

Enhancing Children's Speaking Skills through Game-Based Learning

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) to enhance speaking skills and vocabulary acquisition among young EFL learners at Domby Kid's Hope 1, Yogyakarta. The problem addressed in this study is the low motivation and limited active use of English, particularly in speaking. To address this issue, GBL was implemented through activities like Duduk Senang and Animal Guessing, designed to increase student engagement and reduce anxiety when speaking. The method used was a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through pre- and post-tests, classroom observation, and reflective evaluation. The results showed that GBL successfully improved students' ability to recognize and use English vocabulary related to numbers and animals, as well as increased their confidence in speaking. All students showed significant progress after engaging in GBL activities. The implications of this study suggest that GBL can serve as an effective and enjoyable alternative to traditional language teaching, especially in non-formal education settings, and can contribute to the development of more engaging language teaching methodologies for young learners.

Keywords: *Game-Based Learning; Speaking Skills; Vocabulary Acquisition; Young EFL Learners; Non-formal Education; Language Engagement*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi penerapan Game-Based Learning (GBL) dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara dan penguasaan kosakata pada pelajar bahasa Inggris usia dini di Domby Kid's Hope 1, Yogyakarta. Masalah yang dihadapi adalah rendahnya motivasi belajar dan keterbatasan dalam penggunaan Bahasa Inggris secara aktif, terutama dalam berbicara. Untuk mengatasi hal ini, GBL diterapkan melalui aktivitas permainan seperti Duduk Senang dan Tebak Hewan, yang dirancang untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa dan mengurangi kecemasan saat berbicara. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui tes awal dan akhir, observasi, serta evaluasi reflektif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa GBL berhasil meningkatkan kemampuan siswa dalam mengenali dan menggunakan kosakata bahasa Inggris terkait angka dan hewan, serta meningkatkan rasa percaya diri dalam berbicara. Semua siswa menunjukkan kemajuan signifikan setelah mengikuti aktivitas GBL. Implikasi dari kegiatan ini menunjukkan bahwa GBL dapat menjadi alternatif yang efektif dan menyenangkan dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggris, terutama di lingkungan pendidikan non-formal, dan dapat memberikan kontribusi dalam pengembangan metodologi pengajaran bahasa yang lebih menarik bagi pelajar muda.

Kata kunci: *Game-Based Learning; Keterampilan Berbicara; Keterlibatan Bahasa; Pendidikan Non-formal; Penguasaan Kosakata; Pelajar EFL Usia Dini*

Introduction

English has become a global language, significantly influencing various aspects of life, including education, communication, and technology. As a result, English language learning is now introduced at an early age to help students build foundational proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking stands out as particularly critical, especially for young learners, as it facilitates direct communication and promotes vocabulary acquisition through verbal interaction.

In the context of learning and education, teaching methods refer to the approaches or techniques used by teachers or instructors to teach and facilitate learning for students. Teaching methods refer to the strategies and techniques used to help students understand and master learning material.. The purpose of using teaching methods is to help students understand and master the learning material, as well as to develop the skills and understanding necessary to meet the learning objectives. Various teaching methods have been developed and used in different educational contexts, and the choice of method depends on various factors, including the subject matter, learning objectives, student characteristics, and learning environment. The use of varied and creative teaching methods can help increase student engagement, facilitate better understanding, and enable effective learning according to the individual and group needs.

Mastery of vocabulary is essential for speaking fluency. Without a strong vocabulary foundation, learners often struggle to express their ideas and participate in meaningful conversations. According to Alqahtani (2015), vocabulary is one of the most important components of second language learning, serving as the fundamental building block for communication. Furthermore, young children are at a stage where language absorption is rapid, and with appropriate methods, their speaking skills can be significantly enhanced. However, young learners often face challenges in language learning due to various factors, such as low motivation, difficulty with abstract concepts, and limited exposure to English-speaking environments. Traditional methods—such as memorization, translation, and drills—often lead to disengagement, passivity, or anxiety. These approaches fail to address the developmental needs of children, who learn best through concrete experiences, physical activity, and play.

The proper use of teaching methods can significantly enhance students' creativity. Creativity is the ability to generate new ideas, innovative solutions, and different ways of thinking. The implementation of these teaching methods must be supported by an environment that fosters creativity and instructors who motivate students to think creatively (Hidayat, 2018). Additionally, it is important to recognize and celebrate students' creative ideas, making them feel valued and encouraged to continue developing their creativity.

One of the teaching methods currently used is Game-Based Learning. Game-Based Learning (GBL) has emerged as an innovative and effective instructional method. GBL integrates game elements—such as competition, challenges, rewards, and storytelling—into the learning process. These elements help engage learners cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Pan et al. (2021) highlight that GBL not only improves academic performance but also fosters motivation, collaboration, and creativity within the classroom. GBL is especially effective for young learners due to its emphasis on fun and interaction.

Children naturally learn through play, and incorporating games into English instruction can enhance vocabulary retention and speaking fluency. Games provide opportunities for repetition, peer support, and context-based language use—critical factors for early language acquisition. Additionally, GBL reduces performance anxiety by creating a relaxed, playful atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and language experimentation.

Importantly, Game-Based Learning (GBL) aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that students learn best when they actively construct knowledge through real-life experiences, interaction, and social engagement (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). In GBL environments, learners are encouraged to explore, collaborate, and build understanding through meaningful activities—making it especially effective for young children who benefit from experiential, play-based learning.

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of GBL in improving speaking skills and vocabulary mastery among young English language learners at Domby Kid's Hope 1, a community-based educational initiative in Yogyakarta. By incorporating a series of interactive games, this study examines how GBL influences students' English proficiency, with a focus on vocabulary related to numbers and animals.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the effectiveness of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in enhancing vocabulary mastery and speaking skills among young learners. The research was conducted on January 13, 2024, at Universitas Respati Yogyakarta, with participants from Domby Kid's Hope 1. The students, ranging from grades 1 to 6, were grouped into three categories based on their educational levels: Grades 1–2, Grades 3–4, and Grades 5–6.

Table 1. List of Domby Kid's Hope Students

1 st & 2 nd Grades	3 rd & 4 th Grades	5 th & 6 th Grades
Kinan	Juna	Jesika
Daud	Syallom	Chika
Naya	Albert	Cahaya
Nikel	Huda	Safira
Rayna		Selfie
Zea		Risma
Carolina		Jesika
Tasya		Ardi
Aska		
Aksen		
Arya		

Source: Attendance List, 2024.

The study followed a three-phase teaching design: **pre-teaching, while-teaching, and post-teaching.**

1. Pre-teaching phase: A pre-test was administered to assess students' baseline



Figure 1. Pre-teaching phase. Source: Research Data, 2024.

vocabulary knowledge and speaking ability. The test consisted of oral questions, where students were asked to identify, pronounce, and spell selected vocabulary related to numbers and animals.

2. **While-teaching phase:** Two major Game-Based Learning (GBL) activities were implemented:

- **Duduk Senang game:** The *duduk senang* game is a kinesthetic activity designed to engage students physically while reinforcing their learning through movement, music, and collaboration. The game combines elements of singing, dancing, and number identification, making it an interactive and dynamic learning experience. In this activity, students are given instructions that encourage them to count or identify numbers in English. These instructions might involve simple tasks like counting aloud, matching number cards, or identifying a specific number based on verbal cues.

The game progresses by incorporating musical cues. As the music plays, students are encouraged to dance, but when the music stops, they must follow the instructor's next directive. This could include finding a partner with a specific number, performing a series of actions based on a number (such as jumping a certain number of times), or sitting in a designated spot based on the number they're assigned.

By combining movement and learning, the *Duduk Senang* game allows students to develop a better understanding of number concepts and improve their number recognition skills in an enjoyable and active environment. The collaborative aspect of the game, where students work together to follow instructions and find partners, fosters teamwork and communication skills as well. Additionally, the fun and interactive nature of the game helps maintain students' attention and motivates them to actively participate in the learning process.



Figure 2. Duduk Senang Game.
Souce: Research Data, 2024.



Figure 3. animal guessing game.
Souce: Research Data, 2024.

- Animal guessing game:** In this activity, one student is tasked with describing or acting out an animal, while the other students try to guess its name in English. The student performing the description or acting can use gestures, sounds, or clues to portray the animal without directly saying its name. Once the animal is correctly guessed, the student who identified it will be asked to spell the word aloud. This step helps reinforce the correct spelling of the animal's name, further embedding the vocabulary in the students' memory.

The game encourages active participation from everyone involved, as each student takes turns describing or guessing the animals. This interaction keeps students engaged and motivates them to recall and apply the vocabulary they've learned. Additionally, by acting out or describing the animals, students practice both their speaking and listening skills, which enhances their ability to recall words in various contexts. The inclusion of spelling also strengthens their ability to accurately write and remember new vocabulary, making it a comprehensive and fun learning experience. This activity not only reinforces English vocabulary but also fosters teamwork, communication, and confidence in using the language.

- 3. Post-teaching phase:** After completing the GBL activities, a post-test was conducted to evaluate improvements in vocabulary retention and speaking fluency. Observations were made throughout the session, and student engagement and reactions were documented.

This study faced several methodological limitations. The participants came from mixed grade levels (Grades 1–6) with varying English proficiency, which affected the accuracy of the pre-test and post-test results. Higher-grade students tended to dominate and elevate the overall scores, while younger learners struggled with comprehension and participation. The activity was also conducted in a single session due to time and logistical constraints, limiting both practice duration and observation depth.

Because the researcher—not a classroom practitioner—facilitated the activity, potential observation bias may have influenced data interpretation. The game level was

adjusted to a middle range to accommodate all students, yet this caused imbalance: younger learners needed more guidance, while older ones found the tasks too simple. These conditions created mild hesitation and uneven engagement among groups. Future implementations should extend over multiple sessions, differentiate activities by grade or proficiency level, and involve trained practitioners to ensure more valid and measurable outcomes.

Findings

The implementation of Game-Based Learning at Domby Kid's Hope 1 produced positive results in terms of vocabulary acquisition, student engagement, and speaking fluency.

- 1. Pre-test results:** At the start of the program, 80% of students were able to correctly identify basic vocabulary related to numbers and animals. However, many students showed hesitation when asked to speak or spell words aloud. This suggested that while students had a foundational understanding of the vocabulary, they lacked confidence in using it actively in conversation or written form.
- 2. Post-test results:** After participating in Game-Based Learning activities, 100% of the students showed significant improvement in both vocabulary recognition and usage. The students who were initially hesitant became more confident and began actively engaging in classroom discussions. The interactive nature of the games played a crucial role in reducing students' anxiety, making them feel more comfortable with speaking and spelling words aloud. This shift in behavior highlighted the effectiveness of GBL in promoting a more relaxed and participatory classroom environment.
- 3. Student feedback:** Students particularly enjoyed the *Duduk Senang* game, which combined movement with rhythm to support auditory memory and vocabulary retention. The rhythm and physical activity helped them retain the vocabulary more dynamically and enjoyably. Additionally, the animal guessing game fostered critical thinking, as students had to use their knowledge and reasoning to identify animals, reinforcing vocabulary retrieval. The spelling component of the game was also praised for helping students internalize orthographic patterns, ensuring that they not only remembered the words but could also spell them accurately.
- 4. Observations:** The interactive nature of the GBL activities allowed students to internalize new vocabulary and demonstrated an improvement in speaking fluency. The games created an engaging and supportive learning environment that minimized affective filters—psychological barriers to language acquisition, such as anxiety or lack of motivation. This made the students more comfortable using the language, allowing them to communicate more confidently in English.

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The Game-Based Learning (GBL) program was implemented with mixed-grade participants (Grades 1–6) in a non-formal education setting. The learning process

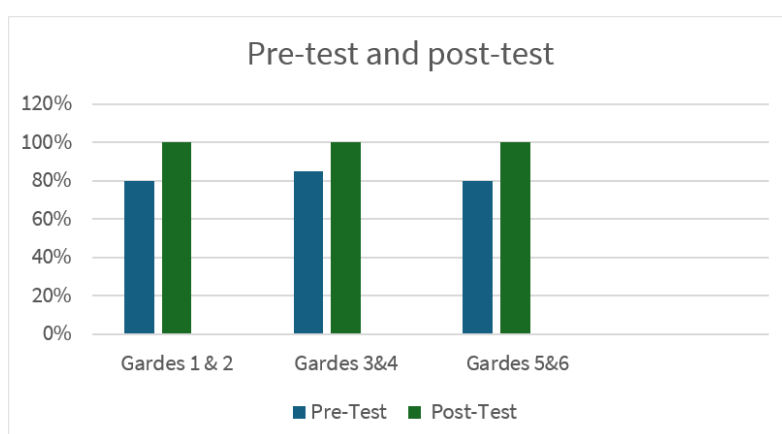


Table 2. Diagram pre-test and post-test, 2024

encouraged high enthusiasm and engagement; however, the outcomes varied across grade levels due to differences in English proficiency. The pre-test and post-test results were influenced by higher-grade students, making the overall achievement less representative of individual progress.

Methodologically, the program was not fully optimal because it was conducted in a single session without grouping based on proficiency levels. This limited the precision of the evaluation and introduced potential observation bias. Despite these flaws, the implementation provides valuable insight for future studies. GBL should be applied across multiple meetings and differentiated by grade or proficiency level to yield more accurate results. This study's findings thus serve as both a reflection and a foundation for further exploration of GBL's impact on young learners' speaking and vocabulary development.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the considerable effectiveness of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in enhancing young learners' proficiency in English, particularly in speaking skills and vocabulary acquisition. By incorporating interactive and entertaining educational activities, GBL transforms the classroom into a dynamic and low-stress environment. This type of learning atmosphere encourages active participation and sustained engagement among students, which are key factors in effective language acquisition. Rather than relying solely on traditional rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction, GBL allows students to explore language use through playful contexts, making the learning process more enjoyable and less intimidating.

These results are consistent with prior research, such as that of Ghazy et al. (2021), which found that games significantly boost students' motivation and involvement in language learning settings. Motivation is a critical component of second language acquisition, especially for young learners who may otherwise become easily disengaged (Kristiawan *et al.*, 2024). At Domy Kid's Hope 1, where this study was conducted, students who initially exhibited hesitation or shyness when asked to speak English began to show noticeable improvements in their confidence and communication skills after participating in GBL sessions. These students became more verbal and willing to express

themselves, indicating that GBL strategies are highly effective in reducing language anxiety—a common barrier in language learning—and in nurturing a more positive attitude toward English as a subject.

The structured yet enjoyable nature of the games used during the learning sessions provided learners with ample opportunities for repeated exposure to new vocabulary in meaningful and contextual settings. Unlike isolated vocabulary drills, GBL embeds new words and phrases within narratives, challenges, and dialogues, allowing students to internalize language naturally through usage. This method not only aids in better vocabulary retention but also helps learners understand how to use language in real-life scenarios.

These findings are not only consistent with prior research but also align closely with established educational theories, which posit that learners build their own understanding through active engagement and hands-on experiences. According to Piaget (1952, p. 176), knowledge is constructed as learners interact with their environment and develop cognitive structures through discovery. In a Game-Based Learning (GBL) classroom, students are not passive recipients of information; rather, they actively construct knowledge by interacting with peers, solving problems, and reflecting on their actions (Driscoll, 2005, p. 386). This learner-centred approach fosters deeper understanding and longer-lasting knowledge by encouraging exploration and critical thinking. Through collaboration in game-based tasks, peer learning is also enhanced, as students support and learn from one another—a dynamic that aligns with Vygotsky's view that more capable peers can scaffold learning (Topping & Ehly, 1998, p. 28). This peer interaction proves especially beneficial in classrooms with diverse learning needs and linguistic backgrounds, as it creates an inclusive and supportive learning culture that is central to constructivist practice.

However, the implementation of GBL is not without challenges. One significant concern was the need for differentiated instruction to accommodate students with varying levels of English proficiency. Ensuring that all learners could participate meaningfully required careful planning and adaptation of the games to fit different skill levels. Another issue was effective time management, as group-based games often require more time to complete than traditional classroom tasks. These challenges were addressed by designing flexible game formats, breaking larger tasks into manageable components, and providing clear, concise instructions to keep students focused. Additionally, the teacher's role as a facilitator and motivator was pivotal. Active teacher involvement was necessary to guide the learning process, clarify misunderstandings, and encourage shy or struggling students to engage.

In conclusion, this study provides strong evidence supporting the integration of Game-Based Learning into early English language instruction. The method not only improves language skills—particularly speaking and vocabulary—but also reduces learners' anxiety, increases motivation, and promotes a collaborative classroom environment. When implemented thoughtfully, with attention to individual student needs and effective classroom management, GBL has the potential to transform English learning into a more accessible, meaningful, and joyful experience for young learners.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Game-Based Learning (GBL) is an effective approach for enhancing vocabulary acquisition and speaking skills among young EFL learners in non-formal educational contexts. The interactive and playful design of the games successfully fostered engagement, reduced learning anxiety, and increased students' confidence in using English. The results confirmed that GBL creates a positive, low-stress environment that motivates learners to participate actively and use vocabulary in meaningful communication.

However, the implementation also revealed several methodological constraints. The mixed-grade composition (Grades 1–6) and single-session design limited the precision of the results, as differences in English proficiency affected the overall outcomes. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into how GBL can stimulate language engagement and motivation among young learners. It is therefore recommended that future implementations adopt a multi-session structure and differentiate groups based on age or proficiency to ensure more accurate and measurable results. Further research could also explore the long-term impact of GBL on language retention and its adaptation to other learning contexts or subject areas.

In conclusion, while this study acknowledges its methodological limitations, the findings affirm that GBL remains a highly engaging and pedagogically valuable alternative to conventional English instruction, offering significant benefits for young learners' language development and classroom participation.

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Declaration of no conflict of interest

“Penulis menyatakan bahwa naskah ini terbebas dari segala bentuk konflik kepentingan dan diproses sesuai ketentuan dan kebijakan jurnal yang berlaku untuk menghindari penyimpangan etika publikasi dalam berbagai bentuknya.”

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