

A Study of Game-Based Learning to Develop English Speaking Skills for Grade 9 Students at Government High School Monyo Township, Myanmar

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the effectiveness of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in developing English speaking skills for Grade 9 students at Government High School, Monyo Township, Myanmar. The objectives were: (1) to examine the effectiveness of GBL in improving English speaking skills, (2) to compare students' speaking performance before and after GBL implementation, and (3) to analyze students' perceptions and satisfaction toward learning English through GBL. The study used a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design. The sample comprised 15 Grade 9 students selected by purposive sampling. Data collection tools included pre- and post-speaking performance tests, observation checklists, and a satisfaction questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, and content analysis.

The findings showed that (1) GBL significantly enhanced students' English speaking abilities, (2) the post-test scores were significantly higher than the pre-test scores, indicating improved fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and communicative competence, and (3) students expressed high satisfaction with GBL, noting increased motivation, engagement, and confidence in speaking English. These results suggest that GBL not only contributes to measurable language improvement but also fosters a positive learning environment. Students actively participated in games such as role-play, storytelling, and vocabulary activities, which created authentic contexts for language use.

Moreover, the incorporation of games reduced students' anxiety and made English speaking more approachable and enjoyable. The positive emotional atmosphere and interactive nature of the games encouraged learners to practice speaking more willingly. GBL also promoted peer learning and collaboration, allowing students to build social as well as linguistic competence. Overall, GBL proved to be a practical and impactful teaching strategy suited to the needs of young learners in Myanmar. The research contributes valuable insights for language teachers and curriculum designers aiming to enhance communicative skills in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Game-Based Learning; English Speaking Skills; Secondary Students; Myanmar

Introduction

English is widely recognized as a global language essential for communication in education, business, science, and technology. In the context of Myanmar, English is taught as a compulsory subject from the primary level. However, students often struggle with speaking skills due to the dominance of traditional teaching methods focused on grammar and translation. Research shows that many students lack opportunities for real-life communication in the classroom, resulting in low confidence and poor oral proficiency. The communicative aspect of language learning is often neglected, leading to challenges in fluency, vocabulary usage, and pronunciation. Innovative, interactive approaches are therefore necessary to bridge this gap and enhance students' engagement and performance in speaking English.

One such approach gaining attention is Game-Based Learning (GBL). GBL integrates educational content with play-based activities that are enjoyable and motivating. Previous studies have demonstrated that GBL can reduce learners' anxiety, improve participation, and create meaningful contexts for language use. Students can engage in communication through games like role-plays, storytelling, or vocabulary challenges, which mirror real-life situations. Despite its documented benefits in international contexts, GBL remains underutilized in Myanmar classrooms. Few studies have explored its impact on speaking skill development, particularly among secondary school learners. This research aims to

address that gap by investigating the use of GBL for improving the speaking abilities of Grade 9 students at Government High School in Monyo Township.

This study was conducted over six weeks using a one-group pre-test and post-test design. It aimed to explore how GBL could enhance students' speaking performance, compare their abilities before and after the intervention, and examine their satisfaction with this method. By identifying the impact of GBL in a Myanmar classroom context, this study contributes to understanding effective English language teaching strategies that are both engaging and educationally sound. The research findings offer practical insights for teachers, curriculum planners, and policymakers seeking to foster communicative competence among English learners in similar environments.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the effectiveness of Game-Based Learning in developing English speaking skills of Grade 9 students at Government High School, Monyo Township, Myanmar.
2. To compare the English speaking performance of Grade 9 students before and after implementing Game-Based Learning activities.
3. To analyze the students' perceptions and satisfaction toward learning English through Game-Based Learning.

Literature Review

Speaking is one of the core components of language proficiency and involves several sub-skills such as pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary usage, and interaction. According to Brown (2007), speaking is a productive skill that requires learners to actively engage in real-time communication. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach and Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) support the use of meaningful communication and low-anxiety environments to promote language acquisition. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory also emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolding in learning, making it particularly relevant to peer-based and collaborative learning environments such as games.

Game-Based Learning (GBL) is a teaching method that integrates educational objectives with interactive and enjoyable activities. Plass, Homer, and Kinzer (2015) suggest that games can enhance learning by promoting engagement, motivation, and contextualized practice. GBL supports active learning and encourages learners to use the language spontaneously in diverse communicative contexts. Previous studies have confirmed the effectiveness of GBL in improving language skills. For instance, research conducted by Huang & Soman (2013) and Soleimani & Khalaji (2016) found that GBL improves students' confidence, language performance, and classroom participation. GBL fosters both cognitive and affective learning. Cognitively, it improves vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and fluency through repetitive, contextualized practice. Affectively, it reduces fear and anxiety, enhances learner motivation, and increases willingness to communicate. In terms of speaking skills, students benefit from repeated exposure to new vocabulary and communicative functions in a low-pressure environment, which supports long-term language retention and fluency development.

While many international studies have shown the benefits of GBL in language classrooms, there is a lack of empirical research in the Myanmar context, especially among secondary school students. Most local classrooms still rely heavily on traditional teaching methods that do not prioritize speaking or communicative competence. This research seeks to address this gap by providing evidence on the impact of GBL in a rural Myanmar secondary school setting.

This study adopts Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis to create a low-stress learning environment through games. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory supports the interactive and collaborative nature of GBL activities such as group tasks, role-plays, and vocabulary games. CLT principles underpin the design of communicative activities that require students to actively use English in meaningful contexts. These theoretical frameworks inform the selection and implementation of GBL techniques throughout the instructional program.

Conceptual Framework

This research examines the relationship between Game-Based Learning activities and students' English speaking skill development. The conceptual framework is based on the integration of CLT and GBL theories, aligned with the core elements of speaking skills: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and communication.

English Speaking Skills (including pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and communicative competence)
 Independent variables → Process/Tools/Area/Target Audience → Dependent variable

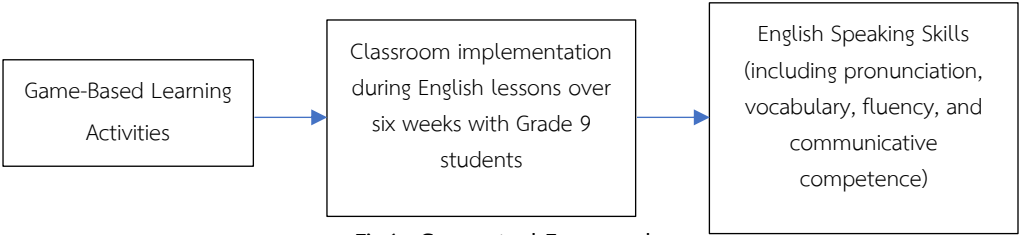


Fig.1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study employed a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design. The purpose of this design was to measure the difference in students' English speaking performance before and after the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL). The design focused on observing changes within a single group over time to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

The population of the study consisted of Grade 9 students enrolled at Government High School, Monyo Township, Myanmar during the 2023 academic year. The sample was composed of 15 Grade 9 students, selected using purposive sampling based on their availability, willingness to participate, and consistent attendance. The sample size was considered appropriate for small-scale classroom research.

Three main tools were used for data collection in this study:

1. Speaking Performance Tests (Pre-test and Post-test): Developed based on CEFR speaking descriptors, assessing fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence.
2. Observation Checklists: Used by the researcher to record student engagement, participation, and speaking behaviors during each game-based lesson.
3. Student Satisfaction Questionnaire: A 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire designed to evaluate students' feelings, attitudes, and satisfaction regarding their learning experience with GBL.

The intervention lasted for six weeks, during which students participated in weekly GBL sessions integrated into English speaking lessons. Each session involved games such as role-play, storytelling, vocabulary games, and interactive speaking tasks. A pre-test was administered before the intervention, and a post-test was conducted afterward. Observations were made during each session, and students completed the satisfaction questionnaire at the end of the program.

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods:

- Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to describe the overall performance.
- Paired sample t-tests were conducted to determine the statistical significance of differences between pre-test and post-test scores.
- Content analysis was applied to observation notes and open-ended questionnaire responses to explore patterns in student behavior and feedback.

Research Results

Table 1: Speaking Test Result

Speaking Test Results		
Test Type	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	11.53	1.64
Post-test	16.87	1.88

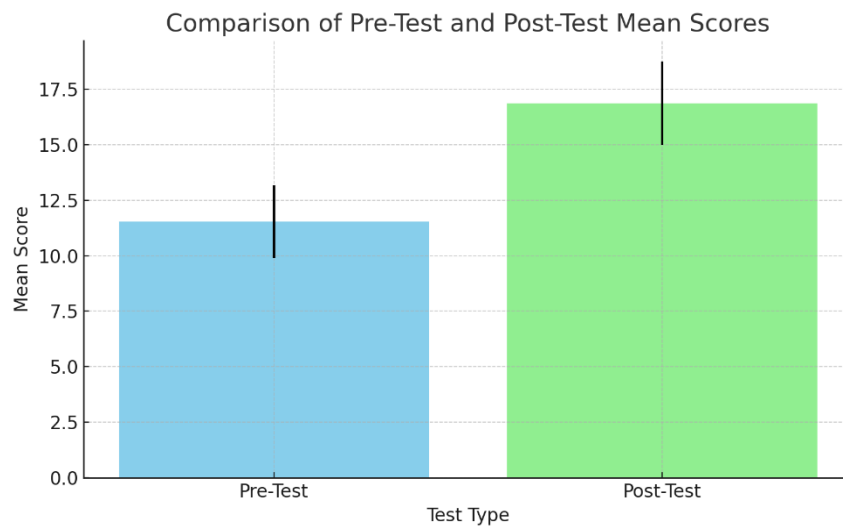


Figure 2: Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Mean Score

Objective 1: To examine the effectiveness of Game-Based Learning in developing English speaking skills.

The study revealed that Game-Based Learning (GBL) significantly improved the English speaking performance of Grade 9 students. After a six-week intervention involving speaking games, students showed notable improvement in pronunciation, vocabulary usage, fluency, and communicative competence. The observation checklist indicated increased student participation and confidence across all sessions.

Objective 2: To compare students' English speaking performance before and after the GBL intervention.

The pre-test and post-test results demonstrate a statistically significant improvement:

- Pre-test Mean Score: 11.53
- Post-test Mean Score: 16.87
- t-value: 17.32
- p-value: < 0.05

The results of the paired sample t-test confirmed that the increase in scores after the GBL intervention was statistically significant. This indicates that GBL contributed effectively to enhancing students' English speaking proficiency.

Objective 3: To analyze students' perceptions and satisfaction toward learning English through GBL.

Students responded positively to the satisfaction questionnaire. The majority agreed or strongly agreed that GBL made learning enjoyable, reduced anxiety, and encouraged them to speak more confidently in class. Many expressed that they preferred GBL over traditional methods and suggested it be used in future lessons. Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses also revealed themes of increased motivation and enjoyment.

Discussions

The findings of this study indicate that Game-Based Learning (GBL) significantly enhanced the English speaking skills of Grade 9 students at Government High School, Monyo Township. The improvement in post-test scores demonstrates that GBL created a more effective learning environment for practicing key speaking components such as pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and communicative interaction. This outcome validates the hypothesis that active, learner-centered approaches can yield better speaking outcomes compared to traditional, lecture-based instruction.

These results are consistent with previous studies conducted in different educational contexts. For example, Huang & Soman (2013) and Soleimani & Khalaji (2016) reported that GBL contributed to greater learner motivation, improved oral proficiency, and more active classroom engagement. The current study supports these findings within a Myanmar secondary school setting, adding to the body of research by showing that GBL is also applicable and beneficial in low-resource environments. The observed gains align with Plass et al.'s (2015) theory that games create immersive, interactive conditions conducive to second language acquisition.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results affirm Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that learners acquire language more effectively when they are relaxed and motivated. The use of games helped reduce students’ anxiety and created a low-pressure environment that encouraged participation. Furthermore, Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory was reflected in the collaborative nature of the activities, which allowed students to co-construct knowledge through social interaction. Practically, the study suggests that GBL can be a powerful tool for teachers aiming to boost communicative competence among English learners, especially in contexts where learners have limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments.

Knowledge from Research

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the application of Game-Based Learning (GBL) as an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing English speaking skills among secondary students in Myanmar. Through the integration of games into classroom instruction, students demonstrated measurable improvement in speaking components such as pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and communicative interaction. Additionally, their satisfaction and engagement levels increased significantly, showing that GBL not only enhances performance but also improves learners’ attitudes toward language learning.

The study synthesized three core outcomes:

- 1. Cognitive Development: Students showed improved retention of vocabulary and better sentence construction, indicating that GBL promotes deeper language processing through active engagement.
- 2. Affective Benefits: The reduced anxiety, increased confidence, and enjoyment observed in students confirm the motivational power of game-based tasks in lowering emotional barriers to speaking.
- 3. Social Interaction: Collaborative games promoted peer learning and created authentic language-use scenarios, enhancing communicative competence in line with sociocultural learning theories.

These insights support a conceptual model where Game-Based Learning serves as an instructional strategy that bridges the gap between traditional teaching and communicative language needs. It can be visualized as follows:

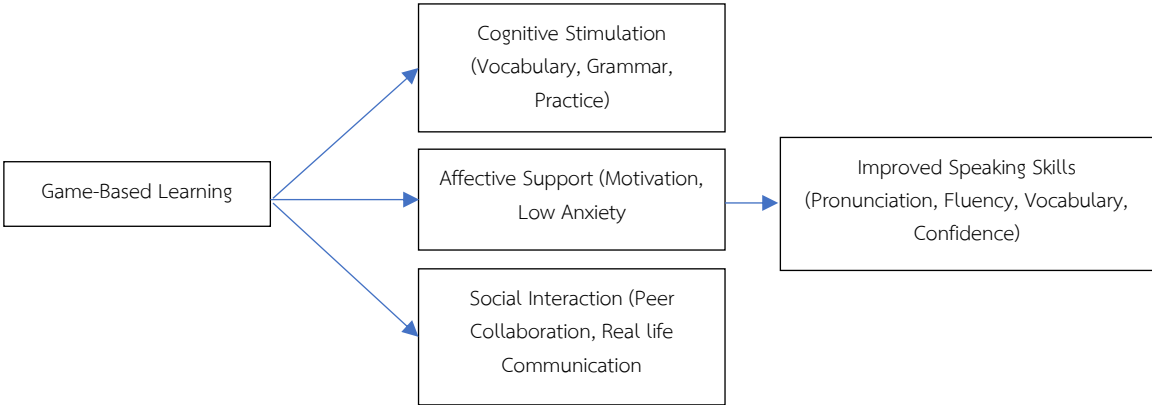


Figure 3: Conceptual Model of Game-Based Learning Outcomes

Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in developing the English speaking skills of Grade 9 students at Government High School, Monyo Township, Myanmar. Through a six-week intervention that incorporated various game-based speaking activities, students demonstrated significant improvements in their overall speaking performance, particularly in fluency, vocabulary usage, pronunciation, and communicative confidence.

The pre-test and post-test results revealed a statistically significant increase in speaking scores, affirming that GBL is a practical and impactful teaching strategy. Observational data also showed increased student engagement, active participation, and enjoyment during lessons. Additionally, the satisfaction survey indicated that students held positive perceptions toward GBL, citing it as enjoyable, motivating, and beneficial to their confidence in using English.

The findings support key language learning theories such as Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, both of which highlight the importance of a low-anxiety, interactive, and socially engaging learning environment. The results also align with previous research emphasizing the advantages of learner-centered and communicative approaches.

In conclusion, GBL is not only an effective tool for enhancing speaking skills but also a valuable method for fostering positive attitudes and active participation among learners. It offers an alternative to traditional grammar-translation methods and has strong potential for broader implementation in English language teaching across Myanmar. This study contributes meaningful insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to improve communicative competence in secondary education.

Suggestions

For Educators:

Teachers should consider incorporating Game-Based Learning (GBL) techniques into their English speaking lessons to foster greater student engagement, reduce anxiety, and promote real-life communication skills.

Activities such as role-plays, vocabulary games, storytelling, and interactive group tasks can create an enjoyable and low-pressure environment for students to practice speaking.

Continuous observation and reflective teaching should be used to adapt GBL activities to suit different learner levels and classroom contexts.

For Curriculum Designers:

GBL should be integrated into national English curricula as a recommended approach for developing communicative competence, especially in speaking skills.

Instructional materials and teacher training programs should include guidance on how to implement game-based activities effectively in large or resource-limited classrooms.

Curricula should be revised to allow more flexible, student-centered speaking activities that align with 21st-century communication goals.

For Future Researchers:

Future studies could adopt an experimental or quasi-experimental design with control groups to compare GBL with other instructional approaches more rigorously.

Longitudinal research could explore the long-term impact of GBL on language retention and speaking fluency.

Additional studies should investigate the use of GBL in other language skill areas (listening, reading, writing) and in diverse educational settings across Myanmar.

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