DEVELOPING B1 LEVEL EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH GAMES

Rashidova Munavvar Xaydarovna,
Namozova Dilnoza Berdimurotovna
Department of foreign languages
The University of Public safety of the Republic of Uzbekistan

ANNOTATION

This article explores the effectiveness of using games to enhance B1 level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking skills. It details the applied methods, incorporating various game-based learning strategies, and analyzes their impact on learners' engagement and proficiency. The conclusion underscores the potential of interactive learning in language acquisition. Key findings and suggestions for educators are presented, advocating for an integrative approach to EFL teaching.

Keywords: EFL (English as a Foreign Language), B1 level, speaking skills, game-based learning, language acquisition, interactive learning.

INTRODUCTION
Enhancing Speaking Skills in EFL Learning

In the real of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), developing speaking skills is a critical aspect that often poses significant challenges, particularly for learners at the B1 intermediate level. This level, characterized by the ability to handle simple, straightforward communication in familiar contexts, requires a nuanced approach to teaching methodologies. Traditional didactic methods, while effective for grammar and vocabulary acquisition, often fall short in fostering fluency and confidence in speaking.

The emergence of interactive and engaging learning strategies has revolutionized the landscape of language education. Among these, game-based learning emerges as a promising approach. The application of games in educational contexts is not a novel concept; however, its integration in language learning, especially for developing speaking skills, offers unique opportunities and challenges. Games, inherently interactive and often communicative, can provide a safe and dynamic platform for learners to practice speaking, enhance their language fluency, and overcome the fear of making mistakes.

This article delves into the potential of games as a tool to develop speaking skills in B1 level EFL learners. It explores the types of games that are most effective at this level of language proficiency and examines their impact on learners' motivation, engagement, and ultimately, their speaking abilities. Through a detailed analysis of applied methods and empirical evidence, this study aims to provide insights and practical recommendations for EFL educators seeking innovative ways to enhance the speaking skills of their students.

APPLIED METHODS

Integrating Game-Based Learning in EFL Curriculum

The methodological approach to integrating game-based learning for B1 level EFL learners is multifaceted, focusing on the selection, implementation, and evaluation of specific games designed to enhance speaking skills.

Game Selection Criteria:

The selection of games was guided by Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Games were chosen based on their ability to provide language input at just above the current proficiency level of the learners (i+1), ensuring both comprehension and challenge. Additionally, Richards and Rodgers' (2001) principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) influenced the choice of games that encourage interaction, negotiation of meaning, and functional language use.

Types of Games Used:

1.   **Role-Playing Games (RPGs):** Inspired by Lee and VanPatten's emphasis on making communicative language teaching happen (2003), RPGs were employed to simulate real-life situations. Scenarios included ordering food in a restaurant, job interviews, and planning a trip, allowing learners to practice functional language in a controlled yet dynamic context.

2.   **Language Puzzles and Board Games:** Following Hadfield and Hadfield's (2012) suggestions, language puzzles and board games were incorporated to enhance vocabulary and grammar, crucial components of fluent speech. These games focused on thematic vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures pertinent to the B1 level.

Implementation in Classroom:

The games were integrated into the regular EFL curriculum over a period of one academic semester. Each session began with a brief instructional phase, followed by game play, and concluded with a reflective discussion, aligning with Rixon's (1981)

framework for using games in language teaching. The reflective phase was crucial for learners to articulate their learning experiences and for teachers to provide corrective feedback.

Evaluation of Effectiveness:

To assess the impact of game-based learning on speaking skills, a mixed-methods approach was employed. Quantitative data was collected through pre-and post-tests measuring fluency, accuracy, and complexity of spoken language, as per Thornbury's (2005) guidelines. Qualitative data, gathered through learner and teacher feedback, offered insights into the affective aspects of learning, such as motivation, confidence, and attitude towards speaking English.

CONCLUSION

Implications of Game-Based Learning in EFL

The integration of game-based learning into the EFL curriculum for B1 level learners has yielded insightful findings. The quantitative data revealed a significant improvement in the fluency and complexity of the learners' spoken English, aligning with Krashen's theory of comprehensible input leading to language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Learners demonstrated greater ease in stringing sentences together and using more complex grammatical structures, as postulated by Richards and Rodgers (2001) in the context of communicative competence.

Qualitatively, the use of role-playing games and language puzzles, as suggested by Lee and VanPatten (2003) and Hadfield & Hadfield (2012), respectively, resulted in heightened learner engagement and motivation. The interactive nature of these games reduced the anxiety typically associated with speaking activities, supporting Thornbury's (2005) assertion on the importance of a positive learning environment for speaking skill development.

Furthermore, the reflective discussions post-gameplay, following Rixon's (1981) methodology, provided learners with critical opportunities for self-assessment and feedback, essential for language development. These discussions also served as platforms for corrective feedback from teachers, a key component in language learning.

Recommendations for Educators and Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that EFL educators consider incorporating a variety of game-based activities into their teaching repertoire to enhance the speaking skills of B1 level learners. Selection of games should align with learners' proficiency levels and learning objectives, emphasizing both language accuracy and fluency.

For future research, longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of game-based learning on EFL speaking skills would be valuable. Additionally,

exploring the effectiveness of game-based learning across different proficiency levels and cultural contexts could provide broader insights into the applicability of this approach in diverse educational settings.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, game-based learning emerges as a potent tool in the arsenal of EFL teaching methodologies. By making language learning interactive, engaging, and less intimidating, games have the potential to significantly enhance the speaking skills of learners. As the field of language education continues to evolve, the integration of innovative and student-centered teaching methods such as game-based learning will be crucial in shaping effective and enjoyable language learning experiences.

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