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Students' Speaking Development Through Word Adventure Game-Based Learning

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Abstract

General Background Game-based language learning has increasingly been adopted in English as a Foreign Language classrooms to support speaking practice through interactive digital environments. **Specific Background** One such approach is the use of *Word Adventure*, a gamified learning tool designed to simulate real-life communication scenarios for junior high school learners. **Knowledge Gap** Previous studies on game-based language learning have largely emphasized learning outcomes, while limited attention has been given to learners' own perspectives, particularly in contexts with constrained internet access. **Aims** This study aimed to explore how *Word Adventure* supports the development of students' speaking skills and to examine students' perceptions and experiences when using the game in EFL instruction. **Results** Using a qualitative descriptive design, data from semi-structured interviews with four seventh-grade students revealed increased motivation, confidence, fluency, and contextual language use, alongside heightened enjoyment and collaborative learning, although technical and conceptual challenges were reported. **Novelty** This study provides learner-centered qualitative evidence on an online–offline accessible game-based tool by foregrounding students' lived experiences in speaking practice. **Implications** The findings suggest that *Word Adventure* can serve as a practical alternative for fostering speaking development and learner engagement in junior high EFL contexts with limited technological infrastructure.

Highlights:

- Learners reported stronger engagement and willingness to participate in oral practice.
- Repetitive interactive tasks supported smoother and faster oral production.
- Narrative-driven activities encouraged cooperation and meaningful classroom interaction.

Keywords: Game-Based Language Learning, Speaking Skills, Student Perceptions, EFL Classroom

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Introduction

In the past decade, the inclusion of digital games in language instruction settings has attracted growing interest from teachers and researchers alike. Game-Based Language Learning (GBLL) is a particular method that uses the engaging and motivating aspects of games to improve students' competency and enthusiasm in acquiring a second language. Zheng et al. [1] claims that game-based learning may encourage situated language use, meaningful communication, and cooperative problem-solving all of which are essential elements that encourage language development. Among the newest tools in this field is "World Adventure," a gamified learning tool designed for modelling actual communication situations while encouraging proficiency in English skills. The demand for more learner-centered methods that take into account a variety of learning preferences and styles is also addressed by the incorporation of games like "World Adventure" into English language instruction. According to research by Huang et al. [2], gamified settings can accommodate kinesthetics, visual, and auditory learners all at once, improving accessibility and inclusion in language classes. Additionally, these platforms offer developed support, repetition, and instant feedback all of which are essential components of successful language learning. Because of these advantages, "World Adventure" shows promise as a teaching tool for teachers looking for innovative ways to help students speak more fluently.

The concept of gamification in education is not entirely fresh, nevertheless, its implementation in language classes has developed significantly with improvements in technology and educational research. In transforming passive learning into active engagement, gamification can boost intrinsic motivation and enhance learning outcomes, claims Susi et al. [3]. The ability to assist students in comprehending, appreciating, and being inspired to study the language is essential while teaching English as a foreign language [4]. Game-based learning (GBL) has emerged as a cutting-edge strategy that is being embraced more and more to address these issues. In order to enhance the caliber and interactive character of classroom instruction, GBL is also being used to examine its efficacy and efficiency [5]. Educational games can boost motivation, promote experiential learning, and provide a joyful learning atmosphere. According to Ferayanti et al. [6], speaking abilities were considerably enhanced by the use of game-based learning. Students showed greater confidence, excitement, and active participation throughout the learning process, according to qualitative data in addition to quantitative changes [7]. Game-based Learning provides a secure and engaging setting for students to practice spoken language, which is important in the field of language learning because speaking abilities are frequently underdeveloped because of a lack of practice chances or a fear of making mistakes. Two essential elements of language fluency, anxiety reduction and risk-taking in communicating, have been demonstrated to be enhanced by game-based activities [8].

One long-lasting life ability is language proficiency [9]. Everybody, but notably students, must prepare competent resources as we enter the free market period, especially in the area of communication [10]. Therefore, social connections might be delayed and possibly result in miscommunication if there is ineffective communication. English language learners need to use appropriate word choice and articulation in foreign language contexts to ensure effective communication with their audience [11]. Consequently, a lot of Indonesian schools have curricula that focus on improving students' speaking abilities because it is possible that speaking will enable one to take part in international movements. In this sense, "word adventure" is a type of game-based learning that offers components for improving students' ability to communicate. Pupils can communicate clearly and confidently. Furthermore, speaking fluency involves regular practice, fast feedback, and meaningful engagement all of which can be successfully supported by well-made online games like "Word Adventure." The game simulates naturalistic language use by promoting role-playing, cooperative problem-solving, and live verbal interactions. According to Rezaei et al. [12], the development of practical and discourse competencies is supported by the integration of task-based language teaching (TBLT) concepts into digital games. Additionally, "Word Adventure's narrative-driven design produces contextualized scenarios that simulate actual life conversation, improving learners' capacity to use language structures in real-life situations.

Several previous studies in the field of Game-based learning have different aspects. The first study tried to explore how Game based learning could enhance speaking skills among psychology students learning English as a foreign language through two cycles of Classroom action research (CAR) [13]. The second study established that game-based learning, particularly Snake and ladder, effectively improved students' speaking abilities by quantitative experimental method [14]. These studies view game-based learning from different aspects, but both focus on how game-based learning influences the students. The third study focused on how students can learn vocabulary and improve comprehension by creating their own digital games based on non-fiction texts using the stretch programming platform [15]. Furthermore, research by [16] highlights the presence of competitive elements and direct interaction in game-based learning students by pre-experimental design are more motivated to use English and can improve their speaking skills without pressure. Another study conducted that using Kahoot as game-based learning created a fun and engaging atmosphere, the platform also significantly increased student's attention and focus during lessons [17]. In addition, game-based language learning, especially through mobile applications like Square Talks®, is a highly effective strategy for enhancing EFL beginners' vocabulary development, and active engagement and creates a positive attitude toward English learning [18].

In general, all of the previous studies showed that game-based learning is one of the media to improve their skills and mentioned the benefit of their game-based learning by their media without the students' perspective. In any case, we know a little media in their school can be accessed offline or online, whereas the school has limited internet access. However, in this study through "Word Adventure" as game-based learning. Therefore, this study "Word Adventure" as game-based learning which can be accessed online or offline aims to explore "Word Adventure" and supports the development of speaking skills in junior high school and Explore students' perception and experience through "Word Adventure" in their skill. Thus, to address this issue, the research carried out by answering these two guiding questions: (1) How does the use of word Adventure as a game-based language instruction tool influence students' speaking skills in EFL classrooms? (2) What are the

student's perceptions and experiences regarding the use of Word Adventure in improving their speaking skill?

Method

A descriptive qualitative methodology was used in this investigation. The approach examined the students' attitudes, perspectives, and beliefs as well as their knowledge of the subject matter [19]. Instead of statistics, the information gathered is presented as words or images. To support and explain the presentation, written research results include quotes from the data [20]. Yastibaş et al. [21] reference Creswell and Poth as saying that qualitative research enables researchers to investigate human problems by assisting them in comprehending the significance of the situation. Consequently, scholars are able to comprehend the issue in great detail and complexity. The researcher describes the respondents' difficulty speaking English using qualitative research methodologies. This approach seemed suitable since it sought to examine students' perspectives. Four seventh-grade MTS Ahmad Yani Jabung students served as the study's subjects. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews. Braun and Clarke's theme analysis was employed to implement the data analysis.

1. Research Design

The study aimed to investigate how students perceived word adventure's effect on speaking ability in May 2025. The methodology used for this investigation was qualitative. An interactive model includes the components of an investigation and how they can affect and be affected by one another, according to maxwell in Jones et al., [22].

The subjects in this study were 4 students of 7th grade MTS Ahmad Yani Jabung. Purposive sampling was the technique used to determine the study's participants. Since the teacher selected the active and passive student groups, the researcher wanted to examine how these students were seen in the classroom. For this reason, this approach was used.

2. Instruments

The researcher collected the data on the student's perceptions of Word Adventure's effect on speaking skills through semi-structured interviews. According to Knott et al., [23], semi-structured interviews are especially well-suited for gaining a deeper comprehension of individual experiences. To obtain correct data and prevent misunderstandings, the interview sessions were held in the original Indonesian language of the participants. The researcher supplied the audio recording to preserve the spoken data. The questions asked in this study were focused on the student's experiences of Word Adventure's on speaking skill.

3. Data Analysis

After Thematic analysis, a method for identifying, examining, and summarizing data patterns (themes), was used to assess the data once it had been collected from the interviewers. According to Braun and Clarke [24], the steps involved in data analysis are divided into six phases: (1) becoming acquainted with the data, (2) developing the initial codes, (3) trying to find themes, (4) themes to be assessed, (5) theme definition and naming, (6) creating the summary.

Results and Discussion

The research findings provide insight into the impact of word adventure and perceptions of word adventure for four students who were active and passive in the classroom. The analysis of the data, which was collected from the interviews and classroom observations, reveals how each student approaches speaking practice.

1. Impact on Speaking Skills

Theme 1: Enhanced engagement and motivation

According to the students, 'Word Adventure' really improved their desire to practice speaking English. Compared to typical classroom activities, learning was less daunting and more enjoyable thanks to the platform's interactive and gamified features.

Sasa: *"Playing 'Word Adventure' makes me feel more eager to speak English because it's more like a game than a study session."*

Fattah: *"I want to keep training because of the points and rewards. My friends and I enjoy competing to see who can score the highest."*

Theme 2: Increased confidence in speaking

Many students reported that 'word adventure' increased their confidence when speaking English. They were encouraged to take chances with their speech production since the platform offered a secure setting where they could make mistakes without judgment.

Heri: *"Before, I was afraid to speak English in front of others, but now I feel more confident because 'Word Adventure'"*

allows me to practice in an enjoyable way.”

Dinda: *“I get immediate feedback from the game, which helps me identify my mistakes and learn how to correct them. I feel more comfortable speaking in front of the class because of it.*

Theme 3: Improved fluency

Fluency gains were noted by the participants, particularly in terms of correctness and speed. Because the tasks in ‘Word Adventure’ were repetitive, they were able to practice naturalistic language use, including direct verbal conversation and role-playing.

Sasa: *“I used to hesitate a lot when speaking, but now I can speak more fluently because the game helps me to practice the same conversations continually.”*

Fattah: *“The game encourages me to think quickly and respond rapidly, which has greatly improved my fluency.”*

Theme 4: Contextual Learning

Students valued how ‘Word Adventure’ helped them learn how to employ English Structures in real-world contexts by presenting language in authentic situations.

Heri: *“It teaches me how to use English in everyday conversation and the game’s story is very realistic.”*

Dinda: *“I like how the game provides me with various opportunities to practice. It’s essential to use words in genuine situations instead of simply remembering words.*

2. Students’ perception and experiences

Theme 5: The Pleasure and joy

All students stated that ‘Word Adventure’ increased their enjoyment of learning English. They liked the game’s plot, characters, and interactive features.

Sasa: *“I like the way the examples are implemented in ‘Word Adventure’. I’m kept attracted by the examples, and I want to know what happens when the game is over”.*

Fattah: *“ I feel like I’m a part of the adventure, and the characters are really cool.” The game simulates playing a genuine game while learning English.*

Theme 6: Collaborative learning

A few students reported that ‘Word Adventure’ made it easier to work with classmates. In order to achieve game objectives, they delighted in cooperating and competing.

Heri: *“It’s enjoyable to compare scores and support one another when we play together in class.”*

Dinda: *“I appreciate that we can cooperate during the game.” It’s about learning together, not just about winning.”*

The findings of this study revealed that “Word Adventure” had a positive impact on students’ speaking skills, particularly in terms of motivation, confidence, fluency, and contextual learning. Students reported increased motivation and engagement due to the interactive and competitive elements in the game, such as the scoring system and level-based progression. These extrinsic motivators encouraged more frequent practice, consistent with Zheng et al., [1] and Susi et al., [3], who emphasized the role of gamification environments in enhancing intrinsic motivation and active participation. This is further supported by Self-Determination Theory [25], which highlights autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential for meaningful learning experiences. By transforming passive learning into a fun and engaging process, “Word Adventure” fostered positive attitudes toward English speaking practice. Additionally, students experienced decreased anxiety and increased self-confidence when using the game, consistent with Hsu et al., [8], who found that game-based activities create a non-threatening environment that encourages risk-taking. The safe space provided by “Word Adventure” allows students to make mistakes without fear of judgment, which is essential for developing fluency. Rezaei et al., [12] also support this, noting that integrating Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) into a digital game improves practical and discourse competence through repeated exposure to real-life scenarios.

Furthermore, the repetitive nature of the tasks in “Word Adventure” contributes to improved fluency and pronunciation. As Kusmayanti & Hendryanti, [18] points out, mobile apps like Square Talks® promote the development of comprehension and active engagement, such as “Word Adventure,” which offers role-playing, cooperative problem-solving, and direct verbal interaction. These features include the use of naturalistic language and support the development of automaticity in speech production, a key component of fluency [26].

Students also appreciate how the game embeds speaking tasks in realistic contexts, such as ordering food or giving

directions. The concepts of situated learning where knowledge is gained by real-world experiences are reflected in this contextual approach [27]. By providing real-world conversations, “Word Adventure” helps students apply language structures meaningfully, bridging the gap between classroom instruction and practical use. In addition to skill development, students reported enjoyment and found the game to be fun and engaging. Huang et al., [2] explained that the gamification setting catered to a variety of learning preferences, including kinesthetics, visual, and auditory learners, making the learning experience more inclusive and effective. The narrative-driven design and interactive elements made learning English less intimidating and more engaging, reinforcing the idea that motivation plays a major role in successful language acquisition [28]. Collaborative learning was another benefit noted by students, as they enjoyed working together and competing in teams. Chowdhury et al., [15] also found that collaborative game-based activities increased peer interaction and mutual support, which contributed to better language development. Despite these positive results, students also faced challenges such as technical issues and difficulties in understanding certain comprehension or grammar points. These limitations are consistent with findings from other studies involving digital devices [16], [17], which emphasize the need for better technical support and additional roles in the game. Addressing these issues could significantly improve the effectiveness and accessibility of “Word Adventure”, making it a more robust tool for language learning.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of “Word Adventure”, a game-based learning tool, on students’ speaking skills in an EFL classroom. The results showed that the game improved speaking skills through elements such as scores and levels that made learning more fun and interactive. The game also reduced anxiety, supported repeated practice for fluency and pronunciation, and used real-life situations for students to apply the language practically. Students felt happy and more motivated because of the interactive game design and teamwork. Overall, “Word Adventure” was effective in improving speaking skills. Further studies can test its long-term impact and use in different contexts. Despite positive experiences, the limitations of this study highlighted the challenges they faced while using “Word Adventure.” These challenges included technical issues and occasional difficulties in understanding certain vocabulary or grammar concepts

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