GAME-BASED LEARNING AS A STRATEGY TO IMPROVE ENGLISH SPEAKING ACCURACY SKILLS IN FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT A PRIVATE SCHOOL IN BOGOTÁ

EL APRENDIZAJE BASADO EN JUEGOS COMO ESTRATEGIA PARA MEJORAR LAS HABILIDADES DE PRECISIÓN ORAL EN INGLÉS EN ESTUDIANTES DE QUINTO GRADO DE UNA ESCUELA PRIVADA EN BOGOTÁ

Laura Sofia Cardenas Garcia
Universidad El Bosque, Colombia

Juan Andrés Rodriguez Forero
Universidad El Bosque, Colombia

Margarita Lucelly Estrada Restrepo
Universidad El Bosque, Colombia

Game-Based Learning as a Strategy to Improve English Speaking Accuracy Skills in Fifth-Grade Students at a Private School in Bogotá

Laura Sofia Cardenas Garcia[1]

lscardenas@unbosque.edu.co

https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7266-509X

Universidad El Bosque

Bogotá, Colombia

Juan Andrés Rodriguez Forero

jarodriguezf@unbosque.edu.co

https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0733-3905

Universidad El Bosque

Bogotá, Colombia

Margarita Lucelly Estrada Restrepo

mlestrada@unbosque.edu.co

https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7588-5968

Universidad El Bosque

Bogotá, Colombia

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of game-based learning as a strategy to improve the accuracy of English-speaking skills of fifth-grade students at a private school in Bogotá. A strategy should be implemented to encourage and motivate students to practice their speaking skills, which, at the same time, will help reduce the anxiety that is generated when learning a new language. Using a qualitative method, the study involved 29 students between 9 and 10 years old. Information was gathered through field notes, audio recordings, and interviews across three action-research cycles. The main goal was to analyze how useful the digital board game was, based on what students shared in their final comments and suggestions. The findings showed that the most common issues students had were grammatical interference, verb lexicon, and meaning over form, being important when developing oral expression. Moreover, students also reported feeling listened to, which increased confidence and willingness to speak. This study suggests that students can develop stronger speaking skills, such as grammar, pronunciation, and varied vocabulary, through a digital board game enhanced with interactive features. Game-based learning displayed its value in promoting autonomy and a more motivated and positive environment to improve the English-speaking skills.

Keywords: game-based learning, digital board game, speaking skills, motivation, meaning over form

[1] Autor principal

Correspondencia: lscardenas@unbosque.edu.co

El Aprendizaje Basado en Juegos como Estrategia para Mejorar las Habilidades de Precisión Oral en Inglés en Estudiantes de Quinto Grado de una Escuela Privada en Bogotá

RESUMEN

Esta investigación examina los efectos del aprendizaje basado en juegos como estrategia para mejorar las habilidades lingüísticas en ingles de los estudiantes de quinto grado de un colegio privado de Bogotá. Se debe implementar una estrategia para incentivar y motivar a los estudiantes a practicar sus habilidades de habla, loque, al mismo tiempo, ayudara a reducir la ansiedad que se genera al aprender un nuevo idioma. Utilizando un método cualitativo, el estudio involucró a 29 estudiantes de entre 9 y 10 años. La información se recopilo mediante notas de campo, grabaciones de audio y entrevistas a lo largo de tres ciclos de investigación-acción. El objetivo principal fue analizar la utilidad del juego de mesa digital, con base en los comentarios y sugerencias finales de los estudiantes. Los hallazgos mostraron que los problemas más comunes de los estudiantes fueron interferencia gramatical, léxico verbal y significado sobre la forma, siendo importantes para el desarrollo de la expresión oral. Además, Los estudiantes también reportaron sentirse escuchados, lo que aumento la confianza y la disposición para hablar. Este estudio sugiere que los estudiantes pueden desarrollar habilidades de habla más sólidas, como gramática, pronunciación y vocabulario variado, a través de un juego de mesa digital mejorado con funciones interactivas. El aprendizaje basado en juegos demostró su valor para promover la autonomía y un entorno mar motivado y positivo para mejorar las habilidades del habla en Ingles.

***Palabras clave*:** aprendizaje basado en juegos, juego de mesa digital, expresión oral, motivación, significado sobre la forma

INTRODUCTION

Speaking English has become essential in today's globalized interconnected world, where it serves as a common language for international communication. Nonetheless, many people still face difficulties when trying to speak English fluently. Game-based learning (GBL) is known to help students participate more and close learning gaps at different levels of education. Some studies, like Pho and Dinscore (2015), say that students can learn new things by trying out new ideas in a safe space, where they don't feel judged for making mistakes. This matters because, as Rajendran et al. (2024) explain, many students don't receive tasks that can help improve their speaking skills due to a lack of teachers' expertise in conducting communicative language teaching activities presented in traditional settings (e.g, teacher-centered methods), being a problem that commonly occurs in English classes, and in our context it is no exception. When teachers include digital games, it can help students join in more, feel less nervous, and speak more fluently and confidently. GBL is an example of an innovative approach to teaching. Agreeing with Ningsih (2023) explains that game-based learning is a way of learning that transforms the learning space into an enjoyable and entertaining experience.

Even though speaking skills are a key to effective communication, many students, especially in English, present language barriers, such as anxiety and lack of confidence when trying to communicate. Studies such as Anburaj et al. (2014) explain that traditional methods repeatedly produce fewer effective results, contrasting with innovative approaches. However, traditional teaching methods are still prioritized over fluency in the classroom.

As society progresses, both teaching and learning strategies must also evolve to include innovative methodologies. As Reyes (2023) explains, this development underscores the important role technology has been playing in modifying and reshaping teaching and learning procedures.

This research focuses on how GBL can enhance English-speaking skills among 5th-grade students. Its main goal is to investigate and describe how the implementation of GBL supports the development of speaking skills, while fostering an interactive environment for practicing English communication. To achieve this goal, three specific objectives were established: 1. Identify the students' initial speaking-level conditions; 2. Describe the impact of GBL on students' fluency, accuracy, and confidence; 3. Evaluate and analyze the results obtained after the intervention. Based on this, the following research

question was formulated: What is the impact of game-based learning on the development of accuracy of English-speaking skills in fifth-grade students at a private school in Bogotá?

Even though this kind of study has been explored in previous research, little is known about its application in Colombian primary school, thus enriching the existing knowledge to inform future research. Few studies have addressed GBL as a strategy for developing speaking skills in Colombian primary schools; this study seeks to fill that gap by implementing GBL to enhance students' English-speaking skills. Field notes, audio recordings, and interviews will serve as the primary data sources.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is built upon three main theoretical constructs: Game-Based Learning (GBL), the development of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the role of Motivation, particularly through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Accuracy. These concepts help us understand how dynamic and playful activities, like interactive games, can support students in improving their spoken English, especially in settings where confidence and participation are essential.

Game-Based Learning (GBL)

Game-Based Learning is defined as the use of pedagogical games, both digital and traditional, to promote active students' interaction with the class content, thereby facilitating effective learning. According to Wang and Zheng (2020) when games are implemented in the classroom, students usually display interest and seek to participate more. Similarly, Pho and Dinscore (2015) discuss how games can motivate learners. Additionally, a study carried out in Bogotá by Guerrero Casallas (2023) claimed that when students used games to practice speaking, they talked more and felt less nervous. Hence, using games in English class can contribute to students feeling more at ease when speaking.

Speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

Speaking is an essential language skill which allows human beings to communicate and interact in meaningful ways. Burns and Joyce (1997) describes it as a process of exchange, characterized by the dynamic and interactive nature of producing, receiving, and processing information. Likewise, Luoma (2004) states that speaking involves not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to adapt language and co-construct meaning with the listeners.

Because of this, speaking is generally considered to be a challenging but indispensable aspect of learning a foreign language. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), speaking is often one of the most demanding skills for students, who may struggle with anxiety, lack of confidence, or limited opportunities to practice (Verdiyeva & Huseynova, 2017). Nonetheless, this skill is a key component since it fosters active participation, communicative competence, and the ability to use English in situated contexts.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

The Self-determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan, stands as a central reference in the study of human motivation. This theory seeks to explain how individuals initiate and sustain behaviors based on innate psychological needs. According to Rahayu et al. (2022), these fundamental needs can be summarized in three dimensions: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When the learning environment stimulates these aspects, individuals are more likely to engage by their own will and portray a lot more consistency in their development.

Within the context of EFL, motivation plays a crucial role. According to Amoah and Yeboah (2021), motivation is the power that cheers students to get in contact with unknown and demanding conditions, with the sensation of being anticipated for growth and hope for success.

Accuracy

According to Cendra and Sulindra (2022), accuracy takes into a count language element such as how well speakers: pronounce words, use syntax, and speak the target language. Furthermore, accuracy is a main factor that can define effective communication. Yuan and Ellis (2003) explained that speaking accuracy shows how well the use of the language adheres to and follows the rules of that language. When accuracy is fostered, individuals have the opportunity to learn a language fruitfully, avoiding biases and mislearning.

As previously shown and mentioned, the constructs of speaking skills in EFL, SDT and Accuracy are essential to understand and consider the factors that involve how the learning of a language can be improved. With this in mind, research on GBL has proven to be an effective strategy and tool to trigger motivation, which in turn supports the development of students' speaking skills.

Numerous studies have explored the role of GBL in language education, highlighting its potential to enhance students' English skills. For example, Qian and Clark (2015) mention that GBL creates surroundings in which gameplay and content are merged for students to develop knowledge and skills through problem-solving tasks, promoting the feeling of accomplishment. With this methodology, students can be requested to accomplish quests (games) in a language learning environment, and they will consider them as an adventure, which can motivate them to improve their knowledge engagingly and interactively. Despite the large number of studies focused on GBL, few have investigated how this methodology could enhance the speaking skills of learners in Colombia. Ruziyeva (2024) mentions that while GBL has been widely recognized to enhance motivation and language learning, more research is required to understand how exactly it impacts speaking fluency.

Building on previous research, we aim to address this gap by investigating how GBL enhances speaking accuracy skills by means of motivation in 5th-grade learners in Colombia. Moreover, offering insights for educators seeking innovative language teaching methods.

It is proposed that GBL intervention provides choice, clear rules, and immediate feedback, which increases learners' autonomy and sense of competence while reducing speaking anxiety due to a playful, cooperative climate. Together, these conditions enable more meaningful practice (more turns and more time on tasks in purposeful communicative activities). Consequently, it is expected observable gains in speaking, for instance, greater fluency and accuracy in applying the learned structure and better grammatical control of the target structures, consistent with the assumptions of speaking skills in EFL (English language usage) and SDT (satisfaction of basic psychological needs).

METHODOLOGY

General approach

This study examined the effects of GBL on the improvement of English-speaking skills through the implementation of interactive games in the classroom. The study was carried out in a controlled classroom environment where students completed game-focused exercises. They were expected to improve their ability to encourage students' expression and participation.

The GBL approach is a strategy aimed at developing students' interest in speaking while reducing anxiety and encouraging natural speech.

Furthermore, the chosen games were crafted with general proficiency objectives in mind, considering and aligning with students' level of linguistic competence A2.2 within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The main interest in this research was to implement an interactive activity that would contribute to learners feeling less nervous or anxious and more comfortable, promoting cooperation and critical thinking. Additionally, it aimed to assess how much it would improve their fluency and willingness to speak in English.

Research design

This action-research study was conducted to describe how the implementation of GBL as a strategy could enhance the development of speaking skills in a fifth-grade English class at a private school in Bogotá, Colombia. As Burns et al. (2022) explains, action research considers that professionals who have previous expertise in a discipline examine their activity to create and build enhancements and revolutionary change. The action part applies to a planned intervention that sets up precise activities within the research setting.

A qualitative approach was adopted in this research to explore students' classroom experiences within the EFL context. As Lim (2024) explains, qualitative research considers important factors such as experience, existence, perspective, meaning, subjectivity, and context, shows significant perspectives for exploring and interpreting the different complexities of social phenomena. Thus, it was used to obtain a deeper understanding of students' experiences, needs, and opinions within the classroom, to implement effective solutions for improving the training of their English-speaking skills.

Participants

This research focuses on a private school located in Bogotá, Colombia. Convenience sampling was used to select the participants from within a total of 29 students, boys and girls, from fifth grade, aged between 9 and 10 years old **(**N=29; 9-10 years**)** without any illness or needing medical treatment. Participation was voluntary, and students were regularly reminded in person that they could choose whether to participate or not. The study included those students who were available and willing to share their thoughts and experiences, without the application of specific selection criteria. Pedagogical relevance was ensured based on students' and their parents' willingness and acceptance to actively participate in the study by means of signing an informed consent.

The selected students represented a linguistic diversity of the environment and were exposed to English from an early age. Bearing in mind the integrity of each student and giving them the choice to participate or not, it was a priority to carry out an informed consent. None of the students were excluded, and participation remained voluntary throughout the study until the end.

Data collection and instruments

The collection of qualitative data was done in 8 weeks of 2 hours per week, employing 3 instruments. First, the use of field notes by making observations during an English class focusing on students' participation and classroom development. This tool was used because it allowed the researchers to annotate details and systematically record real-time observations, thereby identifying patterns during regular class sessions. As Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017) explain, field notes are valuable for various purposes, particularly for supporting research with detailed and rich descriptions of interactions, interviews, documents, and focus groups within the research context.

The second tool was audio recordings of students responding to questions implemented by the researchers about common situations to determine how well students get along with their English-speaking ability. This tool was implemented to obtain authentic and natural responses for evaluating students' ability to use English in short conversations, as well as to identify speaking patterns that provide insights into their language needs. This tool has gained acknowledgment, and it is still a useful device, just as Rutakumwa et al. (2019) explain that over the past three decades, the use of audio recording has developed into a quality method to create in-depth transcripts of interviews and group discussions.

Finally, the third instrument was a semi-structured interview. Researchers designed five questions in the students' first language (Spanish), to identify their experiences and opinions about the digital board game created with the tool Genially. The interview was conducted after the lesson of the present continuous tense in its affirmative, negative, and interrogative forms, followed by the board game activity. This instrument was selected because it enabled the exploration of students´ perspectives while providing reliable and authentic information. As Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021) explain, a key advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they allow for focused conversations while giving researchers the flexibility to explore emerging themes during the dialogue.

As a final review of the game, a semi-structured interview was conducted to determine its usefulness and effectiveness. The selection of these 3 useful tools allowed the researchers to explore and examine the extent to which GBL enhanced students' learning and engagement.

To achieve this, triangulation was used to analyze the emerging outcomes from all the instruments, comparing and identifying similar patterns to obtain a better and unbiased comprehension of students' learning process through GBL implementation, working as an essential element in the improvement of students' speaking skills. As Bans-Akutey and Tiimub (2021) explain, triangulation involves making, in a well-informed manner, decisions after authenticating the obtained outcomes of an investigation.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PROCEDURE

The action research was structured in three cycles (diagnostic, initial improvement, and final implementation), each lasting eight weeks and consisting of sessions of 1–2 hours.

- **Cycle 1 (Diagnostic observation):** This cycle lasted for two weeks. In the first week, a two-hour session was conducted, followed by several shorter sessions during the second week. The Instruments applied were field notes and audio recordings. The focus was to identify students' initial speaking level, their most common difficulties, and to establish baseline categories for further analysis

- **Cycle 2 (Initial improvement):** A second cycle was also extended over two weeks. During the first week, two sessions were carried out: the first lasting two hours and the second one hour, followed by an additional one-hour session in the second week. The instruments included a semi-structured interview and the first version of the interactive digital board game (Genially), which introduced practice with the present continuous tense. The purpose of this cycle was to observe early changes in participation and to gather feedback from students to refine and improve the game design.

- **Cycle 3 (Final implementation):** The final cycle lasted three weeks. The first week included a two-hour session, followed by a one-hour session in the subsequent weeks. The instruments used were the updated version of the interactive board game and short follow-up interviews. The main focus of this cycle was to apply the improvements suggested by the fifth-grade students, while assessing changes in fluency, confidence, and the reduction of common errors.

▪ **In the eight-week**, A checklist was implemented to evaluate the success of the board game.

We conducted open coding of field notes, audio recordings, and interviews, using speaking turns (audio) and excerpts (observations/interviews) as the unit of analysis. In the initial stage, all relevant fragments were labeled without forcing categories. Then, the researchers coded an initial 20% of the data to refine the codebook aiming to identify similar patterns or situations during a normal English language learning class (e.g., error-aux-be, missing- ing, -ed, -s, -ies, etc., tense-mismatch, literal-translation, code-switching) After that, axial coding was performed, in which codes were grouped and consolidated into broader categories, resulting in three final categories: First, Grammatical interference as stated by Puspita (2021) takes place when people applies the grammar rules of their first language into the second language that they are learning. Second, Verb lexicon which According to Viberg (2002), a small quantity of the most recurrent verbs emerges in languages and end up being the most commonly used, and they are known as common verbs and third, meaning over form, as explained by Suer (2023), form is related to the rules and structural features that determine how a language is assembled or put together. Furthermore, the same author stated that meaning indicates the process by which people recognize and interpret forms such as sentences, words, etc. Regarding this, one study has found that memory is a factor that implies how meaning and form are recalled differently through various contexts (Saleem and Umer, 2021). Moreover, another study mentioned that importance is given to meaning rather than analyzing grammatical aspects (Mekheimer and Fageeh, 2025). Thereafter, an inter-coder agreement on the double-coded sample was achieved, and discrepancies were resolved by consensus. Definitions were refined before coding the entire corpus. Finally, to ensure reliability, an external reviewer checked the coded segments to confirm consistency between codes and categories.

Categories such as g*rammatical interference, verb lexicon and meaning over form*, were identified through examples like: ''*They traveled didn't to Paris*'' (Field notes), ''*a veces me perdía y decía cosas como she play sin el verbo to be o sin el ing.*'' (interview), and ''*I am ate chocolate*'' (Audio recordings). These categories are valid because students relied on their previous English learning experiences to construct sentences. Focused on transmitting messages instead of considering the grammatical aspects and by overusing common verbs, they often produced sentences with errors in word order or verb tense, adding or omitting endings such as -s, -es, -ies, -ed, -ing when trying to express ideas.

In practice, triangulation enhanced the validation of the findings by demonstrating that the same difficulties emerged across all instruments. Field notes, audio recordings, and interviews consistently revealed grammatical interference, verb lexicon, and meaning over form as recurring challenges in the English classroom. The recurrence of these patterns confirms that the data are trustworthy and coherent, supporting Oliver-Hoyo and Allen's (2006) assertion that triangulation strengthens the credibility of qualitative research by comparing results obtained through different methods.

The following table shows a summary of what evidence was found in each instrument and how the information was triangulated, identifying issues. On the left side are the categories or codes. On the right are the results found in each of the three instruments.

Table 1 Triangulation of the research Categories

Category/ codes	Field notes	Audio recordings	Interviews (Students' perceptions)
Grammatical interference	The use of verbs in the present simple tense (-s or -es endings) or (-ing endings) when the activity was about the past simple tense.	Expressions such as: ''I eating chocolate''. ''I am ate chocolate''. Using those kinds of structures could affect their speaking skills in future conversations.	Despite the topic (present continuous) being practiced before, grammatical interference was present: Lack of verb to be or words without the ING ending, in: ''she play''.
Verb lexicon	To avoid mistakes, only used known verbs (e.g. play).	Students rely on the most common verbs. play, draw, sleep, eat, etc.	One student was comfortable and used the verb ''play'' when self-reflecting.
Meaning over form	''They traveled didn't to Paris'' instead of They didn't travel to Paris. Happened due to their necessity to communicate and answer the question but to do it, meaning over form influenced it.	''I am drink water'' ''I am in the play futbol''. Trying to transmit a message, the mixed order of the words is evidenced.	''También lo necesitamos *porque siempre, para que siempre* nos corrijan si nos equivocamos o también si pronunciamos mal algunas palabras''. Some Spanish structures can influence the way they create English sentences.

Note. Prepared by the authors.

This study was carried out within an action research framework, organized into three iterative cycles. Following the model of Kemmis and McTaggart (1998), each cycle involved the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The analysis combined thematic coding with color marking techniques, which made it possible to trace recurrent patterns across the different instruments: namely, the field notes, the audio recordings, and interviews. This layered process helped ensure that findings were examined from multiple angles, rather than relying on a single source of evidence.

The first cycle, used as a diagnostic observation, ran over the first two weeks with sessions of about two hours. At this stage the purpose was not to move forward with new content but to see where the students stood in English, especially on the lesson introduced by the homeroom teacher. As Nazari (2022) points out, planning in action research usually begins with spotting a concrete issue and then deciding on the right tools to capture evidence. In this study, field notes proved to be the most practical option. They were taking across a group of 28 students and offered a balance view of their performance: while the records revealed notable difficulties in oral communication, they also showed certain strengths that provided a foundation for the next cycle of intervention.

In the action stage, audio recordings were used to capture students' responses. A total of 26 students participated to maintain accuracy; the analysis focused only on the most frequent patterns that appeared. Therefore, the observation phase involved reviewing both transcriptions and the real time data, following the approach suggested by Cohen et al. (2022). Particular attention was given to language use as it naturally occurred in classroom interactions, which provided a clearer picture of how students manage communication in practice.

During the broader analysis, three dominant categories consistently appeared across all instruments: grammatical interference, verb lexicon, and meaning over form. While colors were originally applied during coding to help track these categories, the findings are presented here in textual form for clarity. Table 2 provides an example of field notes from an English class with 28 students, showing excerpts of classroom observation alongside their respective analysis.

Table 2 Examples of grammatical interference, verb lexicon, and meaning over form identified during class observation

Class observation	Analysis
Other students tried to complete the sentences but used the present tense verbs with –s or –es endings, or they used the present continuous tense verbs (ing endings).	**Grammatical interference:** Grammatical interference were presented during the whole explanation and development of the presented topic, despite having the structure on the board and having the structure on the board and having learned about the specific rules and characteristics, some students made some mistakes, such as using other verb tenses (-s, -es, -ing endings) when the activity was only in past simple.
There was another occasion when students confused the sentence structure, even though they had the sentence structure on the board.	**Meaning over form:** Mistakes like ''they traveled didn't to Paris'' instead of ''They didn't travel to Paris'' reveal that

They often used the verb first and then the auxiliary or they used the correct structure but misspelled the verb, for example, writing: ''They traveled didn't to Paris''.	it happened due to their focus on communicating and answering the question as soon as they could. Because of the reliance on their first language (Spanish) to create the sentences, it could have affected the way could process the English structure and their learning performance.
They could say out loud to create different sentences themselves, following the structure on the board. Many students made short sentences and always used the verb ''play'' a lot because they felt familiar with it.	**Verb lexicon:** This could be evidenced when students most of the time used the verb ''play'' for creating and talking in English, showing that students have being having little exposure to different verbs. To avoid committing mistakes or having a bad grade, students only used the known verbs, in this case, the verb ''play''.

Note 1. The collected information was on the topic given by the homeroom teacher (past simple), aiming for a quick review.
Note 2. Prepared by the authors.

After analyzing the field notes, the second instrument considered was the audio recording of classroom interaction. This tool provided a closer look at students' spoken production and helped confirm the recurring patterns already identified in observation.

To complement the findings from classroom observation, the researchers also analyzed data from the audio recording tool. In this case, a brief oral activity was carried out to assess students' English proficiency. One of the researchers posed six questions, and from these, the three responses with the most errors were selected for analysis. Seven students volunteered to participate, and their questions and answers are presented on the left in Table 3, with the corresponding participants identified on the right.

Table 3 Brief Oral activity

Example of audio recording prompt
(0:00) I am going to ask you some simple questions in English, (0:04) and you must answer them taking into account your preferences, likes, and dislikes, or what you would do in that situation. (0:14) You need to answer them in English, (0:16) Ok? (0:17) Let's start:

Questions and Answers	Participants
1. **What do you do when you are nervous?**	**T-S**
Student 1: (0:01) I am drink water (0:03) and draw.	
2. **What do you do when you are bored?**	**T-Ss**
Student 2: (0:01) I draw, (0:07) listen in the music.	
Student 3: (0:01) I am in the play the futbol.	
3. **What do you do when it is cold?**	**T-Ss**
Student 4: (0:01) I eating chocolate.	
Student 5: (0:01) I take a shower with hot water (0:06) and I study o I sleeping..	

Student 6: (0:01) Walk in the park and (0:07) I sleeping.

Student 7: (0:01) I am ate chocolate with cheese (0:07) and play the hide and seek.

Note 1. Questions in the present simple were carried out to recognize students' real English performance considering the homeroom teacher's following topic.
Note 2. Prepared by the authors.

During the analysis (observation) stage, the researchers underlined key excerpts and assigned categories to recurring errors. Examples included sentences such as *"They traveled didn't to Paris," "I am drink water,"* and *"I am in the play the futbol,"* as well as the repeated use of basic verbs like *play, draw, eat,* and *sleep.* These codes reflected the three central categories that emerged throughout the study: grammatical interference, verb lexicon, and meaning over form. Identifying these categories provided the basis for the next step in the action research cycle: reflection on the intervention.

Reflection, understood as the evaluation of the entire intervention process, can generate additional cycles in action research (Nazari, 2022). In this study, reflection was carried out to design and implement informed adjustments for the following cycle. The findings revealed that most students relied heavily on their first language (Spanish) when constructing sentences. Field notes confirmed that even when the correct structures were written on the board, students defaulted to Spanish-based patterns. This reliance also limited their lexical variety, as they frequently repeated a small set of familiar verbs— a phenomenon described as verb lexicon.

Consequently, students produced numerous grammatical errors, particularly in the placement of auxiliaries, the use of verb tenses, and sentence structure, all of which hindered effective communication.

In the school curriculum, the next topic scheduled was the present continuous tense. Yet, during the lessons, students still made mistakes with even A1 grammatical forms. This suggested that a different approach was needed. As a result, it was decided to implement an activity in the frame of a game that could help them to internalize and acquire the following grammatical structure.

The second cycle is referred to as *initial improvement,* and it took place during the fourth week of the study, consisting of two class sessions, one lasting two hours and the other one hour. First, in the planning stage, the researchers designed a pedagogical intervention in the form of a game for all 29 students, focused on the present continuous tense. Second, for the action phase, an interactive board

game was created using the Genially platform. During this activity, it was required to review the topic, focusing on its affirmative, negative, and interrogative forms, allowing them to demonstrate whether they could recall and apply the structure correctly.

Afterwards, observation was carried out during the fifth week through one-hour interviews conducted in Spanish. The entire group of students were invited to participate in the interview. However, knowing that students were going to be interviewed, many felt nervous about saying something wrong or incorrect about the game. For this reason, three students voluntarily participated, without being forced to share their experiences and opinions about the board game. Taking this into account, we took a representative sample of 10% of the students. Their responses were transcribed to capture most details of their learning process.

The design of the board game used during the phase is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 First Board game.

Note. Prepared by the authors.

This was the first version of the online board game created with genially. The primary objective of the version was to check whether the students understood the grammatical structures of the present continuous tense and are capable of applying them in solving English questions based on the contextual images and examples given in the game. This is an example of one of the exercises from the first board game, where students were asked to create questions using visual prompts such as ''you'', ''playing'', and ''soccer'', which led to questions like ''Are you playing soccer?''.

Semi-structured interview (Cycle two reflection)

As part of the observation phase, a semi-structured interview was conducted in Spanish with three students to gather their experiences and final opinions of the board game. Five questions were prepared, of which two are presented here as examples: Example interview prompt

Example interview prompt

(0:00) Buenos días, el día de hoy vamos a hacer una entrevista con relación a un juego que se realizó

(0:06) en Genially, un board game sobre el presente continuo. Vamos a iniciar con cinco preguntas

(0:11) y la entrevista va a ser en español. ¿Listo? ¡Empezamos!

- ¿Piensas que el juego fue útil y te ayudo a entender y practicar el presente continuo?

  _____

- Si tu hubieras hecho el juego, ¿Que le agregarías o que le cambiarias?

  _____

As part of the reflection, students displayed both engagement and enjoyment while playing the game. Likewise, One participant commented: *"Me gustó porque podíamos practicar cómo responder preguntas usando frases completas, pero a veces me perdía y decía cosas como she play sin el verbo to be o sin el ing."* Another reflected: *"Sí, me ayudó mucho… esta actividad me pudo ayudar a poderme corregir y también porque ahora sé que debo decir las palabras con ING."*

On the other hand, some students reflected on the value of learning English, for example: *"Se necesitaría práctica en casa… porque cuando nosotros estemos en las universidades… vamos a necesitar mucho el inglés para podernos comunicar."* Students also offered suggestions for improvement, such as including more movement, easier questions, or additional challenges to make the game more engaging. These ideas informed the adjustments for the next cycle.

Cycle 3: Final Implementation

The third cycle, referred to as *Final Implementation*, was carried out in the sixth week during a two-hour class session. This stage incorporated feedback from the second cycle. The objective in the planning phase was to refine the board game so that more students could participate freely in speaking activities.

In the action phase, the game was modified to include more basic guidelines such as shorter, simpler questions, clearer instructions, and opportunities for all students to participate. The class of 29 students was divided into four teams to encourage collaboration, communication, and friendly competition. While motivation had already been observed within the first version, the group-based dynamics

facilitated better peer feedback due to students being able to answer the questions as a group, support each other, and share ideas to carry out the game.

By means of observation, at first, some students struggled to understand the rules. However, after a few attempts and student modeling, they were able to participate with more confidence. Throughout the activity, improvements in fluency, confidence, and willingness to speak were more visible. A follow-up semi-structured interview, conducted during the seventh week, confirmed these impressions. Students described the game as enjoyable and dynamic for practicing English-speaking skills. Finally, integrating the board game in the classroom created a positive learning environment, resulting in motivation to learn. Taking into consideration students' feedback was essential, as it gave the students a sense of agency in shaping the activity. At the same time, the researchers noted the importance of carefully planning group work, modeling strategies, and providing scaffolding examples to maximize the benefits of game-based learning.

The updated version of the board game, developed from the students' feedback in Cycle 2, is presented in

Figure 2

Note. Prepare by the authors.

This was the updated version of the online board game created with Genially. The main objective of this updated version was to check whether the students understood accurately the grammatical structures of the present continuous tense with the support of their classmates and more dynamics. This is an example of one of the exercises from the updated version of the board game, where students were asked to complete the sentence considering words such as am/now/I/sleeping/right, which led to a sentence like ''I am sleeping right now''.

This final implementation revealed that learners seem to need less guidance from the teacher, but instead they learn better from their peers and need clear examples for new activities. Overall, the environment was encouraging, which resulted in a remarkable increase in the students' active interaction and

participation. The future cycles need to incorporate a clear demonstration at the beginning to eliminate confusion and engage all students immediately to heighten interest.

Evaluation of the developed speaking activities

In the eighth week, a checklist was developed to evaluate the impact of our implementation on students' speaking abilities, considering students' use of grammar, fluency, vocabulary, and interaction. Identifying and reflecting strengths and areas for improvement was a priority. This checklist serves as a guide for future researchers to find other strategies to enhance English speaking skills.

Table 4 Evaluation of the board game

Criteria	Lower (1 point)	Medium (3 points)	High (5 points)
Students use and recognize the grammatical structure well by being reviewed in the speaking activities.			✓
Students improved the way to express messages and ideas without pausing too much or staying silent for too long.		✓	
Students were able to have conversations with their classmates, aiming to help each other communicate successfully.		✓	
Students didn't feel nervous or anxious when talking in English and were willing to participate during the speaking activities.			✓
If students were lost, didn't understand something, or did not know how to pronounce words, they asked the researchers to help, repeat instructions or clarify it.			✓

Note. Prepared by the authors.

At the end of the Third cycle, the pre-service teachers filled out this checklist after observing students' behavior, attitudes, participation, and the strengths and weaknesses of the game application.

Attempts were made to record the results, but due to factors such as the students being nervous and a lack of motivation to participate if being recorded, they were allowed to participate without being exposed to being recorded. With a total of 21 points of 25 possibles, the results showed that it helped students to recognize the structure and use it in short conversations improving their pronunciation of words within an environment where students could express themselves using familiar, but mainly new, words and vocabulary. Even though students were more motivated and confident in developing and playing with their classmates, at some moments they still presented some pauses or were silent during some parts of the game. Therefore, it suggests that this type of interactive game should be carried out constantly to gain confidence when expressing and communicating ideas. Furthermore, using this type of activity focusing on teamwork could be an effective strategy to develop more active participation

and motivation. For future English classes, it is also important not to forget to identify individual students' doubts and needs during the development of the classes to help them successfully learn and communicate effectively.

We ensured validity, reliability, and avoided bias, using the process of triangulation to analyze and compare all data collection tools presented (Field notes, Audio recordings, and semi-structured Interviews), identifying similar and common patterns. The different categories presented, for example, ''grammatical interference'', were validated and compatible with students' responses, such as when they forgot or changed the position of the auxiliaries or didn't change the verb tenses, such as in this audio recording: ''I am drink water'' or in this interview: ''she play'' without the ing ending and the verb ''to be'' and in the field notes: ''They traveled didn't to Paris'' formulating the sentence incorrectly, confirming congruent and consistent information on validity and reliability in all categories.

Ethical considerations

Participants were informed of their right to voluntarily participate and withdraw at any moment, as needed, without facing any consequences. Their confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all data related to participants and by a promise not to reveal any personal information during the conduct of this research. It adhered to institutional and ethical standards in academia that protect the participants' rights, dignity, and welfare.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results revealed three consistent patterns of speaking difficulties: grammatical interference, Verb lexicon, and meaning over form. The field notes, audio recordings, and interview data supported the observed patterns during the analysis in those three categories.

Category 1: Grammatical interference

Most of the audio recordings showed problems with auxiliaries and the –ing form. For instance, one student said, "I *am ate chocolate*". By Cycle 3, such errors decreased, particularly when prompts explicitly targeted be + V-ing in short, time-limited tasks. This progress can be accounted for by Self-Determination Theory (SDT) but not as a model of learning grammar, instead as an explanation of the role of motivation and interest in language performance. The informal, game-like environment supported autonomy—students were able to play without fear of getting it wrong—competence, with

instant feedback from students and teachers alike, and relatedness, with cooperation in their work environment. These drew learners towards more talk and practice, which led to more attention to form and, consequently, more accurate use of language. In the original board game, the students generated questions using prompts like ''you'', ''playing'' and ''soccer'' to come up with ''Are you playing soccer?'' In the reformulated version, the students selected the correct answer, analyzing the structure of the present continuous tense: a. They is eating b. She is sleeping c. They are playing soccer at the moment; the students showed greater accuracy supported by group interaction.

Category 2: Verb lexicon

Another recurrent problem was the overuse of a small set of familiar verbs *(e.g., play, eat, sleep)* such as in this example: *"I am in the play the futbol"*. During Cycles 2 and 3, however, GBL tasks that required alternative verb choices helped broaden students' lexical repertoires. This finding supports Klimova's (2015) argument that games can diversify vocabulary. Moreover, this progress aligns with SDT's focus on competence, as the challenge of producing new verbs gave students a sense of achievement and mastery. Each effective application of the new word was reinforced by peer feedback and game feedback that increased their motivation and confidence. Because students were aware that they could speak with more varied verbs, their tendency to interact was increased, as well as overall communicative proficiency.

In the first game, students repeated verbs like ''play'' and ''eat''. In the updated version, they formulated questions with verbs like clean, watch, write, etc.; they employed a wider variety of verbs, being more motivated and confident.

Category 3. Meaning over form.

Students often focused on communicating their ideas and messages without considering the proper structure of the English language, producing sentences such as *"They traveled didn't to Paris"*. In the same way, it was identified when in an interview one student said: "*porque siempre, para que siempre…*". Being this a manner that students might communicate in Spanish, which structurally is not correct, it could have had an influence when creating and transmitting messages, causing problems that could be difficult to solve in the long-term. Besides, under time pressure, reliance on first language structure is commonly recalled by language learners. By Cycle 3, however, peer scaffolding reduced

these issues, and students were attentive to use the structure properly, meeting the game's requirements. This outcome echoes SDT's claim that autonomy-supportive, cooperative environments reduce anxiety and encourage learners to concentrate on communicating accurately rather than transmitting messages without knowing the grammar properly. In the first board game, students preferred meaning to correctness, often using Spanish frameworks. In the second board game, the students completed sentences according to the present continuous structure, e.g: We are dancing at the party; they balanced meaning and form through group support. Overall findings, the integration of GBL fostered accuracy, fluency and confidence by lowering error frequency, reducing dependence on Spanish-based structures, and expanding students' vocabulary.

These findings are consistent with Guerrero Casallas (2023), who observed that games reduce fear and encourage oral practice. Similarly, Rahayu et al. (2022) note that when competence, autonomy, and relatedness are stimulated in the classroom, students willingly participate and engage. Finally, GBL proved to be an effective tool for practicing and developing speaking skills in the EFL context, aligning with Verdiyeva and Huseynova's (2017) view that interactive activities stimulate learners' willingness to speak actively.

Essentially, after the implementation of the First version of the digital board game, an improvement in their willingness to speak was noticed.

Students tried to do their part and practice their speaking and if necessary, they asked the researchers for help to resolve doubts about the activity or how to perform an exercise and its pronunciation. Furthermore, for the update of the game, as mentioned before, students felt more relaxed by being around and working with their classmates, stimulating them to practice the language, and even if they committed some mistakes, they were not nervous anymore acknowledging that making mistakes are part of the learning process and help to correct them for future English conversations. Similarly, during the implementation of the instruments and the activity, we realized that students had failures or forgot the basic grammatical rules of English, which prevents good oral development. However, during the practice and review of the topic with this activity, a better understanding and more accuracy was noticed when using the grammatical structure of the target language, in this case, the present continuous. The application of this type of activity facilitated: students' learning, the retention of the structure and its

application while promoting a calm and fun environment that motivated them to push their limits and practice their speaking skill.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of GBL in this study seemed to have a clear impact on fifth-grade students' speaking skills. Participation increased, students gained more confidence and accuracy, and speaking anxiety was reduced. Over the weeks, the classroom atmosphere shifted toward a space where students felt safer to try. This was noticeable because, at the beginning, several learners avoided speaking or gave up quickly. Afterwards, they started to put effort into making it and were willing to try to improve their speaking skills.

Another important observation was that giving students the chance to comment on and improve the games raised their motivation. They seemed to value having a voice in shaping the activity, which in turn strengthened their sense of ownership. This highlights the role of feedback and co-design in language learning.

From a teaching perspective, GBL appears useful when integrated in short but regular classroom sessions. It may also be more effective if combined with grammar scaffolds, so students practice structures in context rather than in isolation.

Teachers should also keep an eye on turn-taking, since not all students naturally step forward to participate. In this sense, GBL is not just a motivational tool but can also serve as a structured method to promote both fluency and accuracy.

Future research could explore similar adjustments in other grades or in public school contexts. Such studies may help confirm whether the results observed here are generalizable, or whether they are more closely tied to this particular classroom setting.

On the other hand, according to the results, it was also observed that once the students overcame their anxiety or nerves when speaking, a new difficulty arose, associated with students' grammatical flaws. This issue could be the basis of a new line of research that complements the work conducted in this article. It is recommended that future research begin with a grammatical analysis.

Limitations and Recommendations

This was a small-scale study carried out in one English class. A large percentage of students felt nervous and were unable to be interviewed. It did not account for students' language use outside school, which may have influenced their performance. A few learners also showed limited interest in English at first, which affected their engagement in speaking tasks. In addition, practical challenges such as time restrictions, school events, and distractions occasionally interrupted the intervention. Even with these limitations, several recommendations can be made. Teachers may want to introduce GBL activities regularly in short slots of about 10–15 minutes. Supporting these games with explicit grammar and vocabulary practice can help students apply structures more accurately. Turn-taking should be guided to make sure quieter students are also included. Finally, it may be helpful to incorporate students' suggestions into the design of activities, since this seems to improve both participation and enjoyment.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:

Adeoye-Olatunde, O. A., & Olenik, N. L. (2021). Research and scholarly methods: Semi-structured interviews. *Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy, 4*(10)*, 1358–1367. https://doi.org/10.1002/jac5.1441

Amoah, S., & Yeboah, J. (2021). The speaking difficulties of Chinese EFL learners and their motivation towards speaking the English language. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 17*(1), 56–69. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.220198786765725

Anburaj, M. G., Christopher, G., & Ming, N. (2014). Innovative methods of teaching English language. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 19*(8), 62–65. https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-19846265

Bans-Akutey, A., & Tiimub, B. M. (2021). Triangulation in research. *Academia Letters, 2*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.20935/AL3392

Burns, A., & Joyce, H. (1997). *Focus on speaking*. NCELTR.

Burns, A., Edwards, E., & Ellis, N. J. (2022). *Sustaining action research: A practical guide for institutional engagement* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429265273

Cendra, A. N., & Sulindra, E. (2022). Speaking accuracy, fluency, and beyond: Indonesian vocational students' voices. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching, 25*(2), 379–394. https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v25i2.4579

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2002). *Research methods in education*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203224342

Guerrero Casallas, L. F. (2023). *Gamification, a strategy to enhance speaking skills in a blended learning environment* [Undergraduate thesis, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional]. Repositorio Institucional UPN. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12209/18525

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The action research planner* (3ª ed.). Deakin University Press.

Klimova, B. F. (2015). Games in the teaching of English. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 191*, 1157–1160. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.312

Lim, W. M. (2024). What is qualitative research? An overview and guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal, 33*(2), 199–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619

Luoma, S. (2004). *Assessing speaking*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511733017

Mekheimer, M. A., & Fageeh, A. I. (2025). Prioritizing information over grammar: A behavioral investigation of information density and rhetorical discourse effects on EFL listening comprehension. *Discover Education, 4*(1), 24. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-025-00411-y

Nazari, M. (2022). Plan, act, observe, reflect, identity: Exploring teacher identity construction across the stages of action research. *RELC Journal, 53*(3), 672–685. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220972456

Ningsih, N. L. A. B. H. (2023). The importance of game-based learning in English learning for young learners in the 21st century. *The Art of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TATEFL), 4*(1), 25–30. https://doi.org/10.36663/tatefl.v4i1.492

Oliver-Hoyo, M., & Allen, D. (2006). The use of triangulation methods in qualitative educational research. *The Journal of College Science Teaching, 35*(4), 42–47. https://scispace.com/pdf/the-use-of-triangulation-methods-in-qualitative-educational-eqehlqtynh.pdf

Phillippi, J., & Lauderdale, J. (2017). A guide to field notes for qualitative research: Context and conversation. *Qualitative Health Research, 28*(3), 381–388.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317697102

Pho, A., & Dinscore, A. (2015). Game-based learning. *Tips and trends, 2,* 1–5.

https://www.edufication.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/https-acrl.ala_.orgISwp-contentuploads201405spring2015.pdf

Puspita, P. (2021). Error analysis of Indonesian grammatical interference in students' English composition. *Buletin Poltanesa, 22*(1), 101–109. https://doi.org/10.51967/tanesa.v22i1.466

Qian, M., & Clark, K. R. (2016). Game-based learning and 21st century skills: A review of recent research. *Computers in Human Behavior, 63,* 50–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.023

Rahayu, R., Nur, S., Mardiani, M., & Nur, M. S. (2022). Self-determination theory in teaching practice for higher education level. *EnJourMe (English Journal of Merdeka): Culture, Language, and Teaching of English, 7*(1), 102–110. https://doi.org/10.26905/enjourme.v7i1.7978

Rajendran, M., Subramanian, J., Ramesh, S., Lamessa, O., Prakash, A., & Revathi, P. (2024). Investigation into the source of students' English-speaking difficulties. *World Journal of English Language, 14*(3), 453–462. https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n3p453

Rutakumwa, R., Mugisha, J. O., Bernays, S., Kabunga, E., Tumwekwase, G., Mbonye, M., & Seeley, J. (2019). Conducting in-depth interviews with and without voice recorders: A comparative analysis. *Qualitative Research, 20*(5), 565–581. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119884806

Ruziyeva, M. A. K. (2024). The role of game-based learning in improving English language learners' speaking skills. *Academic Research in Educational Sciences, 5*(5), 141–147. https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/the-role-of-game-based-learning-in-improving-english-language-learners-speaking-skill

Reyes, N. S. (2023). Evolución de la educación y las aplicaciones tecnologías. *Polo del Conocimiento: Revista científico-profesional, 8*(4), 1319–1328. https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=9152237

Saleem, A., & Umer, M. (2021). Memory for text: The relationship between form and meaning. *Global Language Review, 6*(2), 24–29. https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021(VI-II).03

Suer, F. A. (2023). Integrating form and meaning in language acquisition. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies, 3*(4), 90–97. https://doi.org/10.53103/cjlls.v3i4.111

Verdiyeva, S., & Huseynova, F. (2017). Speaking is a challenging skill in language learning. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, 2*(6), 151–154. https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.2.6.25

Viberg, Å. (2002). Basic verbs in second language acquisition. *Revue française de linguistique appliquée, 7*(2), 61–79. https://doi.org/10.3917/rfla.072.0061

Wang, F., & Zheng, H. (2020). Using game-based learning to support learning science: A study with middle school students. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning, 15*(2), 112–120. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-020-00523-z

Yuan, F., & Ellis, R. (2003). The effects of pre-task planning and on-line planning on fluency, complexity and accuracy in L2 monologic oral production. *Applied Linguistics, 24*(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/24.1.1