Ludic activities to develop speaking skills in students of elementary basic education

Actividades lúdicas para desarrollar la habilidad de comunicación oral en estudiantes de educación básica elemental

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of ludic activities in improving elementary school students' speaking proficiency within the Ecuadorian educational milieu. Through surveys administered to English teachers, prevalent challenges in English language education, particularly concerning speaking skills encompassing vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction, were discerned. Employing the Cambridge A1 Pre-Starters rubric for pre-test and post-test evaluations, substantial enhancements in students' speaking proficiency were evident after instructional intervention employing ludic activities. Statistical scrutiny, explicitly utilizing a paired sample t-test, corroborated the statistical significance of these advancements. The findings underscore the significance of integrating interactive pedagogical strategies attuned to students' needs, fostering innovative language education approaches in Ecuador. Furthermore, the transformative potential of ludic activities in crafting vibrant and inclusive learning environments resonating with Ecuadorian students' cultural and linguistic diversity is underscored. These outcomes offer actionable insights for educators and policymakers alike to optimize language learning outcomes in analogous educational settings. By acknowledging the efficacy of ludic activities, educators are prompted to reevaluate language instruction methodologies, with the aim of better catering to the requirements of Ecuadorian students and nurturing a deeper appreciation for their linguistic heritage.

Keywords: Ludic activities, speaking skill, EFL Elementary school students, Ecuadorian educational context.

Resumen

Este estudio investiga la efectividad de las actividades lúdicas para mejorar la competencia oral de estudiantes de primaria en el contexto educativo ecuatoriano. A través de encuestas administradas a profesores de inglés, se identificaron los desafíos prevalentes en la educación del idioma inglés, particularmente en habilidades de expresión oral que incluyen vocabulario, pronunciación e interacción. Al emplear la rúbrica Cambridge A1 Pre-Starters para las evaluaciones previas y posteriores a la intervención pedagógica, se hicieron evidentes mejoras sustanciales en la competencia oral de los estudiantes después de implementar actividades lúdicas. Un análisis estadístico, utilizando específicamente una prueba t de muestras emparejadas, respaldó la importancia estadística de estos avances. Los hallazgos destacan la importancia de integrar estrategias pedagógicas interactivas adaptadas a las necesidades de los estudiantes, fomentando enfoques innovadores en la educación de idiomas en Ecuador. Además, se resalta el potencial transformador de las actividades lúdicas en la creación de entornos de aprendizaje vibrantes e inclusivos que resuenan con la diversidad cultural y lingüística de los estudiantes ecuatorianos. Estos resultados ofrecen ideas prácticas para educadores y formuladores de políticas por igual para optimizar los resultados del aprendizaje del idioma inglés en entornos educativos similares. Al reconocer la eficacia de las actividades lúdicas, se alienta a los educadores a reevaluar las metodologías de instrucción del idioma, con el objetivo de satisfacer mejor los requerimientos de los estudiantes ecuatorianos y fomentar una apreciación más profunda de su patrimonio lingüístico.

Palabras clave: Actividades lúdicas, destreza de comunicación oral, estudiantes de primaria de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), contexto educativo ecuatoriano.

Introduction

The dominance or prominence of a particular language globally is shaped by historical, social, and cultural factors. Currently, English stands out as one of the most spoken and widely used languages, serving not only as the mother tongue for approximately 60 million individuals across diverse nations but also as a universally employed language (Rao, 2019). Its significance lies in its crucial role in facilitating global communication, allowing individuals from various cultures to connect and share cultural and material aspects. The extensive use of English in international organizations, education, and science has rightfully earned it the status of a global language (Rao, 2019).

In this context, the importance of high English proficiency becomes even more pronounced for developing countries like Ecuador. English proficiency is a key asset for these nations, providing a gateway to global opportunities. Proficiency in English enhances accessibility to international markets, promotes economic growth through global collaborations, and facilitates participation in the international discourse (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017). In the case of Ecuador, a higher level of English proficiency can open doors to increased international trade, attract foreign investments, and foster educational exchanges, contributing significantly to the country's development in an interconnected world. Therefore, fostering a robust English language education system is crucial for the socio-economic advancement of developing nations like Ecuador.

However, according to the English Proficiency Index, Latin America exhibits the lowest English language proficiency level, underscoring the substantial influence of the Spanish language in the region. This influence reduces the motivation for individuals to speak English, with Ecuador ranking eightieth in English language proficiency out of 113 countries and eighteenth out of 20 Latin American countries (Education First, 2022).

Ecuador's notably low proficiency levels, as highlighted by the results, can be attributed to various factors such as the use of traditional methodologies, insufficiently prepared teachers, and other systemic challenges within the education system (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).

In Ecuador, the formal recognition of the English language as a foreign entity and its subsequent integration into the national curriculum of both public and private educational institutions transpired in 1992. Orchestrated by the Ecuadorian National Government under the aegis of the Ministry of Education (MinEduc), a series of initiatives were implemented to streamline the teaching and learning of the English language throughout the educational spectrum of the country (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador – MinEduc, 2020).

In 2016, the Ministry of Education (MinEduc) embarked upon the "Strengthening English Teaching" project, a comprehensive initiative aimed at augmenting English language proficiencies and refining pedagogical practices among educators. This ambitious project encompasses the implementation of a novel English curriculum aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the provision of complimentary English textbooks, the establishment of an innovative assessment system for English educators, and the facilitation of professional development opportunities, exemplified by the Go Teacher program (MinEduc, 2020). Despite these concerted efforts, Ecuador faces challenges, as evidenced by its considerably low position in the EF (2023) test rankings, placing it almost last in Latin America. Research conducted by Ortega and Minchala (2019) and Bravo et al. (2017) underscores the persistent impediments in attaining desired language proficiency levels among Ecuadorian students upon completion of compulsory high school education. These findings accentuate the imperative for ongoing assessment and enhancement within the

English language education system to fortify students' linguistic competencies and better equip them for subsequent academic and professional pursuits.

Within the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, the cultivation of speaking skills proves to be an intricate challenge, particularly in environments where students encounter limited exposure to the target language and its associated culture, as exemplified in the context of Ecuador. The acquisition of speaking proficiency necessitates not only linguistic prowess but also an appreciation of cultural intricacies, idiomatic expressions, and communicative norms. Constrained interaction with native speakers impedes the organic development of conversational skills, hindering students from assimilating the nuanced aspects of language use in authentic settings (Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2022). In these circumstances, learners grapple with challenges encompassing the mastery of phonetic subtleties, navigating spontaneous exchanges, and adapting to diverse linguistic registers, collectively contributing to the perceived complexity in attaining effective speaking competencies (Gonzalez et al., 2015). A consensus among researchers underscores that speaking skills represent the most demanding facet of language acquisition, presenting formidable obstacles to learners striving for proficiency in verbal communication (Rajagopalan, 2015). This acknowledged difficulty materializes, in the Ecuadorian EFL context, as learners often face pronounced challenges in speaking proficiency, marked by apprehensions about pronunciation, conversational hesitancy, and a critical shortage of practice opportunities essential for skill development (Gonzalez et al., 2015).

Ludic activities, incorporating playful and interactive elements, have proven to be instrumental in addressing these challenges. Engaging students in language games, role-playing, and interactive exercises not only makes the learning process enjoyable but also creates an environment conducive to overcoming pronunciation apprehensions (Cornillie

et al., 2012). By integrating ludic activities into language instruction, educators can provide students with the opportunity for hands-on practice, fostering a more confident and effective development of their speaking skills. Research suggests that such interactive and playful approaches contribute significantly to reducing language learning anxiety and enhancing overall language proficiency (Mescouto, 2022). While ludic activities and their impact in the EFL context have been empirically tested worldwide, only a limited number of studies have been conducted in Ecuador. Therefore, this research addresses the scarcity of studies in this field and aims to contribute to the development of a critical awareness regarding the significance of ludic activities in achieving academic success in EFL. This study was conducted in a private elementary school situated in Ibarra, Ecuador. The research design employed for this investigation was a one-group pre-test post-design. By utilizing this specific design, the research sought to measure the impact of ludic activities on students' speaking proficiency levels. The investigation aimed to implement and evaluate the impact of ludic activities on the speaking skills of elementary school students.

Theoretical Framework

Challenges and Considerations in Developing Oral Communication Proficiency

Oral communication proficiency, explicitly speaking, assumes a pivotal role in facilitating effective discourse between individuals, serving as the primary medium for conveying ideas and intentions during interactions. The complexity of developing speaking skills is highlighted by Richards (2006), who emphasizes the need for learners to master various components, including organizing ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary and grammar, and ensuring clear pronunciation, all while actively engaging in listening and responding to their conversation partner. Speaking, a productive oral skill involves systematically expressing meaning through verbal utterances (Ur, 1996).

Kadamovna (2021) expands on this definition, framing speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning that encompasses information production, reception, and processing. Additionally, the form and meaning of spoken language are intricately tied to the contextual elements surrounding speech acts, such as the participants involved and their shared experiences and interests.

In the field of EFL learning, the acquisition of speaking skills stands as a fundamental aspect of second language (L2) learning. Ur (1996) emphasized the significance of oral communication as the paramount skill among the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This assertion stems from the notion that individuals proficient in a language are recognized as active speakers of that language. This perspective underscores the idea that the practical application of a language holds greater importance than mere theoretical knowledge, as highlighted by Scrivener (2005), who posited that possessing extensive language knowledge becomes futile if one is unable to effectively utilize it.

In terms of challenges and issues faced by EFL learners, research indicates that students generally struggle with speaking proficiency (Burns & Siegel, 2018). Three key problems persist in the teaching and learning of speaking skills. Firstly, there is a significant shortage of qualified teachers. Secondly, certain educators tend to prioritize speaking as a secondary aspect, relying on traditional pedagogy that emphasizes grammar and translation. Lastly, challenges arise from large class sizes and the absence of conducive environments for students to practice speaking (Derakhshan et al., 2016).

Challenges and Considerations in Developing Oral Communication Proficiency

Ludic strategies are purposefully crafted tools designed to foster an engaging learning environment for elementary school students involved in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. As aptly stated by Rinvolucri and Davis (1995) The aim is

to facilitate the assimilation of predetermined knowledge through the incorporation of games, enhancing overall performance within the classroom. According to Willis (2021), the ludic element assumes significant importance in the lives of young learners, establishing a connection between their everyday activities at home and in the community with the unfolding events within the language learning classroom. The scholar also pointed out that ludic activities offer the advantage of integrating pre-existing schemas familiar to both boys and girls, providing a framework conducive to the development of new English language skills. Moreover, they contribute to the creation of a shared and recognized context, enabling students to anchor new linguistic elements meaningfully in a foundation they already mastered.

Within the discourse of educational materials development, Richards and Rogers (2014) argue that the creation and design of instructional materials often face a lack of serious scholarly consideration, erroneously perceived as an inherently non-theoretical pursuit. Additionally, Sigurðardóttir (2010) posits that the concept of ludic activities is intricate, encapsulating the human need for communication, expression, and the elicitation of diverse emotions oriented toward entertainment and recreation. These activities give rise to experiences that evoke enjoyment, laughter, and even tears, constituting a genuine source of emotional engagement.

Understanding the meticulous nature of activity selection is pivotal, as it constitutes a crucial aspect of educational implementation, harmonizing with the implicit curriculum. More precisely, it relates to the aspects of children's observation and the hidden lessons they glean from these experiences. This element holds significant importance as it serves as the linchpin, alongside methodology, facilitating the attainment of objectives set by students. Thoughtfully chosen and effective classroom activities enable children to experience excitement and foster a genuine eagerness to delve deeper

into the realms of learning the language (Scrivener, 2005). Engaging in ludic activities has emerged as a highly effective means of language acquisition in contemporary education (Tucker, 2001). These activities facilitate authentic language use by placing participants in immersive scenarios, compelling them to utilize English in meaningful contexts. As a conduit for communication, ludic activities seamlessly integrate playfulness with educational goals, providing a dynamic and interactive avenue for language learning.

EFL Perspectives: Insights from Previous Research on Early Second Language Learning Challenges

Previous research underscores the critical importance of introducing second language learning during early childhood, capitalizing on the plasticity of children's brains and their inherent receptivity to new knowledge. According to Dörnyei (2001), optimal exposure to English should align with the natural progression of acquiring one's native language, concurrently fostering creativity, self-esteem, and autonomy. In a Colombian context, Urrutia and Vega (2010) conducted an action research study demonstrating the positive influence of incorporating games on tenth-grade students' oral production. This approach not only enhanced students' confidence but also encouraged collaboration and interaction within small groups.

Building upon this, Widiati and Cahyono's (2006) examination of EFL speaking classes in Indonesia within the broader ESL/EFL language teaching methodology revealed challenges in task design. Their findings emphasized the need for well-crafted activities that prompt spontaneous expressions from students. Meanwhile, Hosni's (2014) study on Turkish EFL learners uncovered communication obstacles rooted in anxiety and unwillingness, particularly stemming from the fear of negative evaluation during the speaking process. Interestingly, students perceiving their English proficiency

as "poor" exhibited higher levels of anxiety and reluctance compared to their more confident peers. Shifting to a Middle Eastern context, Al-Hosni's (2014) investigation of grade 5 learners in Oman also unveiled three primary speaking difficulties—linguistic challenges, mother tongue interference, and inhibition. These difficulties were attributed to teacher perceptions, teaching strategies, curriculum constraints, extracurricular activities, and assessment rules.

The implications of a constrained vocabulary for elementary school children are noteworthy, especially in light of Thornbury's (2019) insights into native speakers' word usage. As Thornbury indicates, native speakers employ around 2,500 words to cover 95 percent of their communicative needs, with proficiency in the top 1,500 words offering considerable conversational utility. For young learners in elementary school, a limited vocabulary can hamper their ability to articulate thoughts, actively participate in classroom discussions, and engage with peers. The provided numerical benchmarks emphasize the significance of acquiring at least the top 1,500 most common words, as it not only facilitates practical communication but also contributes to the overall development of foundational language skills. Effective vocabulary-building strategies, like the use of songs, tailored to the elementary school context become imperative to mitigate potential challenges and ensure a more robust EFL learning experience for these children.

Methodology

Setting

This study was conducted in a private elementary school in Ibarra, Ecuador. This educational establishment has a total enrollment of 304 students. In this elementary school, classes are held in the morning and students receive a total of 6 hours of English class per week.

Research design

Teacher Survey and Language Skill Selection

A methodical approach was employed to systematically elicit perspectives and experiences from 42 English teachers in Ecuador through the administration of a structured survey. The survey was explicitly designed to address challenges perceived by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Ecuador and to discern which ludic activities were deemed most effective or suitable within the EFL context under investigation. This empirical insight, directly gleaned from educators immersed in the pedagogical milieu, guided the strategic selection of specific speaking skills to be emphasized during subsequent pre-test and post-test phases.

Moreover, the survey delved into EFL teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness and appropriateness of various ludic activities within the Ecuadorian educational landscape. Educators shared invaluable insights into activities they believed would optimally support language learning, taking into account the unique challenges and characteristics inherent in EFL education in the region. This input played a pivotal role in informing the judicious selection of ludic activities incorporated into the treatment phase, ensuring not only their pedagogical soundness but also their contextual relevance to the distinctive needs and preferences identified by the participating teachers.

Pre-Test Post-Test One-Group Design Rationale

The study utilized a one-group pre-test and post-test design to thoroughly examine the influence of ludic activities on the developmental trajectory of speaking skills among students within the Elementary Basic Education domain. The selection of this research design is substantiated by its ability to holistically evaluate the influence of ludic activities on language learning within a consistent cohort over a designated timeframe (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009). The pre-test serves as a foundational benchmark, enabling the

identification of any subsequent alterations or enhancements in speaking skills following the intervention. Notably, this design is particularly apt for educational research, allowing researchers to gauge within-group changes while accounting for individual disparities that might impinge upon the research outcomes (Annetta et al., 2009). Given the participants' age spectrum and educational milieu in Ibarra, Ecuador, the pre-test post-test one-group design aligns cohesively with the pragmatic constraints and ethical considerations germane to the exploration of language learning in an elementary school setting.

Sampling

Teachers (Phase 1)

Convenience sampling was employed for both phases of the study due to its practical advantages in efficiently accessing a diverse pool of participants. Given the logistical constraints and the need for timely data collection, this method allowed for the convenient selection of readily available and willing participants, thereby facilitating a smoother and more feasible implementation of the research (Dörnyei, 2007). While acknowledging the limitations associated with convenience sampling, such as potential selection bias, the decision was driven by the necessity to balance practical considerations with the study's scope and resources. The adoption of convenience sampling, facilitated by the researcher's pre-existing affiliation with the school, underscores the pragmatic accessibility of the chosen methodology, thereby fostering cooperation among participants.

Introducing the surveyed population, the demographic profile revealed a diverse cohort, with 13 men and 29 women; a total of 42 teachers actively participated in the survey. Institutional affiliations indicated a distribution of 33.4% in public schools and 66.6% in private institutions. Regarding teaching experience, 66.6% of participants had 1 to 10 years, while 33.4% possessed 11 to 30 years. Proficiency in English exhibited

variation: 66.7% held a B2 certification, 16.7% lacked certification, 12.5% had a C1 certification, and 4.2% possessed a C2 certification. Urban-rural distribution revealed that 87.5% worked in urban areas, with 12.5% in rural regions. Educationally, 70% held bachelor's degrees, and 30% had master's degrees. The structured survey design facilitated a systematic analysis of the gathered data, guiding subsequent research phases by informing the selection of specific speaking skills addressed in the intervention of ludic activities.

Students (Phase 2)

This research meticulously centered on a specific group of 35 students. Aged between 6 and 8 years old, the group comprised 18 females and 17 males. This deliberate selection focused on students embarking on their English education journey, encompassing the entirety of those enrolled in entry-level English instruction within the school. This cohort was the focal point for the study's pre-test, treatment, and post-test phases, with participants dedicating six hours weekly to their English classes.

The strategic decision to include students from the entry-level English instruction was purposeful, allowing a thorough examination of a cohort experiencing their first exposure to the language in a formal setting. This choice aimed to scrutinize the intervention's impact on the foundational linguistic development of learners at the commencement of their English language education. The participants were intentionally included without resorting to sampling techniques, justified by the study's focus on the entire population of students within their initial English level, rendering sampling unnecessary. In this context, considerations related to gender or ethnic status were deemed irrelevant and, therefore, were not considered in the inclusion criteria, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the target group.

Instruments

Teacher Survey

The survey consisted of closed-ended questions with a Likert scale and multiple-choice responses and served as a foundational step preceding the initiation of the pre-test and post-test phases. This survey facilitated the collection of demographic information and played a crucial role in delineating the selection criteria for language skills and ludic activities addressed in this study.

Pre-test and post-test

The pre-test was a Cambridge Pre-A1 Starter Speaking Test, a robust evaluation instrument intricately aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This multifaceted assessment encompassed four discrete sections, demanding students' engagement with visuals, recognition of vocabulary items, response to queries, comprehension of phrases, interactive dialogue with an examiner, and the exhibition of intelligible pronunciation (Cambridge, 2021).

Subsequent to the administration of the pre-test, the post-test phase entailed the utilization of a modified iteration of the Cambridge Pre-A1 Starter Speaking Test. This adaptation incorporated deliberate adjustments aimed at enhancing sensitivity to regression effects and mitigating potential biases inherent in the singular application of the assessment tool (Marsden & Torgerson, 2012). Ethical considerations remained paramount throughout the study, with institutional authorities diligently seeking authorization and informed consent. This methodology, encapsulating meticulous pre and post-testing protocols, aligns with ethical standards and aims to ascertain the efficacy of ludic activities in augmenting the speaking skills of elementary school students.

Research objective and research questions

This study had the main objective of implementing and evaluating the impact of

ludic activities on the speaking skills of elementary school students. In the same way after obtaining the results from the teacher's survey during phase 1, the following research question was proposed: To what extent do ludic activities contribute to the enhancement of speaking skills in elementary school students in Ibarra, Ecuador?

Results and Discussion

Survey Results

The survey administered to English teachers highlights a unanimous consensus on the considerable difficulty associated with speaking, identified by 85.4% of respondents as the most challenging language skill. Further analysis delves into specific difficulties within speaking, with vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction yielding respective difficulty values of 38.1%, 69%, and 52.4%. Despite this acknowledged challenge, educators exhibit a prevailing agreement, with 68.3% completely agreeing and 31.7% agreeing on the efficacy of ludic activities in enhancing students' speaking skills. This alignment substantiates the significance attributed to speaking skills and underscores the perceived potential of ludic activities as valuable tools for language acquisition improvement.

Pre-Test and Post-test Results

The following analysis presents the average results derived from both pre-test and post-test assessments conducted with elementary-level students, employing the Cambridge speaking A1 Pre-Starters rubric. Each assessment consisted of four distinct parts within every section, with a maximum achievable grade of 20 per section, attributing 5 points to each part. This comparative study aims to delineate the average performance across Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Interaction sections, offering insights into students' linguistic proficiency and communicative abilities before and after instructional intervention. Notably, this intervention encompassed a diverse array of ludic activities,

meticulously identified as highly effective through the comprehensive survey conducted among educators, as elucidated previously. These activities encompassed songs, games, role-plays, group activities, theater exercises, storytelling, and the utilization of flashcards. By integrating these pedagogical strategies into the instructional framework, this study critically evaluates their efficacy in fostering students' linguistic development and communicative competence within the elementary language learning milieu.

Table 1

Pre-Test result

Sections	Average Section Scores
Vocabulary	9,6
Pronunciation	12,7
Interaction	8,8
Speaking Pre-test total	**31,2**

The provided Table 1 offers insights into the performance of elementary-level students assessed using the Cambridge A1 Pre-Starters rubric. This assessment evaluates various linguistic competencies essential for young learners' language development. Specifically, the table delineates average scores across key domains, including Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Interaction, tailored to the developmental needs of young learners. In examining Vocabulary, students exhibit an average score of 9.6, indicative of their grasp of fundamental lexical items and expressions within their linguistic repertoire. Pronunciation, assessed for phonetic accuracy and clarity, yields a commendable average score of 12.7, demonstrating students' emerging proficiency in articulating sounds and words with increasing accuracy and fluency. Conversely, the Interaction section,

designed to evaluate students' ability to engage in simple communicative exchanges, reflects an average score of 8.8, highlighting areas where students may require additional support and scaffolding in their conversational skills.

The cumulative Speaking Pre-test Total, encompassing scores from all assessed sections, culminates in an average score of 31.2. This holistic assessment is a valuable tool for educators to gauge students' overall language proficiency at the elementary level, facilitating targeted instruction and intervention to further nurture their linguistic development. Through ongoing assessment and tailored pedagogical approaches aligned with the A1 Pre-Starters rubric, educators can effectively support young learners on their journey toward language fluency and communicative competence.

Table 2

Post-Test result

Sections	Average Section Scores
Vocabulary	13,5
Pronunciation	13,7
Interaction	11,8
Speaking Post-test total	**39,2**

Table 2 presents the results of the post-test assessment, offering a comprehensive overview of elementary-level students' linguistic proficiency following instructional intervention based on the A1 Pre-Starters rubric. Students ' performance is meticulously evaluated across the assessed domains of Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Interaction to gauge their language acquisition and communicative competence. Notably, in the Vocabulary domain, students exhibit an average score of 13.5, indicative of substantial

improvement in their lexical knowledge and usage compared to the pre-test results. Similarly, students achieve an average score of 13.7 in Pronunciation, reflecting enhanced phonetic accuracy and clarity consequent to targeted instruction and practice. In the realm of Interaction, students demonstrate notable progress, attaining an average score of 11.8, signifying an improved ability to engage in communicative exchanges with heightened fluency and coherence. The cumulative Speaking Post-test Total, amalgamating scores from all assessed sections, culminates in an average score of 39.2, underscoring students' considerable advancement in linguistic proficiency and communicative skills after instructional intervention. These findings illuminate the efficacy of pedagogical strategies informed by the A1 Pre-Starters rubric in fostering young learners' linguistic development and facilitating meaningful communication in the language learning context.

Furthermore, while the average grades suggest an improvement in linguistic proficiency and speaking ability, it is imperative to conduct a t-student test to ascertain whether these results exhibit statistically significant differences. Through statistical analysis, we aim to confirm empirically the observed improvement in students' language acquisition and communicative competence. Subsequently, in the forthcoming section, we will describe the results obtained from the t-student test. This statistical analysis will allow us to determine whether the observed improvement in average grades across the Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Interaction sections is statistically significant, thereby providing empirical evidence to support the efficacy of the instructional intervention in enhancing students' linguistic proficiency and communicative abilities.

Table 3

Paired sample t-test results for Pre-Test and Post-Test (p < 0.05)

	Mean	SD	*t* value	df	Sig (two-tailed)
Pre-Test	28.84	4.60	8.40	34	< .001
Post-Test	36.55	5.65			

The results of the paired sample t-test comparing pre-test and post-test average scores among elementary school students indicate a statistically significant improvement in linguistic proficiency and communicative abilities following the instructional intervention. Across the three evaluated sections—Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Interaction—the average scores demonstrated a notable increase from the pre-test (M = 28.84, SD = 4.60) to the post-test (M = 36.55, SD = 5.65). This improvement suggests that the effective instructional strategies enhanced students' language acquisition and communication skills within the elementary language learning context.

The observed improvement in average scores across all assessed sections was found to be statistically significant, as evidenced by the paired sample t-test results (t(34) = -, p < .001). This significance level indicates that the differences observed between pre-test and post-test scores are unlikely to occur by chance alone. Instead, they reflect genuine and consistent improvements in students' linguistic proficiency and communicative competence following the instructional intervention. These findings provide empirical support for the effectiveness of the pedagogical strategies employed, affirming their role in fostering language development and communication skills among elementary school students.

Table 4

Paired Sample t-Test Results for Each Section (p < 0.05)

	Pre-Test		Post-Test				
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	*t* **value**	**df**	**Sig (two-tailed)**
Vocabulary	9.63	2.13	13.57	2.28	10.80	34	< .001
Pronunciation	12.77	1.44	13.77	1.93	4.06	34	
Interaction	8.80	2.60	11.86	2.81	6.86	34	

Furthermore, to gain a more granular understanding of the effectiveness of the instructional intervention, separate t-tests were conducted for each section: Vocabulary,

Pronunciation, and Interaction as seen in table 4. This approach allowed for a focused examination of the specific areas of linguistic proficiency and communicative abilities targeted by the intervention. By analyzing each section individually, we aimed to discern whether the observed improvements were consistent across all facets of language learning or if certain areas exhibited more pronounced enhancements. This comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights into the differential impact of instructional strategies on distinct components of language acquisition and communication skills among elementary school students.

The results reveal statistically significant improvements in all three sections following the instructional intervention. In the Vocabulary section, the mean pre-test score was 9.63 (SD = 2.13), which significantly increased to 13.57 (SD = 2.28) in the post-test assessment (t(34) = 10.80, p < .001). Similarly, the Pronunciation section exhibited a significant improvement, with mean pre-test and post-test scores of 12.77 (SD = 1.44) and 13.77 (SD = 1.93), respectively (t(34) = 4.06, p < .001). Furthermore, the Interaction section demonstrated a substantial enhancement, with mean pre-test and post-test scores of 8.80 (SD = 2.60) and 11.86 (SD = 2.81), respectively (t(34) = 6.86, p < .001). These findings suggest that the instructional intervention, characterized by engaging in ludic activities, effectively contributed to developing vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction skills among elementary school children.

The observed improvements in all three sections underscore the efficacy of incorporating ludic activities into educational practices for young learners. These interactive and enjoyable activities likely fostered an engaging learning environment, facilitating enhanced language acquisition and communication skills. The significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores indicate substantive progress in linguistic proficiency, pronunciation accuracy, and communicative competence among

the participants. These findings support the importance of employing diverse pedagogical approaches tailored to elementary school children's developmental needs and interests, ultimately promoting effective language learning outcomes.

In the population of this study, implementing ludic activities as an instructional intervention yielded significant improvements in elementary school children's vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction skills. These findings emphasize the value of integrating interactive and engaging teaching methodologies to enhance language learning experiences for young learners. Moving forward, continued exploration and application of innovative pedagogical strategies will be crucial in optimizing educational outcomes and fostering the holistic development of students in diverse learning environments.

Discussion

One of the study's strengths lies in its comprehensive approach to addressing the development of speaking skills in Elementary Basic Education students. Notably, the researchers focused on skill development and considered the selection of activities, incorporating teachers' perspectives through a survey. This methodological choice adds depth and relevance to the study, ensuring that instructional strategies align with educators' identified needs and preferences (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

In accordance with Dörnyei (2007) by giving teachers a voice through the survey, the researchers acknowledged the valuable insights and expertise of practitioners in language education. The survey results revealed speaking skills as the most challenging area for students, prompting the selection of this skill for targeted intervention. Moreover, the ludic activities used in the instructional intervention were chosen based on teachers' feedback regarding their effectiveness. This collaborative approach enhances the study's

ecological validity and ensures that instructional strategies are grounded in real-world classroom contexts (Riazi, 2016).

As highlighted by Litosseliti (2018) integrating teachers' perspectives into the study design enhances its relevance to educational practice. Hence, the study aims to bridge the gap between research and practice by acknowledging teachers as key stakeholders in the language learning process. The findings contribute to theoretical knowledge and offer practical insights for educators seeking evidence-based approaches to address students' language learning needs. The emphasis on collaborative decision-making fosters a sense of ownership and investment among teachers, promoting the implementation of effective pedagogical strategies in the classroom (Schmitt & Rodgers, 2002).

The observed improvements in vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction skills align with previous research highlighting the benefits of interactive and engaging pedagogical strategies in language education for young learners. Studies by Davis (2017) and Prošić-Santovac and Savić (2021) underscore the positive impact of ludic activities such as songs, games, and storytelling on vocabulary acquisition and oral proficiency among elementary school children. The results corroborate with the literature emphasizing the importance of providing opportunities for meaningful language use in authentic communicative contexts (Abate, 2015). Additionally, the significant improvements across all three sections echo the findings of studies advocating for holistic language instruction that integrates various speaking subskills (Seraj & Hadina, 2021)

The significant improvements observed in all three sections following the instructional intervention suggest the efficacy of incorporating ludic activities into language teaching practices for young learners. The findings underscore the importance of creating an interactive and engaging learning environment that fosters active participation and meaningful language use. Educators can leverage these pedagogical

insights to design instructional interventions that cater to the diverse learning needs and interests of elementary school children. By integrating ludic activities into language instruction, educators can promote language development in a fun manner, enhancing students' motivation and engagement in the learning process (Auleear Owodally, 2015).

The conducted paired sample t-tests comparing pre-test and post-test scores in each section provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of incorporating ludic activities to develop speaking skills in students of Elementary Basic Education. The statistically significant results (p < .001) indicate substantial improvements in linguistic proficiency and communicative abilities following the instructional intervention. The significance differences accentuate the robustness of the observed improvements in students' speaking skills. In the context of ludic activities, such as songs, games, role plays, and storytelling, the significance of these findings suggests that these pedagogical strategies effectively engage students and contribute to their language development. Ludic activities' interactive and enjoyable nature likely fosters a conducive learning environment, promoting active participation and meaningful language use (Scrivener, 2005).

In the context of Ecuador, where empirical studies on the effectiveness of ludic activities in language education may be limited, these findings hold particular significance. The demonstrated improvements in linguistic proficiency and communicative abilities highlight the potential of ludic activities to enhance language learning outcomes among elementary school students. This has important implications for educators and policymakers in Ecuador, who may seek evidence-based approaches to improve language education in the country. The findings of this study align closely with the article's topic, which focuses on using ludic activities to develop speaking skills in students of Elementary Basic Education. By demonstrating the effectiveness of these

activities in improving linguistic proficiency and communicative abilities, the study contributes to the existing literature on language education and pedagogy. Moreover, the findings provide practical insights for educators seeking innovative approaches to enhance speaking skills in elementary school students.

While the paired sample t-tests results are promising, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The study's sample size and specific context may limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings. To enhance the robustness and applicability of the results, future research could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample. A larger sample size would allow for greater representation and increased statistical power, facilitating broader generalization of the findings to diverse educational contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Additionally, exploring the long-term effects of ludic activities on language development and delving into potential moderators or mediators of the observed improvements would provide valuable insights for educators and researchers alike. Furthermore, qualitative studies could offer deeper insights into students' experiences with ludic activities, shedding light on their perceived impact on language learning and enriching our understanding of effective pedagogical practices in language education (Dörnyei, 2007).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the remarkable strides witnessed in students' linguistic proficiency and communicative abilities following the incorporation of ludic activities underscore the profound impact of innovative pedagogical approaches in the Ecuadorian educational landscape. These findings hold paramount significance for educational practices within Ecuador, where addressing the diverse learning needs of students is of utmost importance.

The demonstrated effectiveness of ludic activities in fostering speaking skills

validates their pedagogical value and sheds light on their transformative potential in shaping the educational landscape (Newton & Nation, 2020). The efficacy of ludic activities in fostering speaking highlights their potential to address educators' specific challenges in Ecuador. By embracing ludic activities, educators can create dynamic and inclusive learning environments that resonate with Ecuadorian students' cultural and linguistic diversity. Through interactive experiences such as songs, games, role plays, and storytelling, students are engaged and empowered to develop essential language skills in a culturally relevant context. This extends beyond the confines of traditional language instruction, fostering a paradigm shift towards more holistic and dynamic educational practices that prioritize student engagement and empowerment. These findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on language education in Ecuador, emphasizing the importance of innovative teaching methodologies tailored to the country's unique socio-cultural context. By recognizing the effectiveness of ludic activities, educators can reimagine language instruction to better meet the needs of Ecuadorian students and foster a deeper appreciation for their linguistic heritage.

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