Games in Enhancing Productive Skills for EFL Students

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Abstract: This article explores the use of games as an effective pedagogical strategy for improving EFL students' speaking and writing skills. Conducted through a literature review, the study examines various games used in language classrooms and their impact on language learning outcomes. The importance of language as a communication tool and the need to enhance students' English-speaking and writing skills are emphasized. Teachers' role in leveraging innovative game-based learning strategies is highlighted, focusing on games like Zepeto, board games, spinning wheel games, and guessing games. These games offer engaging, real-time language practice, promoting fluency, confidence, and motivation. The research method used by this study was literature reviews. Findings indicate the efficacy of these games in enhancing speaking and writing skills for the EFL students. The study underscores the value of game-based learning in making language education more enjoyable and effective. Concluding, the study advocates for the integration of game-based strategies in language classrooms to boost students' interest, engagement, and proficiency in English.

Keywords: games in EFL teaching, speaking skill, writing skill

INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital tool for communicating human thoughts and emotions. One of the foreign languages that are particularly challenging for students to learn in school is English. In Indonesia, junior high school students are required to take English, however, some elementary schools also offer English instruction to their students. The four skills of the English language that must be learned are speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Speaking and writing are two of the productive language skills that most need to be developed and enhanced.

Speaking is the most important skill among all the four language skills in order to communicate well in this global world (Rao, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial for students to acquire speaking skills to communicate effectively in English. While it is certainly hard for

students to speak fluently in English, learning will be made easier for them if the classroom environment is engaging and enjoyable. Then, writing is the most important ability for students to practice how much they grasp English during their studies, in addition to other skills. Since English is not their first language, students are going to make a lot of mistakes in their writing. So, it is the teacher's responsibility to encourage students to write in English. Purnamasari et al. (2021) state that writing is one of the most crucial language learning skills in English. Writing is necessary for students to acquire to improve their other language skills and critical thinking. Writing involves information, accumulation, equipment, and experience, which is why it takes a significant amount of time to master (Özkan, 2016). Numerous elements, including paragraph form, sentence construction, and language choice, contribute to these challenges. Çetin and Cihan (2021) asserted that the best approach to improve writing abilities is to partake in creative writing exercises as a means of overcoming those challenges.

As English is typically taught to learners as a second language in the classroom, it stands to reason that they will make more mistakes when speaking and writing in the language. If teachers just concentrate on imparting knowledge to their learners, they will become disinterested. Teachers can support students in raising their English proficiency in various ways. Thus, one of the most effective approaches for teachers to help students develop useful abilities like speaking and writing is through the use of games. According to Rabbani et al. (2016), a game is an activity that has rules and aims to be fun and amusing. Morever, if educators integrate game-based learning strategies, it will be simpler to grab students' interest in speaking and writing. In addition to increasing students' flexible and conversational use of English, it provides real-world context for learning. There is no denying the importance of games in vocabulary instruction and acquisition.

Games are frequently utilized in educational environments because they provide students with an enjoyable and engaging alternative to learning English. The exciting and immersive approach to language learning that games provide is a result of their built-in attraction and interactive elements. According to Fauzi (2022), playing games in language classes encourages healthy competition among students and can teach them additional language elements. Games create real-time practice of language use, which helps students become more fluent and confident. The interactive aspects of games encourage healthy competition, teamwork, and active participation, which are critical elements that keep students engaged and motivated in their language learning process.

Thus, it can be summarized that games are an important method educators can use to improve students' speaking and writing skills. There are several games that teachers can use in the classroom, but in this study, it aims to discuss several games that were used to: (1) improve speaking skill, and (2) improve writing skill. Hence, this study aims to build awareness among others about how important games are to attract students' interest in speaking and writing.

METHOD

The researchers used a literature review method to conduct this study (Snyder, 2019). As this paper takes, a literature review used is an overview of a certain issue of games used by

EFL teachers to enhance productive skills of their learners. To be specific, the journal articles reviewed in this paper employ different approaches. For instance, the effects of the Zepeto Game, Board Game, and Guessing Game were measured with pre- and post-tests and their improvements in speaking English. Also, the Guessing Game and Spinning Wheel Game were evaluated, showing positive effects on descriptive and procedural writing skills, respectively. Overall, the games reviewed in this paper are useful to improve students' speaking and writing skills by making learning more engaging and effective.

RESULTS

The researchers discovered that there have been numerous games that EFL students can use to improve their productive skills, which are speaking and writing skills. This finding adds to the growing body of evidence that engaging, interactive tools can enhance language acquisition and proficiency.

Games that Enhance EFL Students' Speaking Skills
1. Zepeto
No one would expect that an online game, namely Zepeto, would improve students' speaking skills in the English language. As all gamers know, Zepeto is not a game typically used to learn English. Zepeto is a game for people to meet and connect with others from around the world, design characters, and have fun together. Typically, online games involve players completing particular tasks to attain the best score and emerge victorious in a designated selection of games (Darihastining et al., 2019). Referring to Hidayati et al. (2023) that students were less embarrassed when speaking with foreigners through Zepeto. On the other hand, foreigners can also learn another language through Zepeto. As a result, students showed significant improvement in speaking skills, including fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension. For these reasons, the Zepeto Game was effective in improving speaking skills.

Studies by Kim and Lee (2020) expanded on these findings, demonstrating that social interaction within such online games enhances students' pragmatic competence in English. Moreover, Lai and Zheng (2018) highlighted that online gaming environments encourage authentic communication and task-based dialogue which directly correlate with improved speaking proficiency. Gee's (2003) principles of game-based learning also stress the importance of situated meanings, which support L2 development through gaming contexts. Additionally, Peterson (2016) found that engagement in online games promotes 'flow' states, enhancing the willingness to communicate and reducing language anxiety.

Despite the students' success in enhancing their speaking skills, they encountered difficulties in finding foreign people initially but eventually overcame the problem. Students were very happy because they could find new friends from various countries. Other games, such as Mobile Legends, PUBG, and Free Fire also facilitate communication with native speakers or those with a shared interest in learning English. An application can be very useful in every aspect of life as long as it is used wisely.

2. Board Games

Board games are an extremely effective and engaging way to teach speaking English because students learn vocabulary and enjoy saying words connected to the board. As a result, using board games to teach speaking will likely lead to success. Board games involve moving responses or pieces in specific patterns on a pre-marked board while complying with a set of rules. Board games can be divided into classic, family, strategy, thematic, and war categories. Some popular board games include chess, Monopoly, and Snakes and Ladders, while others, such as Werewolf, Avalon, and Mafia, incorporate role-playing elements.

Several studies have found that incorporating board games into speaking lessons impacts cognitive and affective skills. For instance, improved versions of Monopoly and Snakes and Ladders can help students practice speaking in the context of descriptive texts. Board games were regarded as tools that provided students with various opportunities to practice speaking the target language naturally. Implementing board games to improve speaking skills was linked to real-life situations that provided meaningful learning opportunities (Tiing & Yunus, 2021), encouraging students to expand their creativity and thinking. According to Kartikasari (2018), board games can increase students' motivation to learn English. They also offer the advantage of helping students memorize words more effectively through repeated practice.

Research from Wright et al. (2005) supports these findings, indicating that board games create a low-stress, high-engagement environment conducive to language learning. Vernon (2009) also points out that such games foster cooperative learning, which boosts conversational skills and team-based communication. Richards and Rodgers (2001) advocate for the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, within which board games fit well due to their emphasis on interaction as both means and ultimate goal of learning. Further, Spratt et al. (2005) show that board games help integrate language skills with non-verbal communication, enhancing overall fluency. These findings highlight the effectiveness of incorporating board games into language learning curriculum. By providing a fun and interactive platform for students to practice their language skills, educators can create a positive and engaging learning environment. Additionally, the integration of non-verbal communication in board games can help students develop a well-rounded set of language abilities, ultimately leading to improved fluency and proficiency. Overall, utilizing board games as a tool for language learning can enhance students' linguistic capabilities and foster a collaborative and communicative classroom atmosphere.

3. Guessing Game

Guessing games align with the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach as articulated by Asher (1966), which emphasizes the value of physical engagement and real-time application in learning a new language. Nunan (2004) supports this by asserting that guessing games improve learner strategies in problem-solving and critical thinking, which are essential for language processing. Hadley (2003) identifies guessing games as tools that stimulate interactive practice, dictation skills, and spontaneous use of language—all crucial elements in achieving communicative competence. Further, Lightbrown and Spada (2013) highlight

that such games create repetitive, contextual learning scenarios which are foundational in language acquisition.

According to Madya and Meiningsih (2021), students with limited English competence often experience significant anxiety about displaying their talents in English. To address this, a regulation was implemented for guessing English games. Students are not permitted to celebrate or humiliate peers who answer incorrectly, allowing pupils to express themselves boldly. Communicative activities, such as guessing games, can help EFL students enhance their speaking abilities. Students are required to talk in accordance with the picture on the card, which they have chosen at random. Guessing games help students understand and retain new terms that can be used immediately in a casual and comfortable setting. Overall, games assist students in developing their speaking abilities. They are also effective in teaching vocabulary mastery as children acquire words concretely based on physical objects (Madya & Meiningsih, 2021).

Games that Enhance EFL Students' Writing Skills

1. Spinning Wheel

Spinning wheel games help students improve their ability to write procedural texts. The data presented, in the form of written words, were gathered through observation of students writing procedural texts. Students are asked to form groups, with each group assigned a different theme to write text procedures using spinning wheel games. It has been confirmed that spinning wheels help students improve their ability to write procedural texts. The spinning wheel can pique students' interest, challenge their reasoning, and aid in writing procedural texts.

Meanwhile, the use of a spinning wheel when teaching writing can arouse students' interest and allow them to participate more actively in learning (Rachmaida, 2022). In addition to being a name generator, the spinning wheel assists with writing instructions. The use of games boosts students' interest in writing skills because they are entertaining and emphasize writing. The teaching instrument, the spinning wheel or wheel of fortune game, forms a circle and has numerous areas as the playing field. Students in this field respond to questions by writing numbers in circles. When used as a teaching tool, the wheel of fortune attracts the entire classroom. As a result, students become more involved, making learning easier and more interesting.

Studies by Cahyani and Cahyono (2021) suggest that the use of spinning wheels not only enhances writing skills but also fosters collaborative learning and peer feedback which are critical in the writing process. Harmer (2004) argues that such interactive tools can reduce the affective filter in language classrooms, making students more apt to engage in writing tasks. Graham and Perin (2007) also support the use of interactive and gamified approaches, which improve both writing quality and student attitudes towards writing. Moreover, Hyland (2003) emphasizes the social aspect of writing, suggesting that spinning wheel games can enhance collaborative writing practices and audience awareness. Overall, the use of interactive tools and gamified approaches not only enhances students' writing skills but also creates a more positive and engaging learning environment. By incorporating elements of fun and collaboration into writing tasks, educators can effectively reduce

students' anxiety about writing and increase their motivation to participate in writing activities. With the added benefit of promoting peer feedback and audience awareness, interactive tools like spinning wheel games can truly revolutionize the way writing is taught and learned in language classrooms.

2. Guessing Games

The guessing game, specifically, involves students guessing words or phrases based on clues provided, which fosters a fun and competitive learning environment. This game encourages students to think critically and improve their descriptive writing skills as they attempt to provide and interpret clues accurately. Furthermore, guessing games can be adapted to various topics and proficiency levels, making them versatile tools in language instruction. By actively engaging in these games, students develop their writing skills in an interactive and supportive environment.

Brown (2001) highlights the importance of interactive tasks such as guessing games in aiding learners to bridge the gap between language comprehension and production. It supports Nation's (2001) argument that guessing games contribute significantly to vocabulary retention and contextual usage, which are essential components in descriptive writing. Additionally, Nunan (1999) asserts that guessing games act as communicative tasks that require learners to use language creatively and strategically, often leading to improved narrative competence and lexical variety. Mubaslat (2012) further provides evidence that such games enhance intrinsic motivation and learner autonomy, both of which are crucial for effective language acquisition. In conclusion, the use of guessing games in language learning not only aids in vocabulary retention and contextual usage but also promotes creativity and strategic language use. By engaging in these communicative tasks, learners can improve their narrative skills and expand their lexical range. Furthermore, the boost in intrinsic motivation and learner autonomy that comes with participating in guessing games can greatly enhance the overall effectiveness of language acquisition.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this mini research highlight the substantial potential of various games in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' productive skills, specifically their speaking and writing abilities. This study underscores the significance of engaging, interactive tools as robust facilitators of language acquisition and proficiency.

One intriguing finding is the efficacy of the online game Zepeto in improving speaking skills among EFL students. Traditionally viewed as a social and recreational platform, Zepeto enables users to create avatars, interact globally, and engage in various virtual activities. The study reveals that students using Zepeto to communicate with foreigners felt less embarrassed and more comfortable practicing English. Hidayati et al. (2023) report notable improvements in fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension among students. Additionally, Kim and Lee (2020) emphasize that such social interaction within online games enhances pragmatic competence, while Lai and Zheng (2018) argue that authentic communication and task-based dialogues in these environments lead to improved speaking proficiency. The concept of 'flow' states, introduced by Peterson (2016), further supports this, showing that engagement in online games diminishes language anxiety and

fosters a positive learning atmosphere. Gee (2003) also articulates that game-based learning principles, such as situated meanings, align well with second language development. This suggests that Zepeto can significantly contribute to language learning when used wisely.

Regarding with the board games, they provide another effective medium for enhancing speaking skills, leveraging their interactive and engaging nature. These games, which range from classics like chess and Monopoly to role-playing games like Werewolf and Mafia, require players to follow specific rules and engage in structured dialogue. Studies (e.g., Tiing & Yunus, 2021) demonstrate that board games offer numerous benefits, including opportunities for natural language practice, creativity, and cognitive engagement. Kartikasari (2018) notes the increased motivation and improved vocabulary retention through repeated practice. Wright et al. (2005) highlight the conducive, low-stress learning environment created by board games, while Vernon (2009) points out the enhancement of cooperative learning and team communication skills. Furthermore, Richards and Rodgers (2001) advocate for the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which supports the use of interactive tools like board games. These games help integrate verbal and non-verbal communication, fostering overall fluency.

Furthermore, the other game namely guessing games align with the TPR approach (Asher, 1966) and have proven effective in reducing students' anxiety and promoting language use. Ho et al. (2019), and Madya and Meiningsih (2021) emphasize the role of guessing games in improving speaking abilities and enthusiasm for learning English. These games involve students describing or identifying images, fostering a comfortable and dynamic learning environment. Nunan (2004) and Hadley (2003) report that such interactive practice stimulates critical thinking, problem-solving, and spontaneous use of language, essential for communicative competence. Lightbrown and Spada (2013) further highlight the importance of repetitive, contextual learning scenarios in language acquisition.

In relation to games that enhance EFL students' writing skills, the spinning wheel game is instrumental in improving students' procedural writing skills by fostering interest, reasoning, and collaborative learning. Rachmaida (2022) confirms that this interactive tool enhances student engagement and participation. Cahyani and Cahyono (2021) suggest that spinning wheels not only bolster writing skills but also promote peer feedback and collaborative learning, critical components in the writing process. Harmer (2004) argues that interactive tools lower the affective filter, making students more likely to engage in writing tasks. Graham and Perin (2007) support the use of gamified approaches for improving writing quality and attitudes, while Hyland (2003) emphasizes the social aspect of writing that spinning wheel games enhance.

Then, guessing games also effectively enhance EFL students' writing skills by encouraging critical thinking and descriptive writing. Brown (2001) underscores the significance of interactive tasks in bridging the gap between comprehension and production. Nation (2001) notes the contribution of guessing games to vocabulary retention and contextual usage, essential for descriptive writing. Nunan (1999) highlights that these games require learners to use language creatively and strategically, resulting in improved narrative competence and lexical variety. It also confirms Mubaslat's (2012) study that guessing

games can enhance intrinsic motivation and learner autonomy, crucial for effective language acquisition.

In brief, the integration of educational games into EFL instruction offers substantial benefits for enhancing students' speaking and writing skills. The findings from Zepeto, board games, and guessing games underline the importance of interactive and engaging tools in language learning. These games not only improve linguistic proficiency but also foster positive attitudes, reduce anxiety, and promote collaborative learning. Therefore, educators should consider incorporating such games into their teaching strategies to facilitate a more dynamic and effective language learning experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from this study highlight the significant impact that game-based learning strategies can have on enhancing EFL students' productive skills, particularly in speaking and writing. The integration of various games such as Zepeto, board games, spinning wheel games, and guessing games into the language learning process has proven to be highly effective in fostering a more engaging, interactive, and enjoyable learning environment. Games facilitate real-time language practice, encouraging students to actively participate and apply their language skills in meaningful contexts. This active engagement not only improves their language proficiency but also boosts their confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm for learning. Furthermore, the collaborative and competitive nature of games promotes critical cognitive and socio-emotional skills, such as creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication.

Given these positive outcomes, it is highly recommended that educators incorporate game-based learning strategies into their language teaching practices. By doing so, they can create a more dynamic, supportive, and effective language learning environment that caters to students' diverse needs and learning styles. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters a lifelong love for language learning among students. Finally, the use of games in language education is a powerful pedagogical tool that can transform traditional language classrooms into vibrant learning communities. By leveraging the engaging and immersive qualities of games, educators can significantly enhance students' language proficiency and overall academic success.

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