

The Effect of Board Games on Speaking Skills of Thai EFL Primary Students

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Abstract

Speaking skills are considered one of the most crucial skills in learning English as they lay the foundation for effective communication and language acquisition. Proficiency in speaking enables young learners to express themselves, convey ideas, and communicate effectively. This quasi-experimental research aims to investigate the effect of board games on Thai EFL primary students' speaking skills and examine their perceptions regarding the use of board games in enhancing speaking skills. The study included 86 sixth-grade students from two intact classes and assigned them to a control group and an experimental group. The speaking pre-test and post-test were administered to collect data before and after a six-week treatment period. A semi-structured interview was conducted with six participants to examine their perceptions regarding board game instruction. The quantitative data collected from the speaking pre-test and post-test were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including means, standard deviations, paired-samples t-tests, and independent-samples t-tests. The qualitative data from the semi-structured interview were analyzed using thematic analysis. Data analysis revealed that the experimental group receiving board game instruction obtained higher scores on the speaking tests than the control group. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups at the 0.05 level. In addition, the data from the semi-structured interview revealed participants' positive perceptions regarding board game instruction as it created a positive classroom atmosphere and enhanced both the functional and emotional benefits for the participants.

Keywords: board games, speaking skills, Thai EFL primary students

1. Introduction

Speaking skills are considered one of the most crucial aspects of learning English for EFL primary school learners due to their role in facilitating practical communication, enhancing confidence, and supporting the development of other language skills. According to Goh and Burns (2012), effective speaking skills are foundational for young learners as they enable active participation in the classroom, foster social interaction, and improve overall language proficiency. Furthermore, Bygate (2009) emphasizes that speaking practice helps consolidate grammar and vocabulary learned through reading and writing, thereby creating a more integrated and comprehensive language learning experience. These scholars highlight that fostering speaking abilities in primary school students not only aids in immediate communication but also lays the groundwork for future academic and social success.

However, in many countries where English is taught as a foreign language, achieving proficiency in speaking remains a significant challenge. This difficulty is often attributed to students' lack of engagement and motivation and fear of embarrassment (Dewi, Kultsum, & Armadi, 2016). Similar challenges are also evident in the Thai context, as Yuh and Kaewurai's (2021) research identified. This study highlights common problems encountered by Thai EFL learners due to the classroom instruction which is mostly teacher-centered with a serious atmosphere. It seems to be one of the important factors that lead students to boredom and demotivation to learn to speak because such instruction requires students to perform tasks through their memorization. In addition, other problems Thai students encounter involve their lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and being humiliated by their classmates. As a result, this English instruction has encouraged future researchers to find an alternative way to conduct a suitable practical English class that meets students' conditions and desires.

In the teaching context of the researcher, Thai sixth graders, based on the indicators of the Basic Education Core Curriculum, are expected to be able to exchange interpersonal communication, express needs, and ask for and give

information about matters around them using past simple tense. However, speaking is considered one of the most challenging skills for these students to master. Some students avoid speaking and answering questions because they lack grammar, vocabulary knowledge, and confidence. Moreover, since the sixth grade is the last year of primary school, students are expected to improve their reading and writing skills to take a secondary school entrance exam. For this reason, English classroom instruction is mostly focused on reading and writing skills primarily memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules causing speaking skills to be often neglected. Because of inadequate practice in speaking and the classes being conducted in a serious atmosphere, some students are bored, demotivated, afraid to speak, and not engaged in class.

As mentioned above, the target content of this current study is the past simple tense which is crucial for EFL primary school learners as it facilitates effective communication of past events, enabling narration of stories, recounting personal experiences, and discussing historical occurrences essential for daily life and academic contexts. Proficiency in this tense lays the foundation for understanding more complex grammatical structures and tenses in English. If learners struggle with the past simple tense, they may face challenges comprehending written texts, participating in classroom discussions, and engaging in social interactions, potentially leading to academic and social setbacks. Additionally, difficulties with this tense can impact learners' confidence and motivation in English language learning, hindering their overall language development and academic progress. Therefore, mastering the past simple tense is vital for EFL primary learners to succeed academically, socially, and personally in English language learning environments.

Many researchers have proposed many teaching methods to improve EFL learners' speaking skills. Game-based learning instruction (GBL) is one of the teaching methods that has been extensively used by many researchers to improve students' speaking skills. GBL is a language teaching approach that allows students to investigate learning content while playing a meaningful game (Ghazal & Singh, 2016). GBL has been proven to be an effective teaching method that enhances EFL learners' speaking skills in various contexts. Historically, games were first used in education in the Middle Ages. For instance, chess was used to improve strategic thinking, wargames were invented to train the military, and kindergarten game tools were developed in the mid-1800s following Friedrich Froebel's learning through play theory. Today's game-based learning challenges students to work toward a goal by deciding actions and learning the outcomes those decisions lead to. When students make decisions based on the expected learning content, the positive outcome advances them in the game (Perotta et al., 2013). On the other hand, when they make guesses or uninformed decisions, games encourage them to consolidate and repeat information during the game cycle to practice and improve the results in a comfortable environment where speaking anxiety is reduced (Demirel, 2011).

Board games appear to be one of the widely used games in teaching language. It has been defined as an entertaining, engaging, and challenging game on board that requires social interaction to achieve the goal of the game. Board games are quite challenging to play alone since they are designed to be social activities. By playing board games, players have the opportunity to develop their communication skills, arithmetic skills, and strategic planning skills in a fun way (Mardon, Wiebe, Dansereau & Tombrowski, 2020). Today's board games do not always require a board to play. As elaborated by Mardon et al. (2020), board game components include a board, dice, cards, character sheets, chips, makers, miniatures, timers, or tokens depending on the characteristics and types of the games. In addition, board games can be divided into seven types, namely strategic board games, educational board games, mysterious board games, luck-centered board games, creative board games, DIY board games, and movement board games (Johnson & Tiwari, 2021).

Integrating games into learning promotes students' autonomy and deepens their understanding of diverse subject areas (Arif et al., 2019). Undoubtedly, games help alleviate student anxiety and create an environment where they can engage in meaningful language usage and collaborative work with peers in a relaxed setting. Kapp (2012) reinforced this idea, emphasizing that students interact with one another while adhering to the context provided within the games. Within these board games, students take turns expressing their ideas in line with the provided instructions. Some board games simulate real-life scenarios, subtly aiding students in improving their social skills and adaptability.

Previous studies in the global context have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of board games in improving students' speaking skills, encompassing aspects such as vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency. Utilizing the Pick and Speak board game, a study conducted by Ng et al. (2021) in Malaysia reported the positive outcomes of the game which enabled the students to describe their daily routines using the present continuous tense. In China, Wang and Han (2021) used the "Liulishuo" mobile app to improve complexity, accuracy, and fluency in monologic oral production among second-year undergraduates. Besides, Wong and Yunus (2023) introduced the "Flippity" online board game to fifth-grade students in Malaysia, resulting in

enhanced speaking abilities and a preference for using “Flippity” for language learning. In Taiwan, the integration of game-based learning with the flipped classroom model by Hung (2023) has been reported to reduce anxiety associated with speaking English and increase motivation among second-year undergraduates. Finally, Xiao and He’s (2023) quasi-experimental study in China showcased the effectiveness of the “Digital Game-Virtual College” software in enhancing various aspects of college students’ oral communication abilities, including vocabulary, oral expression, social skills, emotional expression, language-related awareness, and cognitive skills.

Global studies also highlight the positive impact of game-based learning on interaction, student engagement, motivation, and willingness to communicate, concurrently reducing student anxiety. For instance, Viray’s quasi-experimental research (2016) involved 87 undergraduate students in the Philippines, revealing that board games improved speaking session enjoyment and reduced errors. Additionally, Yeh et al.’s study (2017) focused on a digital game-based learning program, “Digital Game-Virtual College,” with second-year undergraduate students in Taiwan. This approach, combined with supplementary materials, effectively motivated students to actively participate in speaking activities and improved the speaking skills of those with lower proficiency. Furthermore, Chao and Fan’s quasi-experimental study (2020) explored the impact of ice-breaking board games in reducing English learning anxiety among fifth-grade students in Taiwan. The findings showed that these board games created a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere, reducing students’ apprehension about English communication and boosting their speaking confidence.

In the Thai context, board games are commonly used to evaluate their impact on vocabulary acquisition and grammatical knowledge. For, example, Pakginnon, Phongploenpis and Mahimuang (2020) conducted a quantitative study with secondary school students, employing various vocabulary games. Results showed high student engagement and English vocabulary achievement. In addition, Boonprawes (2020) conducted an experimental study with first-year undergraduate students, comparing two groups—one using game-based learning in class and the other incorporating feedback. Both groups demonstrated improved learning scores, with the game-based teaching group showing greater effectiveness in enhancing listening and speaking skills. Furthermore, Sotthikun, Dibyamandala and Mangkhang (2022) explored the impact of digital board games on English vocabulary skills and collaborative abilities among secondary students, revealing the association of Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) with the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In a primary school study, Khansorn, Siripipattanakul and Diteeyont (2022) investigated the effectiveness of a multimedia game on English vocabulary memorization. The results showed significantly higher achievement scores and high student satisfaction. Similarly, Oyibochia and Waewchimplee (2022) conducted a quasi-experimental study with primary school students, comparing game-based learning with traditional methods. The use of game-based learning effectively improved English vocabulary learning. Lastly, in Southern Thailand, Da-Oh et al. (2023) assessed the impact of game-based learning on grammatical knowledge and satisfaction levels of secondary school students, revealing a statistically significant improvement in English grammar knowledge, with students expressing high satisfaction with the learning experience.

Existing research has consistently emphasized the positive outcomes associated with the use of board games in enhancing speaking skills, boosting engagement, reducing speaking anxiety, and increasing overall student satisfaction. However, these studies mostly primarily targeted secondary, high school, and undergraduate educational levels, and the emphasis was mostly on the improvement of their vocabulary and grammar. Little attention had been paid to investigating the use of board games with primary school students, focusing on their speaking skills. Furthermore, the combination of board games, including the Dream On! game, the Snakes and Ladders game, the Guess Who? game, and the Spyfall game, which was the focus of this study, had not yet been examined in the Thai context in terms of their effectiveness on the improvement of speaking skills among primary school students. Additionally, there remains a research gap regarding structured teaching procedures for implementing games into the speaking class, which could further enhance the understanding of the effect of board games on speaking skills in this context.

Therefore, this study set out to address these research gaps by investigating the effect of board games including the Dream On! game, the Snakes and Ladders game, the Guess Who? game, and the Spyfall game on the speaking skills of primary school students and examining students’ perceptions regarding the use of board games in their English classroom. The research questions formulated to guide this study are as follows:

- 1) To what extent do the board games affect sixth-grade Thai EFL learners’ speaking skills?
- 2) What are students’ perceptions regarding the use of board games in enhancing speaking skills?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study applied a quasi-experimental research design, a method that examines cause-and-effect relationships in naturally occurring groups, such as classrooms, without the strict variable control of experimental research (Cook and Campbell, 1979). It involved two groups: a control group receiving traditional instruction and an experimental group receiving board game instruction. In addition, the data collected in this study involved both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis. Quantitative data were gathered through pre- and post-tests on speaking skills, while qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interviews to explore students' perceptions of using board games in speaking classes.

2.2 Participants and Setting

This study involved 86 sixth-grade Thai EFL learners from two intact classes at a large public primary school in northeast Thailand. One class, with 43 students, was designated as the control group, and the other, with 43 students, as the experimental group. The participants, aged 11 to 12, were native Thai speakers who had been learning English for at least five years, receiving two hours per week of Fundamental English and one hour per week of English for Communication. Despite this, their speaking skills remained low due to a lack of practice and the traditional, memorization-focused teaching methods that reduced their interest and motivation. The study took place in a school with approximately 1,800 students, offering various programs, including regular, intensive English, and advanced placement, with the participants coming from the regular program

2.3 Research Instruments

This study utilized two instruments for data collection: an English-speaking pretest and posttest, and a semi-structured interview.

2.3.1 English-speaking Pretest and Posttest

The pre-test and post-test involved an intensive assessment task to assess the participants' speaking skills. According to Madsen (1983), an intensive assessment task requires a task taker to demonstrate their comprehension of a narrow band of grammatical, semantic, or phonological relationships. Using a limited picture-cued assessment task, the task taker will be assigned "something specific to talk about while allowing some flexibility in the expression" (Fulcher, 2014, p.73). In this study, the participants were given a picture of a situation with a description of what happened in the past time. The students had one minute to prepare, then were asked five questions to explain the situation in the picture using the past simple tense form, which was the main content of the lesson. To ensure the validity, three ELT experts validated the tests using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). The tests were rated by three evaluators, including the researcher and two English teachers to minimize biases. An analytic rubric assessed speaking skills based on fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

2.3.2 Semi-structured Interview

A ten-minute semi-structured interview was conducted in the post-stage of the study with six students selected based on high, mid, and low scores on the English-speaking post-test. The interview was conducted in Thai to reduce the language barriers and facilitate students' understanding. The interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interview questions were as follows:

- 1) What do you think about the use of board games in the English class?
- 2) What do you think about the use of board games in enhancing speaking skills?
- 3) How did the Dream on! game enhance your speaking skills?
- 4) How did the Snakes and Ladders game enhance your speaking skills?
- 5) How did the Guess Who? game enhance your speaking skills?
- 6) How did the Spyfall game enhance your speaking skills?

2.4 Data Collection Procedures

- 1) In the pre-study phase, an orientation of the research project, including the purposes of the study and the types of participation was given to the participants. Moreover, a consent form was provided for the participants.
- 2) The participants of the two groups were given a speaking pre-test before data collection took place. This stage demonstrated students' previous knowledge about describing the situation using past simple tense.
- 3) Within six weeks of the second semester, the participants of the two groups learned about the past simple tense.

The control group was instructed using traditional instruction, which provided activities according to the textbook, while the experimental group classroom was conducted employing board games in the classroom.

- 4) In the post-study phase, the participants of both groups were asked to take the speaking post-test.
- 5) Finally, the six representative students from high, mid, and low score groups were asked to participate in a semi-interview to gain their perceptions regarding using board games to enhance speaking skills.

2.5 Data Analysis

The collected data from the speaking pre-test and post-test was analyzed quantitatively to answer the first research question. The test scores were statistically analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean (\bar{X}) and standard deviation (S.D.) in the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. After that, inferential statistics and t-test analysis were used to analyze whether test scores were statistically significant. To analyze the data obtained from within the group, the paired-sample t-test was used to compare the data and assess the effectiveness of the treatment within the group. Meanwhile, the independent-sample t-test was used to analyze the data between the two groups to determine if the observed difference between the means of the two groups was statistically significant.

For the second research question, students' perceptions regarding using board games to enhance speaking, the qualitative data was collected through a semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis was utilized as the methodological approach to derive qualitative insights from the collected data. A detailed analysis was conducted on transcribed qualitative data to uncover patterns, themes, and perceptions regarding the effect of employing board games for enhancing speaking skills among students. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis, the second coder, possessing five years of experience as an English instructor, was chosen to participate. This coder received comprehensive training detailing the process of evaluating the transcripts and textual data. The inclusion of an additional coder aimed to validate the findings obtained from semi-structured interviews with primary school participants and offer an unbiased perspective and analysis.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

In this study, all participants were the priority to ensure that no risks were involved in the data collection process. During the study, the researcher was committed to upholding the highest standards of privacy and confidentiality for all participants. The study descriptions were provided to all participants before conducting. The researcher strictly adhered to confidentiality standards, refraining from disclosing the identity of the respondents. Participants' names were not recorded in any documents, and coded numbers were used instead of their names during data collection. Furthermore, all data collected through questionnaires and interviews were securely stored to uphold confidentiality.

3. Results

3.1 The Effect of Board Games on Thai EFL Primary Students' Speaking Skills

As shown in Table 1, the results indicate that both groups exhibited higher post-test scores compared to pre-test scores. Specifically, the experimental group achieved a mean performance of 8.01 (40.05%) with a standard deviation of 2.50 on the pre-test, while the control group achieved a mean performance of 8.59 (42.95%) with a standard deviation of 2.32. Following board game instruction, the experimental group demonstrated substantial improvement, achieving a mean performance of 14.57 (72.85%) with a standard deviation of 2.61, whereas the control group achieved a mean performance of 10.83 (54.15%) with a standard deviation of 2.25.

Table 1. A summary of students' performance on the word knowledge tests

Participants	Pre-test			Post-test			t-value	p-value	d
	\bar{x}	%	S.D.	\bar{x}	%	S.D.			
Control group (n = 43)	8.59	42.95	2.32	10.83	54.15	2.25	18.26	<0.001	0.81
Experimental group (n = 43)	8.01	40.05	2.50	14.57	72.85	2.61	29.65	<0.001	1.45
t-value	-1.10			7.13					
p-value	0.27			<0.001					
d	2.42			2.44					

Note. Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

In addition, to evaluate the effect of speaking instruction within the group, a pair-sample t-test was computed. At the 0.05 significance level, the data analysis revealed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test

speaking test scores of the experimental group ($t = 29.65, p < 0.001$), indicating a large effect size ($d = 1.45$). Similarly, for the control group, there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ($t = 18.26, p < 0.001$), with a large effect size observed ($d = 0.81$).

An independent-sample t-test analysis was also conducted to examine whether there were any significant differences in the post-test score between the control and experimental groups of participants. As shown in Table 1, analysis of the post-test score revealed a significant difference between the control and experimental group ($t = 7.13, p < 0.001$), indicating a large effect size ($d = 2.44$). These findings are illustrated in Figure 1. Collectively, the results indicate the positive effect of utilizing board game instruction on the speaking skills of Thai EFL primary learners.

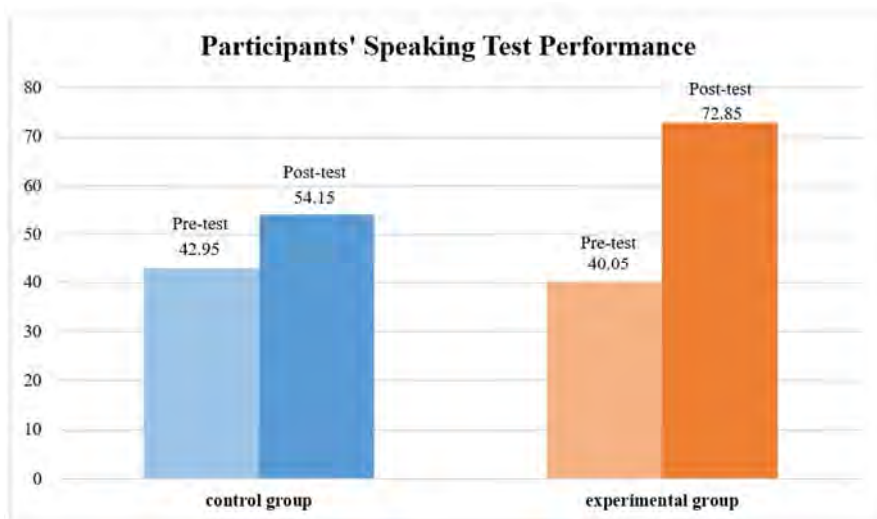


Figure 1. Participants’ Speaking Test Performance

3.2 Thai EFL Primary School Students’ Perception of Board Games to Enhance Speaking Skills

Drawing from qualitative insights gleaned through semi-structured interviews, six participants were purposively selected based on their performance levels on the speaking test. These participants were categorized into three groups: low speaking proficiency (LS), medium speaking proficiency (MS), and high speaking proficiency (HS).

The current study examined student perceptions regarding the utilization of board games in enhancing speaking skills. Through thematic analysis, the study identified key themes demonstrating participants' perceptions, including positive feelings toward the learning atmosphere, enhancement of functional benefits through the board game instruction, and enhancement of emotional benefits through the board game instruction. The themes offering a structured overview of the qualitative findings derived from participants' perceptions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The theme for qualitative data analysis

Themes	Salient characteristics
positive feelings toward the learning atmosphere	fun, happy, interesting, exciting, enjoyable, collaborative, encouraging, engaging, relaxing, useful
enhancement of functional benefits through board game instruction	improve speaking skills, can ask and answer questions, can communicate better with others
enhancement of emotional benefits through board game instruction	good attitude toward learning English, confident, motivating, inspiring, rewarded, proud

The positive feelings toward the learning atmosphere focused on how participants perceived their engagement in learning activities. This theme indicated that participants generally had optimistic attitudes toward learning speaking skills through board game instruction. The perceptions of participants regarding the positive feeling toward the learning atmosphere are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Participants' perceptions regarding the positive feelings toward the learning atmosphere

Participants	Statement or responses
LS1	<i>I like it when the teacher brings games to play in the class. It is really fun.</i>
LS2	<i>I think using board games in English class is fun. It feels like we're just playing and having fun, not really studying. So, I'm happy with it.</i>
MS1	<i>I think learning through board games makes the class more interesting and exciting.</i>
MS2	<i>I really enjoyed playing those games especially when we played in a team. My friends helped me a lot when I had a problem with language difficulties. I think it encourages me to learn English more.</i>
HS1	<i>I like this teaching method very much. I feel like I have more chances to engage in the class and practice my speaking skills, unlike other usual classes.</i>
HS2	<i>I really like playing English games in the class. I think it is relaxing and useful to recheck our understanding of the lesson.</i>

Note. LS = low speaking proficiency; MS = medium speaking proficiency; HS = high speaking proficiency.

The theme of the enhancement of functional benefits through board game instruction centered on students' perceptions of the advantages of board game instruction in speaking classes. A detailed analysis of participant responses regarding board game instruction within the functional benefits theme is provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Participants' perceptions regarding the enhancement of functional benefits

Participants	Statement or responses
LS1	<i>As you know, I cannot learn English well, but I still can remember some sentences we used in the games.</i>
LS2	<i>Because of the games we play, I can now ask and answer questions about simple things like "What did you do yesterday?"</i>
MS1	<i>I think I can speak English better because I had a chance to practice and use it in your games.</i>
MS2	<i>After repeating listening and using the same sentence pattern in the games, I think it helped me a lot to remember those sentences and use them more naturally.</i>
HS1	<i>I really like how you organize the games, starting with practicing affirmative sentences, then negative ones, and finally interrogative. I think it helps us understand better each time and makes it easier to communicate with others.</i>
HS2	<i>Now I sometimes use what I have learned in your class to talk to our foreign teachers.</i>

Note. LS = low speaking proficiency; MS = medium speaking proficiency; HS = high speaking proficiency.

Regarding the enhancement of emotional benefits of board game instruction, six participants expressed the positive impact on their motivation to learn English, as well as heightened feelings of inspiration, confidence, and pride. The participants' perceptions regarding the positive learning atmosphere are detailed in Table 5.

Table 5. Participants' perceptions regarding the enhancement of emotional benefits

Participants	Statement or responses
LS1	<i>English is not easy for me to learn, but games in your class made me feel better and want to learn English more. Before this, I wasn't interested in learning English because I thought it was too difficult and I didn't think I'd ever need it. But playing those games in class showed me how English could be used and inspired me to learn English for my future.</i>
LS2	<i>Ever since you started bringing games to our class, I get really excited every time. I even check my schedule, counting down the days until I get to learn with you again because the games really make me want to learn English.</i>
MS1	<i>As I told you sometimes I feel stressed when I struggle with the game, but when I overcome it think I feel more confident and proud of myself.</i>
MS2	<i>I really hope you keep bringing games to class like this because it really motivates students to learn more.</i>
HS1	<i>Every time I got scores in the game, I felt rewarded and proud of myself.</i>
HS2	

Note. LS = low speaking proficiency; MS = medium speaking proficiency; HS = high speaking proficiency.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Effect of Board Games on Speaking Skills of Thai EFL Primary Students

The study examined the effect of board games on the speaking skills of Thai EFL primary students, revealing significant improvement in their speaking skills. The control and experimental groups showed enhancements in

their speaking skills based on pre-test and post-test scores, with large effect sizes indicating that traditional teaching methods and board game instruction are both effective. However, the experimental group, which utilized board games, demonstrated notably higher post-test scores compared to the control group, highlighting the particular effectiveness of board games in enhancing speaking skills. These findings align with previous research, supporting the use of board games as a valuable tool for improving speaking abilities in primary learners (Boonprawes, 2020; Ng et al., 2021; Wang & Han, 2021; Wong & Yunus, 2023; Xiao & He, 2023).

The notable enhancement in speaking skills among participants can be attributed to the four foundations of game-based learning (GBL), as outlined by Plass, Homer and Kinzer (2015), namely cognitive, motivational, affective, and sociocultural, work synergistically to enhance the speaking skills of young learners. From a cognitive perspective, games engage learners in problem-solving and critical-thinking processes, promoting active engagement with language content (Plass, Homer, & Kinzer, 2015). This engagement is further bolstered by the motivational foundation, which emphasizes the enjoyable experiences games offer, encouraging continued participation and learning (Gee, 2003; Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006). The affective foundation underscores the role of emotions in shaping learning experiences, with games designed to induce positive emotional states that foster engagement and learning (Izard, 2007; Pekrun, 2000). Lastly, the sociocultural foundation highlights the importance of social interactions and cultural contexts in influencing learning outcomes within game-based environments (Bandura, 2002; Barab & Duffy, 2000). Together, these foundations create a comprehensive framework that immerses young learners in dynamic and interactive language experiences, ultimately enhancing their speaking skills within educational settings.

Board games have been shown to effectively enhance the speaking skills of young learners through a structured game-based learning (GBL) approach, involving three phases: pre-game, game cycle, and post-game (Deterding et al., 2011). In the pre-game phase, learners receive structured instruction on grammar and vocabulary, focusing on the past simple tense and pronunciation rules. This preparatory stage involves both explicit teaching and mini-games to build linguistic competence, reduce anxiety, and boost confidence (Plass, Homer, & Kinzer, 2015). A participant's feedback highlighted the effectiveness of this approach in preparing them for gameplay, reducing nervousness, and improving sentence formation. During the game cycle phase, four board games—Dream On!, Snakes and Ladders, Guess Who?, and Spyfall—were used to practice different past simple tense structures. Each game provided unique opportunities for students to practice speaking in a dynamic context. Dream On! focused on affirmative past tense sentences, Snakes and Ladders on negative structures, Guess Who? on yes-no questions, and Spyfall on various forms of past tense statements and questions. Participants reported increased confidence and enjoyment in learning through these interactive games. Finally, the post-game phase involved reflective activities and discussions to consolidate learning. Students reflected on their performance, received feedback, and engaged in discussions to reinforce their language skills. Feedback from this phase indicated that students benefited from peer correction and felt they were having a mini English class, enhancing their understanding and communication abilities.

In summary, the study underscores the significant effects of board games on the speaking skills of Thai EFL primary students. The overall findings underscore the positive impact of board games on speaking skills enhancement. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the positive influence of board games on speaking skills. The success of board game instruction can be attributed to the comprehensive framework of game-based learning, which engages students cognitively, motivationally, affectively, and socio-culturally. Furthermore, the study's implementation of various board games, such as Dream On!, Snakes and Ladders, Guess Who?, and Spyfall, in the game cycle phase demonstrated their efficacy in reinforcing past simple tense structures and promoting fluency, confidence, and proficiency in spoken English. Additionally, the post-game phase facilitated reflective activities and discussions, further enhancing students' understanding and reinforcing language skills acquired during gameplay. Overall, the study provides compelling evidence supporting the effectiveness of board game instruction in improving speaking skills among young learners, highlighting the enjoyment and excitement experienced by students while simultaneously sharpening their linguistic abilities.

4.2 Thai Primary Students' Perception of Using Board Games to Enhance Speaking Skills

In addressing Research Question 2 (RQ2), qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were employed to investigate participants' perspectives on the use of board games to enhance their speaking skills. The qualitative data underwent content analysis, resulting in the identification of three main thematic categories: positive feelings toward the learning atmosphere, enhancement of functional benefits through the board game instruction, and enhancement of emotional benefits through the board game instruction.

The qualitative analysis provided insight into the underlying attitudes and behaviors contributing to the effect of

board games on the speaking skills of Thai primary students. These findings not only supplemented the quantitative results but also emphasized the importance of board games in promoting speaking skills. Thematic insights regarding the positive feelings toward the learning atmosphere, enhancement of functional benefits through the board game instruction, and enhancement of emotional benefits through the board game instruction revealed the positive influence of board games on student engagement and motivation. This offers valuable perspectives on the pedagogical advantages of integrating board games into language learning settings.

The utilization of board games to improve speaking skills is widely viewed favorably as board games serve as dynamic tools for enhancing the speaking skills of young learners in several ways. Through interactive gameplay, students engage in conversations, negotiations, and strategic discussions, providing ample opportunities for practicing speaking in a relaxed setting. These games often incorporate thematic content and specific vocabulary, expanding learners' linguistic repertoire. Additionally, by adhering to game rules and communicating with peers, students reinforce grammar structures and build confidence in expressing themselves orally. Board games also foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, encouraging learners to articulate their thoughts, opinions, and reasoning. Overall, the immersive and collaborative nature of board games cultivates a supportive environment where young learners can actively develop and refine their speaking abilities. This approach is corroborated by previous research (Chen, 2010; Fung & Min, 2016; Viray, 2016; Yeh et al., 2017; Chao & Fan, 2020), which indicates that games positively impact interaction, student engagement, motivation, and willingness to communicate, while concurrently reducing student anxiety.

Insights gleaned from participants' responses during the semi-structured interviews unveiled nuanced viewpoints regarding the learning environment facilitated by board game instruction, highlighting positive feelings. Participants perceived board game instruction as offering abundant opportunities for practicing speaking skills through interactive and enjoyable activities. This created a less anxiety-inducing environment that facilitated engagement with the learning process. Participants reported feeling enjoyment, encouragement, and engagement, resulting in the successful achievement of learning goals. The following excerpts from students' responses illustrate this viewpoint:

"I think using board games in English class is fun. "It feels like we're just playing and having fun, not really studying. So, I'm happy with it." (LS2)

"I really enjoyed playing those games especially when we played in a team. My friends helped me a lot when I had a problem with language difficulties. I think it encourages me to learn English more." (MS2)

"I like this teaching method very much. I feel like I have more chances to engage in the class and practice my speaking skill, unlike other usual classes." (HS1)

In terms of the enhancement of functional and emotional benefits derived from the instruction, qualitative analysis of the data indicated that board game instruction offered participants functional benefits, as they effectively attained targeted learning objectives through speaking practice during the game sessions. The following excerpts from participants' responses could corroborate this assertion:

"As you know, I cannot learn English well, but I still can remember some sentences we used in the games." (LS1)

"I think I can speak English better because I had a chance to practice and use it in your games." (MS1)

"After repeating listening and using the same sentence pattern in the games. I think it helped me a lot to remember those sentences and use them more naturally." (MS2)

Board game instruction not only enhances speaking skills as expected but also provides emotional benefits. Participants reported increased motivation, inspiration, confidence, self-esteem, and pride. These findings indicate that board game instruction contributes not only to academic proficiency but also to students' emotional well-being. The following excerpts from participants' responses could support this assertion:

"Before this, I wasn't interested in learning English because I thought it was too difficult and I didn't think I'd ever need it. But playing those games in class showed me how English could be used and inspired me to learn English for my future" (LS2)

"Ever since you started bringing games to our class, I get really excited every time. I even check my schedule, counting down the days until I get to learn with you again because the games really make me want to learn English." (MS1)

"As I told you sometimes I feel stressed when I struggle with the game, but when I overcome it think I feel more confident and proud of myself." (MS2)

“Every time I got scores in the game, I felt rewarded and proud of myself.” (HS1)

5. Conclusion of the Study

The current study investigated the impact of board games on the speaking skills of Thai EFL primary students. Through the integration of board games such as Dream On!, Snakes and Ladders, Guess Who?, and Spyfall into the classroom, quantitative analysis revealed a positive effect on improving students' speaking skills, notably in the areas of grammar and fluency. Furthermore, the qualitative findings shed light on participants' perceptions regarding the use of board games in speaking classes. Participants found this instructional approach enjoyable, motivating, and engaging, facilitating speaking acquisition and bolstering their confidence.

In essence, this research makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing studies in the field of language teaching by bridging theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence. With an emphasis on the importance of incorporating board games into speaking classes, the study underscores the efficacy of board game instruction in enhancing speaking skills.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Pilanut Phusawisot provided critical guidance and supervision throughout the research process, offering valuable insights and expertise that significantly shaped the study. Nantapit Pittayanantakul was responsible for the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and writing of the manuscript. Both authors collaborated closely to refine the research and ensure its accuracy and quality.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. No benefits in any form have been received or will be received from any commercial entity related directly or indirectly to the subject of this manuscript.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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Appendix A

Speaking pre-test and post-test

1. Speaking pre-test: a limited picture-cued assessment task

Directions: Look at the picture and answer the following questions.

Test-takers see:



Test-takers hear:

1. Where was Jack? What did he do?
2. Where were Lisa and Tom? What did they do?
3. Where were Jinny and Kate? What did they do?
4. Where were Mary and John? What did they do?
5. Where was Ava? What did she do?

2. Speaking post-test: a limited picture-cued assessment task

Directions: Look at the picture and answer the following questions.

Test-takers see:



Test-takers hear:

1. Where was Thomas? What did he do?
2. Where were May and Alice? What did they do?
3. Where were the Adams? What did they do?
4. Where was Maria? What did she do?
5. Where were Mark and Jackson? What did they do?

Appendix B

Dream On! Game

DREAM ON!

GAME RULES:

- Setup:**
 - Place the three Scoring cards and Timer aside.
 - Shuffle all the Dream cards into one deck and put it face down in the middle of the table.
 - Choose a player to start.
- Gameplay:** The game consists of two phases: Dreaming and Remembering.
 - Phase 1: Dreaming**
 - The first player draws the top card from the deck and puts it face up next to the deck, creating the Dream pile. They use the image on the card to start the story and flip the Timer.
 - The Dream begins, and any player can play a Dream card from their hand onto the Dream pile, connecting it to the previous card.
 - After playing a card, draw a new one from the Dream deck to maintain a hand of three cards.
 - The Dreaming Phase ends when the Timer runs out.
 - Phase 2: Remembering**
 - All players discard the remaining cards in their hands. Place the three Scoring cards in the center.
 - With everyone contributing to a unique dream, each player must now try to recall the dream sequence.
 - If you were the last player to add a card, pick up the Dream pile, holding it face down.
 - As the active player, recall the first part of the Dream and reveal the top card.
 - If you correctly remember the next part without help, place the card near the Individual Scoring card for 2 points.
 - If you need assistance, teammates raise their hands to offer help.
 - If you correctly remember with help, place the card near the Collective Scoring card for 1 point.
 - Failing to remember results in placing the card near the Faulty Scoring card for -2 points.
 - Once a card is scored, pass the Dream pile to the next player, who becomes the active player.

End of the Game: After scoring all the cards and attempting to remember the entire Dream, count up the points to determine the winner.

Appendix C

Snakes and Ladders Game

Snakes & Ladders
by T.Nanun

PAST SIMPLE TENSE VER.

Game Rules:

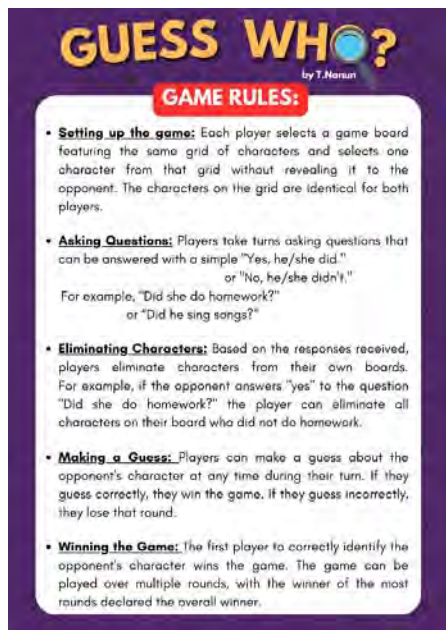
- Take turns rolling the dice and moving a piece forward by the number rolled.
- If a player lands on a square with a symbol , the player must create a positive sentence using the word given.
- If the player lands on a square with a symbol , the player must create a negative sentence using the word given.
- If the player lands on a square with the bottom of a ladder, move the piece to the top of the ladder.
- If the player lands on a square with the head of a snake, move the piece to the square's tail.

Reach the final square to win the game!

START →

Appendix D

Guess Who? Game



GUESS WHO?
by T. Harun

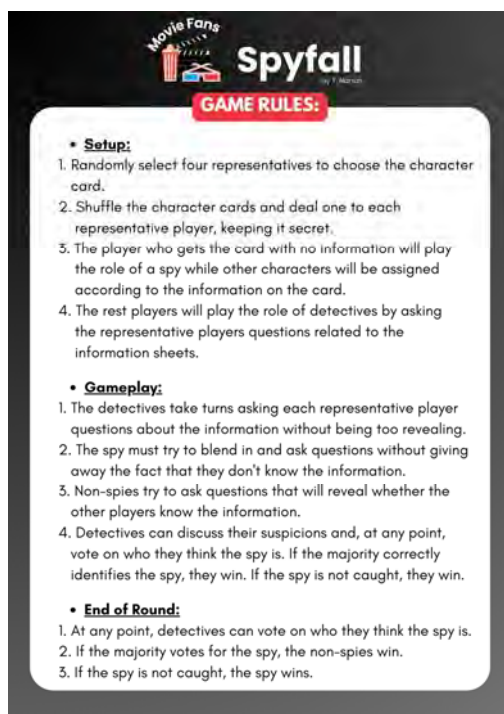
GAME RULES:

- Setting up the game:** Each player selects a game board featuring the same grid of characters and selects one character from that grid without revealing it to the opponent. The characters on the grid are identical for both players.
- Asking Questions:** Players take turns asking questions that can be answered with a simple "Yes, he/she did," or "No, he/she didn't," For example, "Did she do homework?" or "Did he sing songs?"
- Eliminating Characters:** Based on the responses received, players eliminate characters from their own boards. For example, if the opponent answers "yes" to the question "Did she do homework?" the player can eliminate all characters on their board who did not do homework.
- Making a Guess:** Players can make a guess about the opponent's character at any time during their turn. If they guess correctly, they win the game. If they guess incorrectly, they lose that round.
- Winning the Game:** The first player to correctly identify the opponent's character wins the game. The game can be played over multiple rounds, with the winner of the most rounds declared the overall winner.



Appendix E

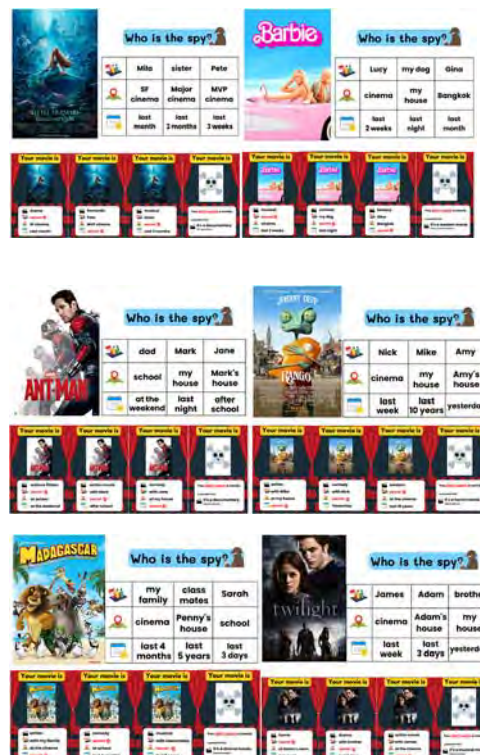
Spyfall Game



Movie Fans Spyfall
by T. Harun

GAME RULES:

- Setup:**
 1. Randomly select four representatives to choose the character card.
 2. Shuffle the character cards and deal one to each representative player, keeping it secret.
 3. The player who gets the card with no information will play the role of a spy while other characters will be assigned according to the information on the card.
 4. The rest players will play the role of detectives by asking the representative players questions related to the information sheets.
- Gameplay:**
 1. The detectives take turns asking each representative player questions about the information without being too revealing.
 2. The spy must try to blend in and ask questions without giving away the fact that they don't know the information.
 3. Non-spies try to ask questions that will reveal whether the other players know the information.
 4. Detectives can discuss their suspicions and, at any point, vote on who they think the spy is. If the majority correctly identifies the spy, they win. If the spy is not caught, they win.
- End of Round:**
 1. At any point, detectives can vote on who they think the spy is.
 2. If the majority votes for the spy, the non-spies win.
 3. If the spy is not caught, the spy wins.



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