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GAME-BASED LEARNING TO ENHANCE SPEAKING SKILLS

Game-Based Learning to enhance Speaking Skills

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Abstract

This action research project investigates the implementation of game-based learning to enhance speaking skills in a group of English intermediate level students. It aims to actively implement and observe the effects of game-based learning in the classroom. The study hypothesizes that incorporating games into language instruction can effectively engage students, encouraging them to participate in communicative activities and ultimately improving their speaking abilities. By creating an enjoyable and motivating environment, games offer students authentic opportunities for communication, collaboration, and feedback. The findings of this study will contribute to the understanding of the benefits of game-based learning in language education.

Keywords: game-based learning, speaking skills, intermediate level, enjoyable learning, motivation, communicative activities, language acquisition.

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia.

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Context Description

“Institución Educativa Pablo Neruda” is a public school located in Santa Cruz La Rosa near to Tricentenario metro station. The school offers formal education services across elementary, middle, basic, and technical secondary. Also, it provides flexible models: acceleration of learning, basics processes, and "caminar" in high school.

As a mission, it seeks to promote in all students, without distinction of ethnicity, creed, sexual identity, nationality, and social condition, learning that improves: Being, Doing, Knowing, and Living in a community so that they can understand their environment and transform it positively, valuing teamwork and building social consensus that favors their life projects from respect for difference.

Regarding facilities, the school is a 3-story red-bricked and white building. It has a teacher's room with a utility room with lockers and a kitchenette; it is equipped with an individual desk for each teacher to work and have lunch. The school also has a cafeteria, an auditorium, a patio that acts as the sports area, a library, and three computer rooms.

English is taught in all grades. In primary school, the same teacher of each group teaches English with the other subjects. In high school, three teachers are in charge of teaching English and humanities. The institution implemented a language center intending to work with students according to their particular level of English proficiency.

The teachers designed four learning guides, which are based on the common European framework. The guides are: Aproximación, A1, A2 y B1. The learning guides are made up of three units. Each unit serves four performance criteria, two input criteria corresponding to Listening and Reading and the other two outputs that refer to Speaking and Writing.

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For the English class, the groups are divided into three groups: basic, intermediate, and advanced. Each professor is in charge of a different level. My cooperating teacher (CT) is in charge of the intermediate level, in all the high school groups, with an hourly intensity of 3 hours per group a week.

Regarding my CT, she has a degree in Foreign Languages with an Emphasis in English from the University of Monteria and has worked in the institution since 2018. She is in charge of implementing and designing materials for the language center.

The English class schedule is Tuesdays from 6:15 to 7:00 am and Wednesdays from 6:15 to 8:05 am. The classroom is located on the third floor. It has horizontal sliding windows along the walls and a fretwork-bricks window along the other. This allows good air and illumination to the classroom. There is a board, a desk for the teacher, and each student has a computer.

The intermediate-level ninth-grade class comprises seven boys and nine girls whose average age is fourteen years old. The students live in neighborhoods near the school, which has a challenging context. There is violence due to drug production, distribution, sale, and consumption.

Statement of the Problem

Learning a new language in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting requires creating a learning environment that provides ample opportunities for students to use the target language in the classroom. While using the first language, also known as the mother tongue, may be seen as a hindrance to language acquisition, it can actually be a helpful strategy to facilitate learning. However, during my observations at the institution, I noticed that the ninth-grade students rarely used English in their classes. The teacher conducted the classes in Spanish, and

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when the students were prompted to speak in English, they struggled and often refrained from doing so. In addition, during the observations made in the context of this study, I found that there was not much exposure to the foreign language. The proposed activities in the class did not require students to use the target language, resulting in the mother tongue being predominantly used throughout the course. Although the teacher's explanations were in English, she had to repeat everything in Spanish, which further reinforced the use of the mother tongue in the class.

Furthermore, students' speaking production in class was limited due to their lack of knowledge of English pronunciation. They often asked questions in Spanish and struggled to articulate the vocabulary they had learned. During the final project, they only completed the written part and did not do the presentations because they were not confident in their speaking abilities. Therefore, it became apparent to me that the lessons needed to be restructured with activities that encourage students to have more contact with English. It is also crucial that the topics and content covered in the classes are significant and engaging to capture the students' attention. Consequently, I believe that the game-based learning model can be useful for teaching in this context. By using games, students can practice their language skills in a fun and engaging way, helping them develop their English proficiency while also boosting their confidence in using the language in class.

Question

How can implementing games enhance the development of speaking skills in a group of English intermediate level students at Pablo Neruda institution?

Theoretical Framework

The use of games in language teaching has gained attention in recent years as a tool to foster communicative competence, particularly in the area of speaking skills. This literature review aims to explore the implementation of games as a means to enhance the development of speaking skills among English language learners. This review will provide insights into the types of games that can be utilized, their benefits in language learning, and their impact on students' speaking performance. By creating a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, games have the potential to motivate students and foster authentic communication, collaboration, and feedback. This review also evaluates the effectiveness of implementing different games on the speaking performance of students in intermediate-level students in a public institution.

Speaking Skills

Speaking skills comprise various elements, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and interaction, essential for effective communication (Brown & Yule, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Developing speaking skills is vital for English as a foreign language (EFL) students, enabling them to interact with native speakers and participate in real-life situations. Besides, speaking skills are a crucial aspect of language learning, and they have an essential role in students' ability to communicate effectively in the target language.

Types of Games for Enhancing Speaking Skills

Various games have been identified as practical tools for enhancing speaking skills. Chen (2019) highlights the potential of language games, providing specific examples that encourage speaking practice in the language classroom. These games engage learners in interactive and communicative tasks, promoting fluency and accuracy in speaking.

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Ibrahim and Rahman (2017) explore using games to enhance speaking skills among ESL learners. Their study emphasizes the importance of utilizing games that motivate and engage students, enabling them to practice speaking with increased fluency and accuracy. Digital games are also discussed as practical tools for enhancing speaking skills in EFL learners (Al-Mohammadi, 2016). These games promote student participation, interest, and improvement in pronunciation and fluency.

Benefits of Using Games in Language Learning

Using games in language learning creates a relaxed and enjoyable environment that fosters motivation and engagement. Thornbury and Slade (2006) emphasize the practical approaches and pedagogical strategies for teaching conversation skills. Games provide opportunities for students to practice speaking in a low-pressure setting, reducing anxiety and facilitating language production.

Chen (2019) investigates the effectiveness of an online simulation game in enhancing the speaking skills of EFL learners. The study demonstrates that game-based learning can improve students' speaking proficiency by providing immersive and interactive experiences. Shuo and Jing (2020) highlight the benefits of game-based learning in enhancing English speaking skills while discussing challenges such as balancing game content with language learning objectives.

Relation between Games and development of speaking skills

Games play a significant role in promoting authentic communication, collaboration, and feedback. They create a context where learners are motivated to use the language meaningfully. The literature review on gamification in teaching EFL (2019) reveals that games provide

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opportunities for learners to interact with their peers, negotiate and practice speaking in real-life situations.

Hsu and Hsieh (2018) investigate the effect of board games on the oral communication skills of EFL learners. Their findings demonstrate that board games promote active participation and communication, improving students' speaking abilities. Additionally, Kılıçkaya and Aydın (2018) highlight the positive impact of digital games on students' speaking skills, emphasizing the opportunities for interactive and collaborative speaking activities.

Game Design Principles for Speaking Skills Enhancement

The design of games can influence their effectiveness in enhancing speaking skills. Game designers should consider principles such as relevance, challenge, feedback, and engagement, which can facilitate learning and motivate students to engage in communicative activities (Kiili, 2005). Also, game-based learning activities should also be aligned with learning objectives and include opportunities for reflection and self-assessment.

Evaluation of Game Implementation

It is crucial to consider factors such as student engagement, motivation, and language improvement to evaluate the impact of different games on speaking performance. The selected games should align with the learning objectives and cater to the specific needs of intermediate-level English learners.

This literature review has provided a comprehensive understanding of how games can enhance the development of speaking skills among English language learners. By creating a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, games motivate students to engage in communicative activities, improving fluency, accuracy, and confidence in speaking. Games

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foster authentic communication, collaboration, and feedback, allowing students to practice speaking meaningfully. To ensure successful game implementation, selecting appropriate games that align with the learning objectives and cater to the specific needs of intermediate-level English learners is essential.

Objectives

General Objective

To describe the way oriented-game activities enhance the development of English-speaking skills in a group of intermediate level at I. E. Pablo Neruda

Specific Objectives

- To identify the characteristics of oriented game activities that enhance the development of speaking skills in a group of intermediate level students at I. E. Pablo Neruda
- To define the English-speaking skills of intermediate students at I. E Pablo Neruda
- To relate the characteristics of games with the development of speaking skills in a group of intermediate level students at I. E. Pablo Neruda

Action Plan

To achieve the objectives mentioned above, different actions were developed from February to May. The first actions were to design and administer a series of surveys to know the students' interests. The second action was to design and implement a unit to connect the class subjects and activities using games, and a survey at the end to explore the students' opinions and an interview with the cooperating teacher. This plan intends to observe and analyze whether students would be able to begin to develop their speaking skills through the game-based strategies implemented.

During March and April, I implemented different games to reinforce vocabulary and speaking skills. These games were designed to make learning fun and engaging, fostering students' speaking skills. The games to implement are: charades, hangman, who I am? and role-playing activities.

The first game is "Charades."; this game not only enhanced their vocabulary related to hobbies and interests but also encouraged creativity; it challenged their spelling and vocabulary knowledge, promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Another game we played was "Who Am I?" The main objective of this game is to review vocabulary related to physical description. This game encouraged active participation and prompted students to recall and apply their knowledge about the topic.

I also conducted role-playing activities. Students were assigned different scenarios, such as ordering food at a restaurant or shopping, and they had to act out the dialogues using the vocabulary they had learned. This activity also let me know if the students learned the terminology used in the other games.

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In May, I implemented the research actions to evaluate the efficacy of the games. I employed a semi-structured interview with the teacher and an interview with the students. Those interviews aimed to gain insights and perspectives from an experienced teacher who could provide valuable information regarding the effectiveness of games.

Action Development

To start the implementation, I asked the cooperating teacher about the curriculum and topics. With this information, I design the unit, and I include several games that can help to improve speaking skills.

During the implementation, students actively engaged in various games to reinforce the previously presented topics. In each class, I introduced a new topic and organized a different game for the students to participate in.

One game implemented was charades, where students had to act out words or phrases related to the topic we were studying. The Charades game proved to be a hit among the students. Both teams showed great competitiveness and tried to guess the activities represented by their peers, and the students could use the learned vocabulary. However, challenges arose regarding specific vocabulary and understanding of the gestures. To assist the students, I provided some additional hints and examples of movements they could use. This game not only encouraged creativity but also required students to think critically about the concepts they had learned and express them in a different form

During the game "Guess Who?" I explained the rules of the game to the students. I divided the class into pairs, with one student facing the board and the other with their back to the board. The student facing the board described the physical appearance of a celebrity without

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revealing their name, while the other student listened and tried to guess the identity. They tried to provide detailed descriptions and examples to help their partners guess correctly. However, some students encountered challenges with vocabulary and pronunciation. In such cases, I offered additional vocabulary support and modeled example sentences through the game. Finally, the students actively participated in the speaking activity, demonstrating their engagement and effort to use the target vocabulary.

The last game implemented was Hangman. I chose key vocabulary words or essential terms from the lessons and students had to guess the letters to complete the word. This game helped reinforce vocabulary retention while providing an enjoyable challenge. This game was utilized in two classes as part of their preparation for the spelling bee.

At the end of the process, I gathered data through various instruments to assess the benefits of this implementation. I maintained a teacher journal where I recorded my classroom observations regarding students' performance and behavior. I also included my reflections on these events. Additionally, I designed semi-structured interviews to gather students' opinions on classroom activities. Furthermore, I created and administered a survey at the end of the implementation to understand teachers' perceptions of games in the classroom.

To analyze the data collected through these instruments, I created a chart allowing data comparison and identifying common patterns in students' answers and observations. This analysis led to the results presented in the following section. The data would be analyzed by following the steps proposed by Burns (2015)

Project constraints

The study group was modified several times: At the beginning of the school year, the project started with the ninth-grade group 2. After a month, the English teachers divided the groups according to levels, and the project continued with the ninth-grade group, but with the students who remained at the intermediate level. With this new division, there were 11 students at this level, and I started the implementation of the classes.

After holy week, the teachers decided to redistribute the students according to their levels again, as the basic level had more students than the others. With this change, there were 16 students, but only eight students.

Time: The school had various activities scheduled on its calendar, and on multiple occasions, classes were either canceled or had to be dedicated to other activities. One example of this was the spelling bee competition, which required a total of 5 classes to be dedicated to preparing and assessing the students' progress.

Findings and interpretation.

In order to answer the research questions and to assess the effectiveness of this study, a unit plan was designed and executed, and data was collected and analyzed following the action research methodology. According to Burns (2015), action research is a methodology that involves understanding contexts and their social transformations. This process requires interpretation, resource checking, and reflection. Action research combines systematic inquiry with practical action, recognizing that knowledge is constructed through the interaction between theory and practice. This approach is based on the premise that problems and challenges can be

better understood and addressed through collaborative and iterative cycles of action, reflection, and learning.

After the analysis of the data collected, the main findings and interpretations derived from the evidence are presented in three overarching themes: games contribute to learn the language; games make language learning more meaningful and enjoyable, and games Enhance Students' Interaction and participation in the English Class

Games Enhance Students' Interaction and participation in the English Class

I found that games offer an interactive and enjoyable way to practice language skills, including speaking. An example of this can be found in the following extract from the journal, "the activity allowed students to interact with each other and practice asking and answering questions about hobbies and interests. This activity helped engage the students right from the beginning, and they actively participated by". (Journal entry 2).It means that games encourage interaction and create a platform for students to engage in meaningful conversations with their peers. According to this evidence, Peterson (2012) states that language learning games have been recognized as an effective means of providing learners with an interactive and enjoyable learning environment.

Also, I found that Games create a playful atmosphere in the classroom, which facilitates student participation. Evidence supporting this point can be seen in the interview with the teacher "Games provide not only motivation for students to speak in English but also a safe and comfortable environment for practicing and improving their language skills." In brief, the games provide students with an opportunity to practice vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation while having fun, reducing the pressure and fear of making mistakes. According to Girard et al (2013)

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the playful nature of serious games promotes a sense of enjoyment and excitement among students, contributing to their active involvement and participation in the learning process.

Games make language learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

The data analysis revealed that games provide a fun and engaging way to practice language skills, making the learning process more meaningful and enjoyable. According to a student's perspective, "Games provide a fun and motivating way to improve vocabulary and pronunciation skills." This shows that incorporating games into language learning not only enhances vocabulary and speaking skills but also adds an element of enjoyment to the class. Regarding this answer, Smith and Koschmann (1997) state that linguistic simulation games promote the development of oral communication skills and the acquisition of vocabulary in a dynamic and participatory environment.

Games contribute to learning the language.

Furthermore, the conducted study revealed that games play a significant role in the language learning process. When students were asked if they believe they can learn English by playing games, 100% of the participants agreed with this statement. This response suggests that games are a valuable and effective tool for promoting language learning. Girard et al (2013) in their study state that students were able to use and apply the vocabulary they had learned within the context of the serious game.

It was observed that students were able to use the learned vocabulary through games. We can find an example of this in the journal "They made efforts to provide detailed descriptions and examples to help their partners guess correctly" (Journal entry 5). Although some difficulties related to pronunciation and the participation of a few shy students emerged, the fact that they

could effectively employ the vocabulary indicates that games provide practical and relevant practice for language use.

Conclusion

This action research project was carried out with the objective to know the way games enhance the development of English-speaking skills in a group of intermediate level. The results show that games are an effective tool for enhancing students' speaking skills in English class. They provide an interactive and enjoyable environment where students can practice language skills, develop social abilities, and work collaboratively. Therefore, integrating games into the English class is a valuable strategy for promoting active participation and meaningful learning among students.

Overall, these games, including Charades and Hangman, proved to be highly effective in reinforcing vocabulary and speaking skills. They created a playful and interactive environment where students actively participated and practiced the language, leading to significant improvements in their language learning journey. Besides, games create an immersive environment where students are motivated to engage in meaningful conversations and express themselves confidently.

Also, the results evidence that games play a vital role in making language learning more meaningful and enjoyable. Through interactive gameplay, learners can enhance their vocabulary, pronunciation, and contextual understanding of the target language. Furthermore, games foster motivation and engagement, creating an immersive and dynamic learning experience.

Finally, it can be affirmed that results obtained in the study support the claim that games contribute to the development of speaking skills, as all surveyed students agreed that English can

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be learned through playing games. Also, the teacher's answers showed that games provide students with an opportunity to practice and consolidate their language knowledge while having fun and actively engaging in the learning process. In conclusion, are an effective and motivating tool for the development of speaking skills in English language learning.

Reflection

My first experience teaching in a public school has been a roller coaster of emotions, challenges, and learning. It has been a period where I have had the opportunity to apply everything I learned during my training and face the reality of teaching. One of the most essential reflections this experience has brought me is the importance of adaptability. Every day in the classroom has been unique and different, and I have had to constantly adjust my strategies and approaches to meet my student's needs. This experience teaching in a school has given me a better understanding of the importance of education and the impact I can have as a teacher. Although I have faced challenges, I have also experienced great satisfaction in seeing my progress as a teacher.

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