

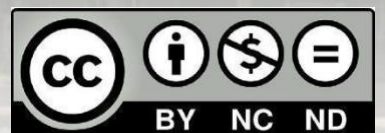


**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

Trabajo de investigación presentado como requisito
parcial para optar al título de:
Licenciado en Lenguas Extranjeras

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2023



Fostering Student Engagement in the English Class Through Game Choice

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November 21, 2023

Abstract

This study was an action research project designed to attempt to enhance students' engagement in the English class through game choice. It was developed during two school terms. The participants were 20 eighth graders at Institución Educativa Francisco Luis Hernández Betancur of Medellín. Most of them were approximately from thirteen to fifteen years old. Data collection instruments included a pre and post-test, observations and a rubric, students journal, a focus group interview, and a survey. Data was analyzed using the triangulation method with all the sources. The results of the project showed that giving students game choice in the classroom increases students' engagement in the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimension, while for the social dimension the effect of the intervention was not as significant.

Keywords: students' engagement, Game-Based Learning (GBL), Choice.

Título en español: Fomentando el compromiso de los estudiantes en la clase de inglés a través de la elección del juego.

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.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have supported and guided me throughout the journey of completing this thesis. First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to my family for their unconditional support. Without their encouragement and motivation, it would not have been possible to complete this work.

I also want to thank my classmates, who always gave me their support and collaboration. Their comments and suggestions were very valuable to me. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the participants in this study, whose willingness to share their time and experiences made this research possible.

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Preface

This research seeks to increase students' engagement in English activities through learning games from a choice-based perspective. The idea came from the observation that most students seem discouraged and disconnected from English activities due to its traditional nature, which can affect their ability to learn the language. For this reason, by incorporating learning games into the classroom, students are expected to feel more involved and motivated in their English learning as these games foster a positive and dynamic learning environment.

The following pages will explore how using learning games can make the English learning process more enjoyable. In addition, it is believed that by empowering students to select their own learning games, we not only increase their engagement, but also encourage their responsibility in the educational process. I hope this work will be useful for other English teachers looking for new ways to involve their students in learning a new language.

Description of the Context

This project was conducted at Institución Educativa Francisco Luis Hernández Betancur, a public institution located in the Aranjuez neighborhood, in district four. This institution has offered its educational services for 97 years to children and young people at the preschool, primary, and high school levels, many of them with different special needs, especially with hearing and visual impairment.

The institution has ample spaces and classrooms. Each room has desks for students, a board, a desk for teachers and a television. However, in the classroom where this project was going to be carried out, the TV did not work, although there was the possibility of exchanging classrooms with another teacher for English classes.

As stated in the Institutional Educational Project of the school Francisco Luis Hernández Betancur (2018, p. 3), its mission is to offer formal education aimed at promoting in students the respect of differences in diversity, guaranteeing the development of cognitive, physical, sensory, psychological, and cultural skills. Regarding its vision, the institution aims to be recognized in the city and in the country for its policies, practices, and cultures of inclusive education.

The English teacher for the grade in which this project was conducted, eighth grade, studied a bachelor's degree in foreign languages, English and French, at the Technological University of Chocó, and has a master's degree in teaching English as a Foreign Language and a Doctorate in Education. This Cooperating Teacher (CT) has 30 years of experience as a language teacher and has taught at various public colleges, institutes, and universities.

In the eighth grade, there are 20 students, 11 men and nine women. None of them have physical disabilities. They are between 13 and 15 years old and all belong to different places in the city of Medellín. Students can comprehend simple everyday situations, some basic expressions, and elementary vocabulary orally and in writing in English. Regarding

their attitude towards English class, most students do not like the class because they say they are not interested, and others find learning English difficult.

The English syllabus was created by two teachers, following the Guide 22 of Basic Foreign Language Competence Standards of English. The English program is divided into two semesters, according to the academic calendar of the institution. In each semester, the teachers selected the lexical, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competence and the conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal learning for each competence. In addition, the program also includes the grammatical topics that must be worked on, and the academic achievement expected of students.

In this school, students without special physical needs must receive 3 hours of English per week. The eighth-grade students are taught English under the translation approach, and the materials used for this class are mainly worksheets with which students are asked to copy texts and vocabulary from the sheet and translate them.

Statement of the Problem

After a month of observation of the eighth-grade English class at Institución Educativa Luis Hernandez Betancur, it was possible to identify a lack of students' engagement in the activities proposed which required students to copy and translate vocabulary. As a result, students are not focused on the class activities and have inappropriate behaviors such as talking to other classmates about matters that are not related to the class, misusing their cell phones, falling asleep, among others. Likewise, during my interventions as a student-teacher, this problem was evident. For example, when I asked the students to search for the meaning of some words to understand a reading text, they behaved in the same way.

Additionally, in one of the classes when I asked a group of students why they did not do an activity about copying a list of reading strategies in their notebooks, they said "we're not learning anything, we just copy and translate". (Journal excerpt, 20th February 2023).

For this reason, during the observed classes, students showed a preference for involving themselves with other activities or simply doing nothing. Since students are limited to the translation approach, this has become monotonous for them and has led them to a lack of commitment and active participation in learning.

This was also supported by a survey conducted as part of my teaching actions, to learn more about students' perceptions and needs in the English class. When students were asked to describe the class, 72.22% of the students (13) stated that they found it boring and 27,78% (5) of them also affirmed that the class is quiet; therefore, it could be interpreted that students think they have a passive role during class. Additionally, students were also asked about activities they would like to develop in the classroom, and 100% (18) of them claimed that they would like didactic activities like games. (Journal excerpt, 13th April 2023).

Improving student engagement in the English class is essential for effective learning. When students are engaged, they pay attention, participate, perform the proposed activities, and show interest in the class. In addition, it can benefit the learning experience of students because they will feel committed to participating in the class and achieving the stated outcomes. My Cooperating Teacher (CT) agrees with the relevance of this topic. In an informal talk, he stated that it is important to find a way for these students to feel committed to the development of activities. In addition, in my experience as a language learner, being engaged is key for second language learning because it increases our curiosity and interest, we strengthen our self-confidence, and we strive to improve our language skills.

Theoretical Background

To support this research and justify my intervention I will address the concepts of Student Engagement, which is the problem found, and Game-Based Learning model (GBL), and Giving Student Choice as the focus of the actions proposed.

Student Engagement

The term engagement has been approached by different authors and all of them have given different definitions of it. Engagement is a complex concept due to its wide scope and the different ways in which it is applied in different contexts. For this reason, in this study, which is framed in a language classroom, I will consider the definition given by Hiver et al. (2021) who described engagement as “the amount (quantity) and type (quality) of learners’ active participation and involvement in a language learning task or activity” (p. 2). According to Hiver et al. (2021), the amount refers to measurable actions and behaviors such as class attendance, time spent, frequency of participation, and attention to the activity. On the contrary, quality refers to the style and nature of students’ participation, such as asking questions, participating in discussions, presenting ideas or solutions, etc.

In addition, various authors (Fredricks et al., 2004; Hiver et al., 2021) have claimed that engagement is a multidimensional construct that has three core dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. The first one refers to positive behavior, participation in academic tasks, and involvement in school activities, and includes elements like order, compliance with rules, and concentration. The second dimension concerns students' mental effort in learning and involves aspects such as attention and effort to achieve a task or learning goals. The last dimension describes learners’ personal affective reactions to the activities or tasks. Furthermore, Hiver et al. (2021) also added social engagement, and they define it as active participation and interaction among students. It involves students’ degree of willingness to participate in classroom discussions, group activities, and collaborative tasks with others.

In this study, I will consider these four dimensions because they seem to be interrelated and together could facilitate meaningful learning and a rewarding experience for the 8th-grade students. For example, as stated by Anderman and Maehr (1994) behavioral

engagement facilitates cognitive engagement, as students who actively participate in learning are more likely to understand concepts at a deeper level. In turn, cognitive and emotional engagement might foster social engagement, as mentally and emotionally engaged students are more willing to interact and collaborate with their peers.

It is important to attend to the lack of engagement because, as has been identified in the observed 8th classroom, when this aspect is not present during the learning process, students cannot achieve defined outcomes, and do not develop new learning. In this regard, Skinner, and Belmont (1993) stated that disengaged students are passive learners, do not strive, get bored, and feel anxious to be in the classroom. This explains what was mentioned in the previous section about students' behavior during the observed class activities and their comments in the survey. That is why, if the activities presented to the students are engaging, students will increase their involvement, and this will be perceived through their active participation in class.

In addition, I will also explore another fundamental concept that has the premise of involving students in their learning process in a personalized way and which may be an ideal resource for learning in an engaging environment.

Game-Based Learning Model (GBL)

Since we were children, we have used the games to have fun, and they seem to have a remarkable ability to foster engagement. Plas et al. (2015) stated that games can motivate learners to stay engaged over long periods through a series of game features that are of a motivational nature. In other words, games can maintain players' interest and attention due to specific elements, such as challenges, rewards, achievements, and competition, that students find interesting. In addition, Plas et al. (2015) and Gillern and Alaswad, (2016) affirmed that games could be effective in creating engagement because of their ability to adapt to learning objectives, individual characteristics of students, and educational contexts.

On the other hand, as well as being a fun tool, games might also be an effective resource for learning. An example of this is the Game-Based Learning model which combines the fun of games and the educational process. “Definitions of game-based learning (GBL) mostly emphasize that it is a type of game play with defined learning outcomes” (Plass et al., 2015, p.259). This means, GBL is not just about playing games for fun, but the games used in this model are designed for educational purposes and have clear learning goals that participants are expected to achieve.

Regarding learning through games in EFL classrooms, according to Hadfield (1999), there are two types of language games, communicative and linguistic. Communicative games are a set of activities designed in a fun way, which can encourage participation and interaction among students (Hadfield, 1999; Dewi et al., 2017). Therefore, the main objective of these games is to promote effective communication between participants. Developing this type of games in the context of this study would require focusing on effective communication rather than grammatical accuracy, which would not align with the methodology that the students are used to.

Conversely, as stated by Hadfield (1999) linguistic games focus on accuracy. In linguistic games, the primary objective is to promote and improve grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and language structure. These types of games are often used in educational contexts to teach or reinforce specific aspects of language by ensuring players use the language accurately and effectively. Therefore, given that the focus of the language classroom is the accuracy and mastery of certain aspects of grammar, the implementation of linguistic games could be the most appropriate option to strengthen and apply what students are learning.

In previous studies in which learning games were implemented the results obtained have been positive. For example, in a study that explored how language games can help

fourth-grade students to engage with the English class and learn the grammar topics, Restrepo (2023) found that the games were useful for promoting students' engagement in the class and increasing students' interest in English grammatical topics. Therefore, GBL seems to be effective in language learning because it could foster learning while enjoying the playful interaction that games provide.

Considering the purpose of this study, GBL will be understood as creating playful learning activities so that students can acquire, practice, and improve new concepts during their English classes in line with the school syllabus. I consider it appropriate to implement GBL in this study because this model could have a significant implication in the students' second language learning. This model is likely to be essential to counteract the lack of engagement that students have towards the activities in the English class because games are often exciting and create a fun learning environment. Additionally, these possible benefits could be potentialized through choice-giving.

Giving Students Choice

According to Katz and Assor (2007), the term choice is a multifaceted phenomenon, which means that it can present benefits as well as drawbacks. Some studies have shown that choice in the educational context has had positive results (Evans and Boucher, 2015; Parker et al. 2017; Cordova and Lepper, 1996) others, however, showed that it has been beneficial in some measures but not in others (Flowerday and Schraw, 2003;), it has had no effect (d'Ailly, 2004), or even it has proven negative outcomes (Flowerday et al., 2004). Despite the mixed results, I decided to include a choice perspective in this study as it could play a key role in promoting students' engagement in the classroom. By giving students meaningful choices about the materials they use, the assignments they complete, the peers they work with, etc., teachers are promoting student autonomy and, in turn, improving deep engagement in learning (Evans and Boucher, 2015; Parker et al., 2017). This means that when students have

the possibility to decide on the activities they want to do, based on their needs and interests, they are very likely to perceive the importance of the given learning activity and become actively involved in it.

For example, in a research study that analyzed how choice-giving strategies would affect motivation to read, Vidal (2021) found that regarding content selection, students felt more motivated to read since they were allowed to choose their books, instead of imposing them. In this study, giving the choice to the students aroused their motivation as they had chosen something they felt more inclined to do. For this reason, by implementing learning games in my research, it will be expected that students commit to the activities as they will have a greater participation in the class-design process.

In the specific context of this project, the term "choice" will be understood as the presence of options and the possibility for students to select games that promote English learning, based on their individual preferences and interests. It is necessary to give students a voice for them to be more deeply involved in their learning process because, as stated by Lim (2008), when teachers create learning experiences based only on their own perceptions, goals, etc. teachers are imposing their set of beliefs and values on their students, and in these circumstances, students are unlikely to commit to their learning. Therefore, I consider it necessary to create learning experiences that consider the diverse backgrounds, needs, and preferences of students because they are likely to actively engage in their learning process and find relevance and meaning in what they are studying. By considering students' choice, providing new opportunities, and developing instruction based on their interests, it may be possible to foster a sense of ownership and participation in their learning process.

Research question

How does giving eighth-grade students choice under a Game-Based Learning Approach enhance their engagement in the English class activities at Institución Educativa Francisco Luis Hernández Betancur?

Objectives

General Objective

To determine how giving eighth-grade students choice under a Game-Based Learning approach enhances their engagement in the English class activities at Institución Educativa Francisco Luis Hernández Betancur.

Specific Objectives

To assess students' mental effort in learning (cognitive engagement) resulting from their interaction with the choice perspective through the GBL approach.

To monitor students' level of participation and discipline (behavioral engagement) in the English class when given the opportunity to choose their learning games.

To analyze students' perceptions (emotional engagement) of enabling them to choose games for their English learning process.

To evaluate students' willingness (social engagement) by the implementation of a choice perspective in the GBL approach.

Action Plan

To increase the engagement of eighth graders in the English activities developed in class, the GBL approach will be implemented to learn and reinforce grammatical topics, through a choice-based perspective. The actions will be carried out through two cycles (See Table 1), following the same process, but performing a different language focus in each one: simple past tense and modal verbs. During the cycles, a pre-test will be administered with the purpose of checking students' previous knowledge on the grammatical topics mentioned. The test will also be implemented, at the end of each cycle, as a post-test, with the objective

of comparing the mental effort (cognitive dimension) in learning of students before and after the implementation of the learning games.

Then, from a list of three games that will have the same learning objectives, each student will have the possibility to play and choose the games they want to implement once a week for two weeks until they reach the desired game goals. The data collection will be done through observations and the use of a rubric by the CT and the student-teacher. These instruments aim at monitoring the level of participation and specific behaviors (behavioral dimension) such as order, compliance with rules, concentration, and responsibility of each student, while they are performing the games.

Table 1.

Action Plan for the Development of the Project Proposal

Cycles	Activities	Length	Participants
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inform students about the study and give them the consent format. ● Talk with my CT to agree on the topics. ● Select a list of games. 	Last week of July and beginning of August.	Eighth graders CT Student-teacher
GBL through choice Cycle one: Past tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administer a pre-test. ● Implement the three games. ● Record students' level of participation and discipline. 	1 session 2 sessions 1 session	Eighth graders CT Student-teacher
GBL through choice Cycle two: Modal verbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask students to reflect in their journals. ● Administer a post-test. ● Implement a focus group interview. 	1 session 1 session 1 session	
Closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement a survey. ● Evaluate the results. 	Late October - November	Student-teacher

During the two cycles, once the implementation of the games is complete, students will record in a journal their learning, reflections, feelings, etc. These questions will require students to reflect on the advantages of selecting games, whether they influenced their engagement and participation, and whether they believe that having choice gives them a sense of responsibility in their learning, among others.

At the end of the two cycles, a focus group interview will be administered to discuss with students the experiences, emotions, advantages, and disadvantages of interacting with others during the games and to evaluate students' willingness to participate with others. Finally, a survey will be conducted with participants to gain a broader view of the impact of learning game choice on student engagement in English class activities. The Cooperating Teacher will be asked to participate during the observation stage, in which we will fill out the educational rubric to assess students' participation during the implementation of the games.

Development of Actions

In this section, I will describe the teaching and research actions I implemented to evaluate the effects of the game-based model (GBL) based on a choice perspective on students' engagement.

At the beginning of the second semester, students were informed about the project and were given a consent form to participate in it. Students were also presented with a list of learning games to be implemented in the classroom and they selected 10 of them. I administered the first pretest during the last week of August that was planned to be two weeks before, but it was not possible due to an unexpected request from the CT. Like this, all tests (See Appendix A) included the grammatical topics covered during each unit, and I designed them according to the approach used by the CT for evaluating students' performance. Due to class cancellations, I developed my actions by late September. At that time, students explored the grammar topic through different activities. I also did the

implementation of three learning games on the wordwall platform (hangman, sort by group, and couples) to identify regular and irregular verbs in the past, and with the help of the CT, I registered the level of students' participation and discipline in the rubric (See Appendix B). I created the rubric following the four elements proposed by Stevens and Levi (2013): 1. the task description, which was the participation and behavior, 2. the scale to describe how well or how badly the given task was performed, 3. the dimensions of the rubric which set the parts of the task, and 4. a description of each dimension for each of the levels of the scale.

After the implementation of the games, students reflected in their journals upon their feelings, learnings, and thoughts, and the importance of enabling them to select their own games to practice the topic. The journal included guiding questions about a variety of emotions related to school, schoolwork, and people at school (Fredricks et al., 2004). During the following weeks, students explored the past tense forms and structures, and performed three games (Kahoot, Snakes and ladders and baamboozle) to practice the subject, and through the rubric, I recorded their participation and discipline. Then, the students reflected in their journals. In early October, the post-test was administered to evaluate the change in students' knowledge. A focus group interview was conducted to explore complex and emerging issues in depth (Morgan, 1998). In the interview 6 students participated, who were asked about their experiences, emotions, and challenges of interacting with others during the games. I designed the questions based on the recommendations proposed by Anderson (1998). Therefore, I designed open-ended questions, asked questions of a qualitative nature, and omitted suggestive questions to avoid bias and ensure data reliability.

The plan was again affected due to classes canceled for extra-curricular activities and I had to make some adjustments to my plan. Consequently, the pre-test was implemented, by mid-October, to evaluate students' prior knowledge of the grammatical topic of modal verbs. The exploration of the topic, the implementation of the three games (Baamboozle, snakes and

ladders, and game-show quiz), and the registration of students' participation in the games were made in the same week. Then, the students did the reflection in their journals for the second cycle. In late October, I conducted the post-test and the focus group interview. Finally, in early November, participants filled out a survey to obtain a broader view of the impact of game choice on students' engagement. For doing the survey, I followed the steps proposed by Anderson (1998) which consist of determining the questions, drafting the questionnaire items, sequencing the items, designing the questionnaire, piloting, and revising the instrument, and developing a strategy for data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis

This is an action research study carried out in a public institution of Medellin with the participation of 20 students from the eighth grade which corresponds to 100% of the group. Action research was the selected approach because as stated by Bell (2005) it is applied research, which is carried out by professionals who seek the need for change or improvement in an organization.

To collect data for this research project, I used a pre-test which also was implemented as a post-test. A statistical analysis of the paired T-test (Gosset, 1908) was performed to analyze these data given that it is a useful tool for detecting significant differences between two paired measurements. According to Gosset (1908) a paired T-test is used to compare the means of two groups of data that are matched and to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention. Therefore, the paired T-test was appropriate for calculating the difference between students' scores in the pre-test and post-test. If the mean difference is statistically significant, then it can be interpreted that the choice of the game was effective in increasing students' mental effort. Before the T-test was done, and following Gosset's (1908) recommendations, the normality test of Shapiro-Wilk was done, to check whether the student's score data before and after the intervention had a normal distribution, which means

that the mean value, the central value, and the most frequent value of the data were the same. The test showed that the data had a normal distribution since the p value was greater than the significance level 0.05. This indicated that there was insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that the data follows a normal distribution.

The second tool was an observation rubric. To do the analysis, I organized the data and calculated the average that students obtained in each dimension during the six sessions in which the games were implemented. From these data, I created figures to visualize the evolution of student performance in each dimension over time. Third, for the student journal, I read all the entries, and I used highlighters of different colors for each theme or pattern. Fourth, regarding the focus group interview, I first made the transcript of the recording in goodnotes and assigned codes to the participants. I then used highlighters and identified relevant concepts. Once the data was encoded, I grouped the data into predefined and emerging categories, based on similarities or differences. Finally, I analyzed the coded and categorized data to identify topics and trends. Finally, to make the analysis of the questionnaire, I combined methods of qualitative and quantitative analysis. First, with qualitative responses I codified and organized the data into categories. Then, using descriptive statistics, I identified the relationships and trends that existed in quantitative data. After that, through comparison analysis, I integrated the results of qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Once I gathered the data, I decided to consider the constructive stage of analysis proposed by Altrichter et al. (1993). This construction of meaning is composed of four stages: 1. reading data, 2. selecting data, 3. presenting data, and 4. interpreting data and drawing conclusions. When I read the data gathered, I became familiar with it and using the triangulation method (Altrichter et al., 1993), I began to identify patterns and trends. To do this, I carefully analyzed the data of each collection instrument, identified topics, concepts

and relationships, and organized them in a summary sheet. Then, I decided which data would be used for the analysis, selecting the data that best fit the research objectives. After that, I organized and visualized the data so that it was easy to understand, using tables, graphs, charts, and maps. Finally, I interpreted the data and drew conclusions about the findings. This involved identifying patterns and trends that were identified at the data reading stage and explaining their meaning.

Findings and Interpretations

After the data analysis, I identified four main categories: Game Choice and Cognitive Engagement, Game Choice and Behavioral Engagement, Game Choice and Emotional Engagement, Game Choice and Social Engagement.

Game Choice and Cognitive Engagement

The analysis of the collected data suggests a direct correlation between the implementation of game choice and an increased mental effort (cognitive engagement) of students in learning. When analyzing the results of the scores of the 20 students in the pre-tests and post-tests of the first cycle (past tense) and the second cycle (modal verbs), using the paired T-test proposed by Gosset (1908), it was evidenced that there was a significant change of knowledge in the target topics after the implementation of the learning games. As can be seen in Table 1, the p-value in the pre-test and post-test of the two grammatical topics is equal to 0.001. This value is much lower than the level of significance (0.05), so the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between the mean (the value that, on average, represents all percentages of a data set) of the pre-test and post-test scores since the lower the p-value, the lower the probability that the difference between the mean of the samples is due to coincidence. In other words, a low p-value indicates that the observed difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is due to the intervention that was applied, rather than chance.

Table 1

Paired T-test (pre and post-test simple past/pre and post-test modal verbs)

Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p
Pre-test past tense	Post-test past tense	-10.472	19	< .001
Pre-test modal verbs	Post-test modal verbs	-11.361	19	< .001

Note: t: t-Student (difference between means); df : degrees of freedom (amount of information); p: probability (Probability of getting a random result).

In addition, the mean of the two post-tests is higher than the mean of the two pre-tests as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2. This indicates a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. From this finding, it can be interpreted that the mental effort of the students increased because they obtained a significant performance in both post-tests after practicing the grammatical topics with the games. According to Hadfield (1999), linguistic games focus on accuracy and their primary objective is to promote and improve grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and language structure. Therefore, given that the games used to practice the topics were spelling games, and quiz games to create and complete sentences, they provided students with opportunities to practice the grammar topics, which may have helped to improve their knowledge.

Figure 1

Difference of means past tense tests.

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Pre-test past tense	20	16.800	3.189	0.713	0.190
Post-test past tense	20	34.850	8.893	1.988	0.255

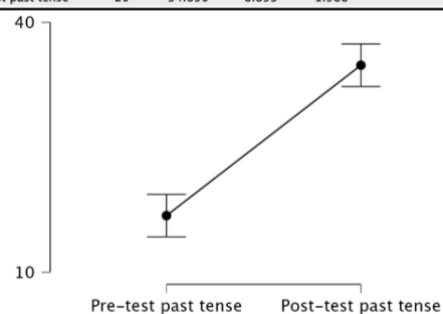
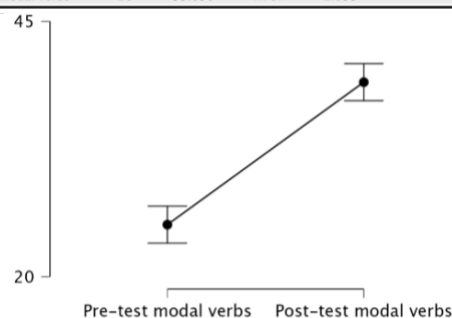


Figure 2

Difference of means modal verbs tests.

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Pre-test modal verbs	20	25.100	5.149	1.151	0.205
Post-test modal verbs	20	39.050	4.707	1.053	0.121



Moreover, this positive effect on students' learning seems to be related to their participation in the games. Anderman and Maehr (1994) stated that when students are engaged with learning at the behavioral level, they are also more engaged at the cognitive level. During my observations, I noticed that the students were more motivated and involved while playing the learning games. For example, in my journal, I took some notes of this event: "Most students show interest and enthusiasm with the games, ask questions and express their ideas" and "When students finish one game, they inform the teacher and ask him to play another" (Journal excerpt, 13th September 2023). It was possible because as stated by Plas et al. (2015) intrinsic motivation could stem from the fun and the dynamics of the game. For this reason, students participated with greater enthusiasm in the activities as the grammar learning activities were based on games and recreational dynamics that were attractive to students. This suggests that by getting involved in the activities and actively participating, students were able to develop a deep understanding of the grammatical topics covered, which is interpreted as evidence of their cognitive effort.

Game Choice and Behavioral Engagement

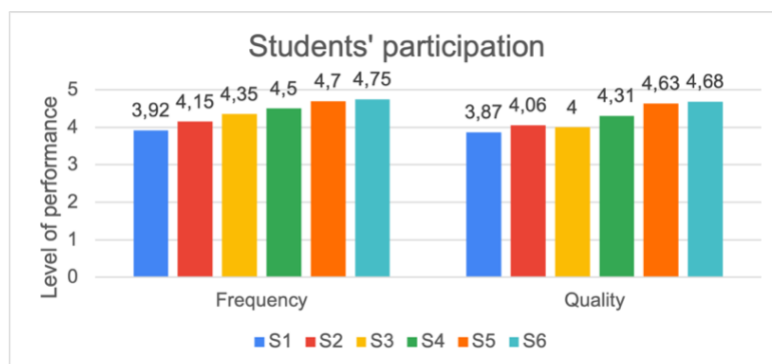
This category refers to the level of student participation in academic activities and their positive behavior in the classroom. The results of the study show that game choice had positive effects on both components of behavioral engagement.

Regarding the first component, it was found that students showed greater participation. This finding is evident from the analysis of the rubric (see Figure 3) with which the frequency and quality of students' participation were monitored during the six sessions of the implementation of the games. When averaging the score obtained by the students in the frequency and quality of participation, it was found that only in the first session the students had a fair level of performance (3,92 and 3,87). However, in the following sessions both the aspects of participation correspond to a good level (4-4,75) . According to the rubric, a good

level of performance means that the students constantly participated in the games and contributed with relevant ideas.

Figure 3

Students' level of participation



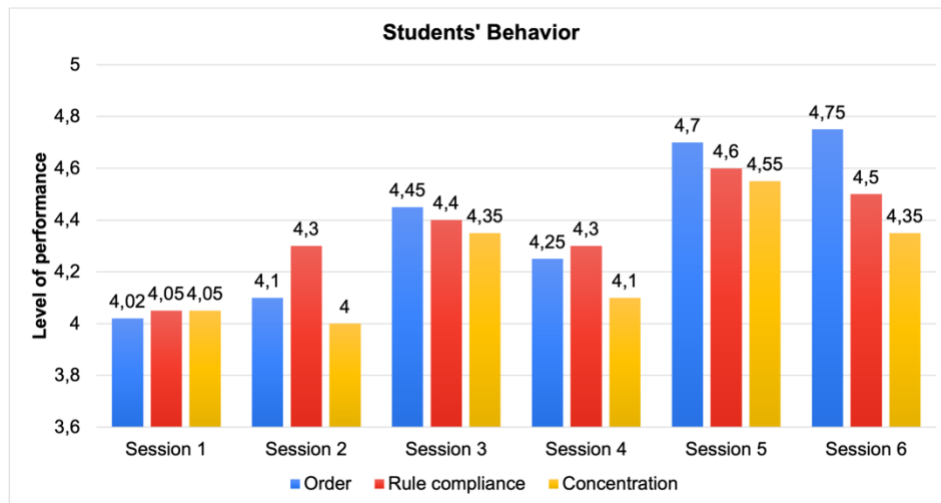
These results can also be seen in the survey in which most students, 75% (15), stated that they often participated in learning games, and 25% (5) said that they always participated in the activities, which supports the idea that the scores assigned on the frequency of participation by my CT and me were consistent with students' perceptions. In addition, the notes in my journal also suggest that students were more immersed with games. For example, when the 3 games were implemented to practice the simple past, I made the following note, "students actively participate, contribute with ideas in the group, and ask me questions when they do not understand something" (Journal excerpt, 20th September 2023).

Furthermore, it was also evident that game choice improved students' disruptive behaviors in the class. When averaging the points obtained by the students in these three aspects of discipline: order, compliance with rules and concentration, it can be observed that during the six sessions, the level was equal or greater than 4, which means that the students maintained an adequate level of order and concentration during the activity and followed most of the instructions given (see Figure 4). I also documented this improvement in behavior in my journal, when I wrote that students no longer misuse their cell phones, do not sleep in

classes, and do not talk with their classmates about subjects that do not concern the English class (Journal notes, 23rd October 2023). Therefore, this finding shows that the behavior of the students during the games was positive.

Figure 4

Students' behavior while playing the games.



It can be concluded that the games from a choice perspective helped to improve the level of participation and behavior of the students since they were interested and committed to its realization. According to Plass et al. (2015), the games can keep the interest and attention of the students due to their playful nature and motivational characteristics such as challenges, competitions, rewards, etc. Therefore, it is possible that when implementing the games, students had a greater interest in the activities, which was reflected in greater participation, and a significant decrease in disruptive behaviors. In addition, the students' interest may also have been promoted by the autonomy they were given when choosing the games, they wanted to play (Evans and Boucher, 2015; Parker et al., 2017). Since students chose and practiced the games based on their interests and needs, they gave them greater importance and became actively involved in them.

Game Choice and Emotional Engagement

The implementation of learning games in English class seems to contribute effectively to the personal affective reactions of students. In this study, the games proved to be effective in generating greater enthusiasm, engagement, and joy in students to learn. This was evident in the reflections of the students in their journals in which 95% (19) wrote that the games were very interesting and generated in them greater motivation to participate. For example student LC wrote “*Yo no suelo participar en estas clases pero con los juegos el aprendizaje ha sido más entretenido*” and MFL stated “*Me ha ayudado mejor los juegos para las clases porque me hace entender mejor. Escoger el juego a mi gusto me ayuda más en mi participación porque yo misma estoy escogiendo mi gusto y mi interés*”. In addition, this finding is supported by the implementation of the focus group interview and my observations. In the interview, 5 of the 6 students stated that during the implementation of the games they had experienced fun and happiness, which encouraged them to continue playing or to choose another game. Similarly, in my observations, I noticed that when the game options were presented to the students, they were all excited to know how each game worked and when they were playing, they showed happiness and enjoyment (Journal notes, 13th September 2023). This may have been because games can impact the affective state of students through their specific elements, such as aesthetic design, game mechanics, musical score, etc., which induce emotions such as happiness in players (Plass et al., 2005).

On the other hand, it is likely that allowing students to select games was another essential factor in creating greater interest in the games. According to Parker et al. (2017), this may have been possible because by giving students choices about activities to develop, materials to use, and peers to play with, their engagement increased. Since the games presented to the students were relevant to their interests and preferences, they captured their attention and participation. Games are motivating, challenging and social, which help students get involved in learning and achieve their goals.

Game Choice and Social Engagement

Concerning this dimension, game choice did not have a significant influence on the social engagement of students, specifically in terms of teamwork. The analysis of the data confirmed that choice is a multifaceted phenomenon, and that it can present both benefits and drawbacks (Katz and Assor, 2007). In the interview, it was found that students were hesitant to work with their peers. In the first focus group interview when students were asked how they felt working with their classmates they said they felt uncomfortable or stressed. For example student JH said “*Se siente realmente muy incómodo, o sea, el estar compartiendo tiempo con los demás y saber que hay muchas diferencias entre uno lo complica.*” (Focus group interview, 04th October 2023). Four students also gave similar answers, and only one student said he felt good because he could share with his peers and relate more with others who were not friends. During the second interview, the responses of the students remained consistent, 83.3% of the students (5) stated that they did not feel comfortable due to the conflicts and personal differences they had between them. Similarly, In the survey it was found that the students were not very willing to work in groups. When students were asked about the type of activities they liked most, only 15% (3) chose the option of teamwork, while the options of working in pairs with 55% (11) and individual work with 30% (6) were the most voted options. As can be seen, the preference for teamwork was relatively low among the students, this shows that students prefer working in pairs rather than large groups during the activities.

However, the data suggest that although the social engagement of the students was not fully positive, this was not due to the learning games but to the peers with whom the students chose to participate. According to Katz et Assor (2007), based on the self-determination theory, people are motivated by three basic psychological needs, and one of them is the need for relationships which refers to feeling connected with others. This need is met through

positive relationships with others, which provide support, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. However, this suggests that the relationships among the participants in this study were not very positive. In the interview, when students were asked what challenges they faced when interacting with others during the games, they mentioned tolerance, respect, communication, coexistence, and teamwork. (Focus group interview, 04th October 2023). For this reason, they sometimes preferred to work in pairs or individually, or even sometimes they decided not to play anymore. In this case, giving students the possibility to choose their peers with whom to play, instead of motivating them, in some cases and sometimes, generated feelings of tension, anxiety, and even hostility.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The main objective of this project was to explore how the implementation of learning games based on a choice perspective could enhance the engagement of eighth graders in English class. The results of the project showed that the learning games from a choice perspective were effective in increasing student engagement in the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. However, in the social dimension the intervention was not effective in promoting interpersonal skills among students when working in groups.

In the behavioral dimension, it was observed that learning games kept students motivated in academic activities, which resulted in greater participation in classes, order, concentration, and compliance with rules. From a cognitive perspective, learning games proved effective in improving knowledge retention, due to factors such as practice and repetition. On the emotional side, learning games generated a more positive and enjoyable learning experience for students. This resulted in a decrease in learning-related anxiety and an increase in self-esteem. Finally, in terms of social engagement, the intervention did not foster collaboration among students, in terms of teamwork and communication since the students

preferred to work in pairs given that they had bad relations between them and therefore, while playing the games there was sometimes an atmosphere of tension.

Games have significant implications for teaching and learning English. They can be an effective tool for increasing student participation and improving student learning and teachers can use games to motivate students, engage them in learning, and provide opportunities to practice English in a fun and challenging environment. However, when implementing games in the classroom it is important that games are relevant to the interests and needs of students. It is also important to offer a variety of games and let students have an active role in choosing them because it can provide students with a sense of ownership and control over their learning.

Finally, teachers should help students develop the social skills needed to work effectively as a team, such as communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution. Future research on this topic could examine whether the impact of learning games on student engagement remains long-term. Understanding the duration of the games' impact would help plan short, medium, and long-term strategies.

Reflection

My practicum experience and teacher action research have been a transformative journey that has profoundly enriched both my professional and personal growth. On a professional level, it has given me practical exposure to the real-world application of the knowledge and skills I have acquired at the university. Through practical experience, I have gained a deeper understanding of the complexities of my field and honed my problem-solving skills. In addition, interacting with experienced professionals in the field has expanded my network and allowed me to learn from their wisdom and experience. On a personal level, practical experience has been fundamental to my personal growth. It challenged me to adapt to new environments, develop resilience and improve my communication and interpersonal

skills. This process has nurtured a sense of self-confidence, and I have developed a greater sense of purpose as I see the impact of my work on my students.

Although my experience as an English teacher was mostly positive, there were times when I thought that this profession was not for me. However, I believe that these moments of doubt are a natural part of any educator's journey and are often opportunities for personal and professional growth. Teaching is a challenging task that involves the responsibility of guiding and empowering students, which can sometimes be overwhelming. It is precisely in these moments of uncertainty that true passion for teaching is forged. I am sure that in time, those moments of doubt will become valuable lessons that will help me consolidate my vocation as a teacher and inspire me to continue to grow and perfect my skills and knowledge to benefit my future students.

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Appendix A

Pre and post-test first and second cycle

Test

Name: _____

Date _____

1. Cómo se forma el pasado simple en inglés?

- A Agregando "-ed" al final del verbo en su forma base para verbos regulares.
- B Los verbos irregulares en inglés no siguen el patrón regular de añadir "-ed" al final del verbo. Estos verbos tienen formas únicas para el pasado simple.
- C La opción A y B son correctas.

2. ¿Qué acompañante usamos para formar oraciones negativas e interrogativas en tiempo pasado simple?

- A Debemos usar "do" Example: I do not like apples / Do you like apples?
- B Debemos usar "be" Example: I am not in the hospital? / Are you in the hospital?
- C Debemos usar "did" Example: I did not study / Did you study?

3. Completa las oraciones conjugando el verbo entre paréntesis en pasado simple.

Con verbos regulares:

Situación: Hablando del fin de semana pasado

- I _____ (study) for the English exam on Saturday morning.
- Then, I _____ (watch) a new horror movie.

Con verbos irregulares:

Situación: Contando una aventura de vacaciones pasadas.

- On my vacation, I _____ (drive) from Medellín to Guatapé.
- During the trip, I _____ (take) many photos to remember the experience.

4. Transforma las siguientes oraciones afirmativas en oraciones negativas usando el tiempo pasado simple.

Con verbos regulares:

Situación: Estás compartiendo tus experiencias de viaje con un amigo.

Affirmative form	Negative form
I visited a famous museum in Paris.	

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1b1b5f92Zw90zk27YWDb1YEWWhOvw5dPgLvR1x>

[JcwnQZc/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1b1b5f92Zw90zk27YWDb1YEWWhOvw5dPgLvR1x/edit?usp=sharing)

Appendix B

Rubric to assess students' level of participation and discipline

Criterio	Niveles de desempeño				Valoración
	Excelente 5	Bueno 4	Regular 3-2	Deficiente 1	
Frequency of participation	El estudiante participa activamente en las actividades de clase.	El estudiante participa de manera consistente en las actividades de clase.	El estudiante participa de manera ocasional en las actividades de clase.	El estudiante no participa en las actividades de clase.	
Quality of participation	El estudiante contribuye con ideas originales, y realiza preguntas.	El estudiante Contribuye con ideas relevantes.	El estudiante Contribuye con ideas básicas.	El estudiante no contribuye en absoluto en las actividades.	
Orden	El estudiante mantiene un alto nivel de orden durante toda la actividad.	El estudiante mantiene un nivel adecuado de orden durante la mayoría de la actividad.	El estudiante muestra un nivel limitado de orden durante la actividad.	El estudiante no mantiene el orden durante la actividad.	
Cumplimiento de las reglas	El estudiante sigue las instrucciones de la actividad de manera metódica.	El estudiante sigue la mayoría de las instrucciones de la actividad de manera adecuada.	El estudiante sigue algunas de las instrucciones de la actividad.	El estudiante no sigue las instrucciones de la actividad.	
Concentración	El estudiante está completamente enfocado en la actividad.	El estudiante mantiene un nivel adecuado de concentración durante la actividad.	El estudiante muestra una concentración intermitente durante la actividad.	El estudiante está totalmente desconcentrado durante la actividad.	
Interes	El estudiante muestra un alto nivel de interés en el tema.	El estudiante muestra un interés razonable en el tema.	El estudiante muestra un nivel limitado de interés en el tema.	El estudiante no muestra ningún interés en el tema.	
Uso del ingles	El estudiante utiliza el inglés de manera excepcional durante toda la actividad.	El estudiante utiliza el inglés de manera efectiva durante la mayoría de la actividad.	El estudiante utiliza el inglés de manera limitada durante la actividad.	El estudiante no utiliza el inglés durante la actividad.	
Total puntos obtenidos					
Observaciones:					

<https://forms.gle/cJqosx6uwfDAbHQ6>