

Article

Game-Based Learning for Improving English Language Skills of Grade 2 Elementary School Students

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Abstract. This study investigates the effectiveness of game-based learning in improving English language skills among Grade 2 elementary school students aged 7–8 years. The research was conducted over a three-month classroom observation involving 29 students and employed a descriptive classroom-based study design. The learning intervention integrated digital and non-digital English games, focusing on vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation accuracy, and basic listening comprehension. Data collection involved multiple instruments, including pre- and post-learning assessments, systematic classroom observations, teacher reflective journals, and simple performance-based tasks. The findings demonstrate a notable improvement in students' vocabulary mastery, pronunciation confidence, and listening responsiveness after the implementation of game-based learning activities. In addition, students showed higher motivation, sustained

attention, and increased participation during English lessons. This study highlights the pedagogical value of game-based learning for young learners and supports its integration into early English instruction as part of inclusive and quality education. The study contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4 by promoting effective, engaging, and child-centered learning practices in elementary education.

Keywords: game-based learning; young learners; English for children; elementary education; SDG 4 Quality Education

Introduction

English instruction at the elementary level plays a crucial role in preparing learners for future academic engagement and global communication. For lower-grade students, particularly Grade 2, English learning should emphasize enjoyment, meaningful exposure, and oral language development rather than formal linguistic accuracy. However, English teaching in many elementary schools still relies on conventional methods such as repetition drills and worksheet-based activities, which often fail to align with children's cognitive and emotional development (Blake, 2016).

Language acquisition among young learners tends to be more effective when

learning activities are embedded in play-based and experiential contexts. Games provide opportunities for repetition, contextualized language use, and immediate feedback in a low-anxiety environment. Previous studies have confirmed that game-based and digital learning approaches can significantly enhance learners' motivation and language engagement (Huang et al., 2016; Rahiem, 2021). Digital games further support multimodal learning by combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements, which are essential for children aged 7–8 years.

Despite the growing body of research on game-based learning, most studies focus on secondary or higher education contexts. Research that specifically

addresses lower elementary students, particularly in Indonesian EFL classrooms, remains limited. Moreover, existing studies often emphasize motivation without providing detailed evidence of skill development over an extended observation period.

This study offers three main novelties. First, it focuses explicitly on Grade 2 elementary school students, a group that is underrepresented in empirical EFL research. Second, it employs a three-month classroom observation, allowing for a more sustained examination of learning development rather than short-term intervention. Third, the study integrates both digital and non-digital games within regular classroom instruction, providing a practical and replicable model for elementary English teachers. These contributions distinguish the present study from prior research that largely centers on short-term or technology-only interventions.

Methodology

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a descriptive classroom-based research design with elements of classroom action research. The design focused on observing changes in students' English skills before and after the implementation of game-based learning activities over a three-month period.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 29 Grade 2 elementary school students aged 7–8 years. All participants were beginners in English and had similar instructional backgrounds. Parental and institutional consent was obtained prior to data collection.

LEARNING INTERVENTION

The intervention integrated game-based learning into regular English lessons. The games included:

1. Digital vocabulary games (picture–word matching, audio-based pronunciation games)
2. Non-digital classroom games (flashcard races, guessing games, action-response games)
3. Listening-response games using simple commands and short audio inputs

The learning materials covered basic English topics such as animals, colors, numbers, daily activities, and simple expressions. Each session lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was conducted twice a week.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Data were collected using:

- Pre-test and post-test (vocabulary recognition, pronunciation imitation, listening response)
- Classroom observation sheets
- Teacher reflective journals
- Students' performance records during games

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analyzed descriptively to identify learning improvement. Qualitative data from observations and reflections were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of engagement, motivation, and language use.

Results and Discussion

This section reports the findings of the three-month classroom-based implementation of game-based learning and discusses its impact on the English learning outcomes of Grade 2 elementary school students aged 7–8 years. The discussion focuses on two main aspects: improvement in English language skills and changes in learning motivation and classroom engagement

IMPROVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

The findings reveal a consistent improvement in students' English skills after the implementation of game-based learning. Pre-test and post-test assessments were administered to measure students' vocabulary recognition, pronunciation accuracy, and basic listening comprehension. The comparison of average scores before and after the intervention is illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1. Average Pre-test and Post-test Scores (N = 29)

Skill Area	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Vocabulary	56	78	+22
Pronunciation	52	75	+23
Listening	54	76	+22

Table 1 summarizes the average pre-test and post-test scores of students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening skills, showing consistent improvement across all assessed areas.

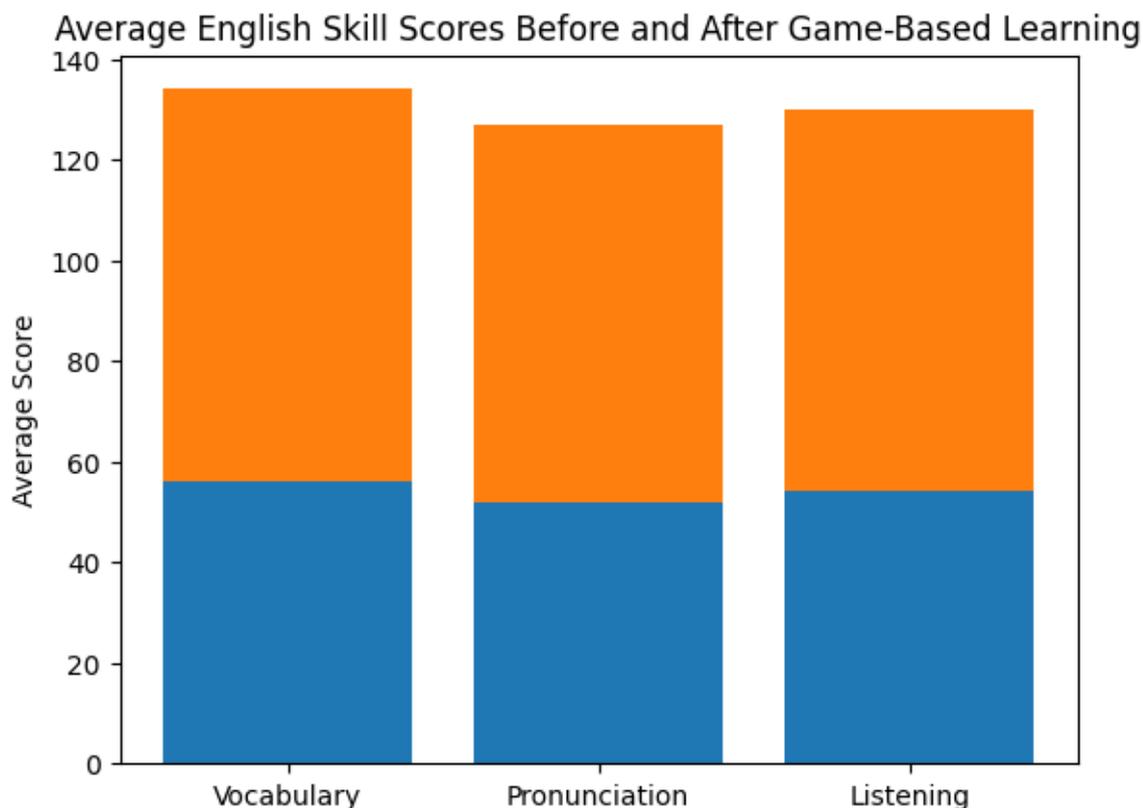


FIGURE 1. Average English Skill Scores Before and After Game-Based Learning

Figure 1 shows a clear increase in students' average scores across all assessed skill areas. Vocabulary scores improved from 56 in the pre-test to 78 in the post-test, pronunciation scores increased from 52 to 75, and listening comprehension rose from 54 to 76. These results indicate that sustained engagement with game-based English learning activities positively contributed to the language development of young learners.

The improvement in vocabulary suggests that games provided meaningful repetition and contextual exposure, enabling students to acquire new words naturally without excessive memorization. Activities such as picture-word matching and guessing games encouraged active participation and reinforced word retention. This finding supports previous research highlighting the effectiveness of playful repetition in early language learning.

Pronunciation skills also showed substantial improvement. Audio-based games and teacher-guided imitation activities allowed students to model correct pronunciation in a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment. As a result, students demonstrated increased confidence and accuracy in producing English sounds and words. Furthermore, the enhancement in listening comprehension indicates that students became more familiar with English classroom instructions and simple spoken input through continuous exposure during game-based activities.

LEARNING MOTIVATION AND CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT

In addition to linguistic improvement, game-based learning had a positive effect on students' motivation and classroom engagement. Classroom observations conducted throughout the three-month period revealed noticeable changes in students' learning behavior. Before the intervention, several students exhibited limited attention spans, reluctance to speak English, and passive participation during lessons. After the integration of game-based activities, students became more enthusiastic, attentive, and willing to participate.

Students frequently volunteered to answer questions, actively engaged in group games, and demonstrated excitement during English learning sessions. The playful nature of games reduced learning anxiety and encouraged students to take risks in using English. These findings suggest that game-based learning supports not only cognitive development but also affective aspects of language learning, which are particularly important for young learners.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings confirm that game-based learning is an effective instructional approach for young EFL learners. The consistent improvement across vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening skills demonstrates that games

function not merely as motivational tools but also as meaningful learning strategies. The three-month duration of the intervention allowed students to gradually internalize language patterns, supporting sustained learning rather than short-term performance gains.

The visual evidence presented in Figure 1 strengthens the empirical argument that play-oriented instruction supports both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning. For Grade 2 students, whose learning characteristics emphasize repetition, interaction, and enjoyment, game-based learning provides an appropriate and practical pedagogical framework. These results support the integration of game-based learning into early English instruction as part of inclusive and quality education, in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that game-based learning significantly improves vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening skills among Grade 2 elementary school students. The approach also enhances motivation and classroom engagement, making English learning more accessible and enjoyable for young learners. Integrating game-based learning supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 by promoting inclusive, equitable, and quality education. Future studies are encouraged to apply experimental designs and larger samples to further validate these findings.

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