stressed. Even when some they found certain games tricky, they still enjoyed them and finished with smiles. . This shows that using interactive games to boost speaking skills was quite successful.

CONCLUSION

In summary, leveraging game-based learning presents significant opportunities for enhancing English Language Learners' speaking abilities. It cultivates motivation, delivers contextual learning experiences, allows interactive practice, supports personalized learning, and facilitates progress monitoring. Through leveraging technology and creativity, educators can establish vibrant language learning environments that empower students to excel as confident English speakers. As game-based learning evolves in language education, educators must explore new tools, strategies, and effective practices for its integration into teaching. Embracing this approach can spark students' enthusiasm for learning, motivating them to acquire essential skills for success in today's interconnected world. It's suggested to do similar studies with students at different levels too.

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