

# Board Games in Improving Speaking

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Contributor: Catherine Wong Hui Tiing

English is a fundamental language to learn as it is used worldwide. The teaching and learning of English has been emphasized in Malaysia as English plays a major role in global communication. However, speaking performance was recorded as poor and weak among pupils in ESL classrooms. Previous researchers explored a myriad of communicative language activities to improve speaking skill. Board games are employed as one of the most useful tools to improve speaking skills among pupils.

Keywords: board games ; speaking ; education ; English ; pupils' perceptions

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## 1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, English takes its stance as the predominant language, spoken by around 400 million people across the globe. English is used as a means of verbal and written communication worldwide to bridge the gaps in economic, political and social aspects. Since English is known as an international language, development of English proficiency and speaking competency should be emphasized <sup>[1]</sup>.

Speaking is an interactive process that comprises producing, receiving and processing information in the presence of both the speaker and listener to convey feelings, thoughts and opinions <sup>[2]</sup>. One of the aims of teaching English is to facilitate pupils to speak the target language fluently and accurately in their daily communication, group discussions and classroom presentations. In Malaysia, deficiency in speaking skill has been a main concern in ESL classrooms. Before the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the exam-oriented curriculum caused English lessons to focus solely on tested items such as reading comprehension, grammar and essay writing. Limited time allocation for listening and speaking leads to the negligence of oral language development in the ESL classroom. According to the results of the Cambridge Baseline Study in 2013, pupils' English performance was below the expected level of proficiency and speaking skill was the weakest among the four skills <sup>[3]</sup>.

The success of speaking English is measured in terms of the pupils' ability to carry out a conversation in English with correct pronunciation, grammar, good use of vocabulary and fluency. The primary obstacles that deter pupils from speaking are the lack of vocabulary as well as some psychological factors, such as anxiety and fear of making errors <sup>[4]</sup>. To address the issue of low speaking proficiency among primary pupils, educators have revised the curriculum. The curriculum focuses on communicative-based language activities and upholds fun learning in ESL classrooms. It is essential for teachers to develop captivating and interactive speaking activities to motivate pupils to engage in spoken interaction. Student-centered activities with authentic contexts should be planned to gain pupils' interests and motivation to speak in the lessons <sup>[5]</sup>. Pupils show their willingness to participate when the topics and materials are related to their own lives <sup>[6]</sup>. Therefore, teachers should select appropriate learning strategies that cater for pupils' needs and learning preferences so that they feel encouraged to speak without any fear of making flaws <sup>[7]</sup>.

One of the ways to get pupils immersed in a speaking lesson is through games. Using games in teaching and learning transforms the traditional method of transmitting knowledge. The incorporation of games in learning triggers pupils to be autonomous learners and enhances their learning in various fields of knowledge <sup>[8]</sup>. Undeniably, games help to lower pupils' anxieties and create contexts in which pupils can collaborate with peers in teams to use language meaningfully and in a relaxed way. This is supported by <sup>[9]</sup>, who proclaimed that pupils interact with other players and follow the context presented during the games. There are a wide array of communicative games that can be used to teach speaking, and one of them is board games. Through board games, pupils have to take turns to express their ideas according to the instructions given. Some board games imitate real-life circumstances which subconsciously help pupils to develop social skills and increase their flexibility. Several studies were done in the past to examine the effectiveness of the integration of board games into classroom teaching and learning to improve speaking skill. Gaming literature also displays data on the usefulness of board games in language learning.

## **2. Board Games in Improving Pupils' Speaking Skills**

### **2.1. Pupils' Perceptions to the Use of Board Games**

Fithriani <sup>[10]</sup> identified that pupils themselves reported that board games assisted them in gaining confidence in using English during speaking lessons. Board games lowered their speaking anxiety and provided a game-like atmosphere which enabled them to express their ideas freely within the context provided. Similar findings were depicted in the studies of Łodzikowski & Jekiel <sup>[11]</sup> and Gonzalo-Iglesia et al. <sup>[12]</sup>. The former delineated board games as alternatives that promoted active participation in a speaking lessons, while the latter portrayed board games as activating catalysts that motivated pupils to speak in the classroom. For instance, pupils proclaimed that the use of board game, Snakes and Ladders, reduced the boredom of a speaking lesson as it was an engaging and fun game that motivated them to speak confidently in front of the class; they enjoyed many aspects of the game <sup>[13]</sup>. From pupils' perspectives, board games made speaking lessons fun, reduced their shyness in speaking and lessened their fear of making flaws while speaking <sup>[14]</sup> <sup>[15]</sup>. Pupils were encouraged to speak as board games replaced drilling practices in speaking lessons <sup>[16]</sup>.

Apart from the change in learning attitude, there was a shift in pupils' speaking competence in terms of grammar, pronunciation and fluency <sup>[10][17][18][19][14][20][11][21][15]</sup>. Pupils claimed that board and dice games enabled them to learn how to use tenses, passive voice and conditional sentences in their speech <sup>[10]</sup>. Pupils admitted that they actively converted the sentences in the board games to their past tense forms and spoke the sentences while they played the game with their peers <sup>[15]</sup>. Pupils acquired the grammar in the speech subconsciously and improved their speech accuracy gradually through board games <sup>[24]</sup>. Pupils also perceived board games as a great tool that improved their vocabulary, fluency, grammar and pronunciation in their speech as their scores in the speaking post-test were higher when compared to the pre-test <sup>[17][19]</sup>. Pupils also viewed board games as helpful in improving their English pronunciation in terms of stress and intonation <sup>[11]</sup>. Pupils expressed that board games improved their fluency in speaking as they enjoyed playing the games and forget their fear of making errors in their speech <sup>[14][20]</sup>.

Through board games, pupils' learning community development was enhanced in terms of their social ability and communication <sup>[22][17][18][12][23][24]</sup>. Pupils' social skills were improved through board games as they learnt to tolerate losing the games, listened to others' opinions and shared their points of view <sup>[18]</sup>. Pupils expressed their preferences for board games because they promoted collaborative learning and pupils could socially interact as well as develop teamwork skills with peers <sup>[12]</sup>. Karasimos' study <sup>[23]</sup> revealed that pupils showed an active participation in board games as they loved to work with peers in groups.

Based on the above findings, board games are proven to increase motivation in speaking, improve speaking competence and enhance social interaction from pupils' perspectives.

### **2.2. Usefulness of Board Games in Improving Pupils' Speaking Skill**

Board games were proven to be efficacious in improving pronunciation in terms of clarity <sup>[25][26]</sup> and intelligibility <sup>[27][28]</sup>. Pupils were able to identify, blend and segment individual sounds <sup>[29]</sup>, know the differences between phonemes and pronounce the ending sounds /s/, /z/ and /iz/ clearly <sup>[30]</sup>. Pupils were able to articulate the speech sound with the right pitch <sup>[31]</sup>, stress <sup>[32]</sup> and intonation <sup>[27]</sup> with reference to some standard of correctness and acceptability. Repetition of words mentioned by peers in the board games facilitated pupils' memory retention of the words' pronunciations <sup>[33]</sup>.

Board games also caused a significant improvement in fluency. Pupils' speech fluency showed a huge progression as their speed of speech production was maximized <sup>[34]</sup>, grammatical accuracy was increased <sup>[35]</sup> and they could further elaborate on their points of view <sup>[36]</sup>. Pupils could understand the conversation and respond to their peers using comprehensible speech <sup>[28]</sup> as well as express their opinions without hindrances <sup>[29]</sup>. Halts, repetitions, fillers and sentence fragments were reduced in the speech and communication was not impeded by minor grammatical errors and language limitations.

Apart from the improvement in speech fluency, board games assisted pupils in using grammatical forms such as verb tenses, linking words and conjunctions in their speech correctly <sup>[33][34]</sup>. Pupils began to use complex and compound sentences in their speech instead of simple sentences <sup>[37]</sup>. Pupils were aware of the units and patterns used in the speech <sup>[29]</sup> and developed a relatively high degree of grammatical control <sup>[36]</sup>. They would select the right tenses and word class while conversing with their peers in board games.

Board games were regarded as tools that exposed pupils to various chances to practice speaking the target language naturally. Pupils were connected to real-life situations that provided meaningful learning opportunities through board

games <sup>[38][39]</sup>, thus stimulating them to develop their creativity and thinking into a wider area <sup>[35]</sup>. Pictures and words provided on the cards in board games enabled pupils to develop ideas for their speech content and pupils gained experience using the language naturally for their daily communication <sup>[4]</sup>.

It was notable that pupils were keen on speaking after board games were implemented in their speaking lessons. A few studies indicated that board games created a positive learning environment with a comfortable atmosphere that reduced apprehension in communication <sup>[39]</sup> and boosted confidence in speech <sup>[40]</sup>. Moreover, board games required pupils to gather in small groups to play <sup>[4]</sup>, so pupils were able to learn through their friends' speaking. The stress-free ambience offered by board games allowed pupils to forget their shyness and express ideas naturally <sup>[35]</sup>. As pupils were familiarised with the concepts, rules and regulations of the board games such as Monopoly and Snakes and Ladders, their anxiety and phobia in speaking was minimized <sup>[41]</sup> and they felt more encouraged and confident in conveying their opinions to their friends in the games <sup>[36]</sup>.

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