

Enhancing Public Speaking Confidence in Primary Students: Exploring the Impact of Game-Based Interventions on Anxiety Reduction

Sharenjit Kaur, Manoharan Nalliah, Sarfraz Aslam

Faculty of Education and Humanities, UNITAR International University, Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: manoharan@unitar.my

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Abstract

Public speaking is essential for improving communication skills and confidence levels in speaking effectively. The program allows students to improve their ability to speak up effectively. Research indicates that board games in primary classrooms positively impact students by helping them interact and build their interpersonal skills. This case study is designed to study the effects of using games on primary students, especially in years one and five, to overcome anxiety in public speaking. This quantitative and qualitative study would enhance students' motivation to speak up while building confidence and speaking competency. The English language continues to be a compulsory subject in school, and it is taught at all levels in schools locally. When students can speak fluently, they open doors for new opportunities, allowing speakers to share and transfer information confidently during oral presentations. The researcher observed and recorded the student's performance to make a weekly comparison, indicating how they progressed while overcoming their anxiety in public speaking via games. All year five students were also given a questionnaire to understand their public speaking perspective better.

Keywords: Public Speaking, Communication, Academic Writing, Games, Primary School

Introduction

The purpose of the study detailed in this article is to describe the effects of using games to overcome anxiety in public speaking. Speech anxiety is an issue in schools, considering speaking is a standard requirement in the English language classroom. Students sometimes feel uncomfortable when they must speak up or are present in class. Games in the classroom help students get better and more comfortable speaking and presenting in class. Research cited in Habiburrahim et al. (2020, p. 254) shows that ESL students who had studied English for at least six years succeeded with their written tests but had difficulty using English in real-life situations.

According to an online article by Malaysia Now (2019), the Malaysian school system produces students who can write in English but cannot communicate fluently outside the classroom setting. One of the objectives of this study is to guide students in developing speaking skills during speaking activities, which include public speaking or group discussions, to express their

thoughts, feelings, ideas, and experiences in storytelling. Making the session enjoyable with games would bring willingness from students to communicate while reducing anxiety.

Research Questions

This study examines the impact of utilizing game-based interventions to address public speaking anxiety in primary students, with a primary focus on fostering self-confidence. The study explores the potential benefits of employing games as a pedagogical tool to alleviate anxiety associated with public speaking in the early stages of education. Two key research questions were formulated to guide the investigation:

1. How do game-based interventions contribute to primary students' ability to overcome anxiety in public speaking?
2. What is the significance of employing games in assisting primary students to overcome public speaking anxiety and develop self-assurance?

Games in Public Speaking

Hall G, 2017, Communicative-based approaches allow students to talk and fulfill the requirements of the 21st-century teaching and learning approach. At the same time, games also play a vital role in building students' ability to build confidence. It was also seen that (Rahman & Bakar 2018) cited that when games are integrated into the classroom, they help students develop their skills and develop themselves as confident learners and speakers. To overcome this problem, research has been done to improve students speaking skills through games because it is a strategy to help students be involved in class activities, enabling them to interact and share ideas orally. By practicing, students will develop fluency in speaking. (Chambers & Yunus, 2017) Also, to develop fluency, students should participate in games activities as the skills will be learned unconsciously through practices during fun activities that would result in students feeling motivated.).

The same study mentioned that students face difficulties speaking on a particular topic because they either lack understanding or the teacher's instructions are too fast. According to (Kaur & Aziz, 2020), this situation would create a ripple effect on students' competency in speaking in the classroom and further impact their behavior. They may lose interest in public speaking. Therefore, teachers and educators must consider students learning proficiency and background before teaching to create a conducive learning environment for their students. (Cheng, 2018) mentioned that some methods can be applied to reduce students' anxiety. Implementing language and speech games helped students reduce their anxiety in speaking; board games were used, and they involved communicating with peers.

Good motivating strategies increase students' motivation, and to add on, Krashen (1982) mentioned a few components that increase the value of motivation. The advantages of using games to improve communication among students are that they bring more excitement in the classroom, help students feel encouraged to try and practice speaking skills, and allow students to develop more than their current ability with the combination of practice and fun. With the right approach, students will overcome shyness, stage fright, and anxiety and build their self-esteem toward public speaking and speech development. With this approach, teachers may also evaluate how well the students learn and if the objective is met through games. While students participate in the game activities, their confidence will automatically form as they build new concepts and interaction habits through games. Baharudin & Yunus, 2018 mentioned that games motivate and transform the lesson into active learning.

According to Ahmad (2017), Malaysia implemented 21st-century learning in 2004. It is divided into four components: communication, cooperation, creativity, and critical thinking, also known as the 4C's. During the learning process, students are taught how to collaborate and communicate. The goal was also to generate competent English speakers in Malaysia (Arif & Amin, 2021). There is a lack of enthusiasm involving English-speaking activities in the classroom. Therefore, the problem arises as students lack confidence in speaking English. The conceptual framework below explains how the session is carried out and the variables used. The conceptual framework can be seen below.

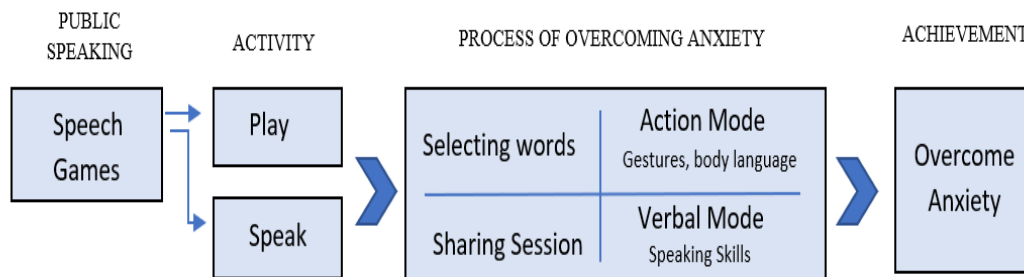


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

The types of games explored to overcome anxiety among students can be seen in Figures 1.2 and 1.3

Games explored at St. Marian's Scholars

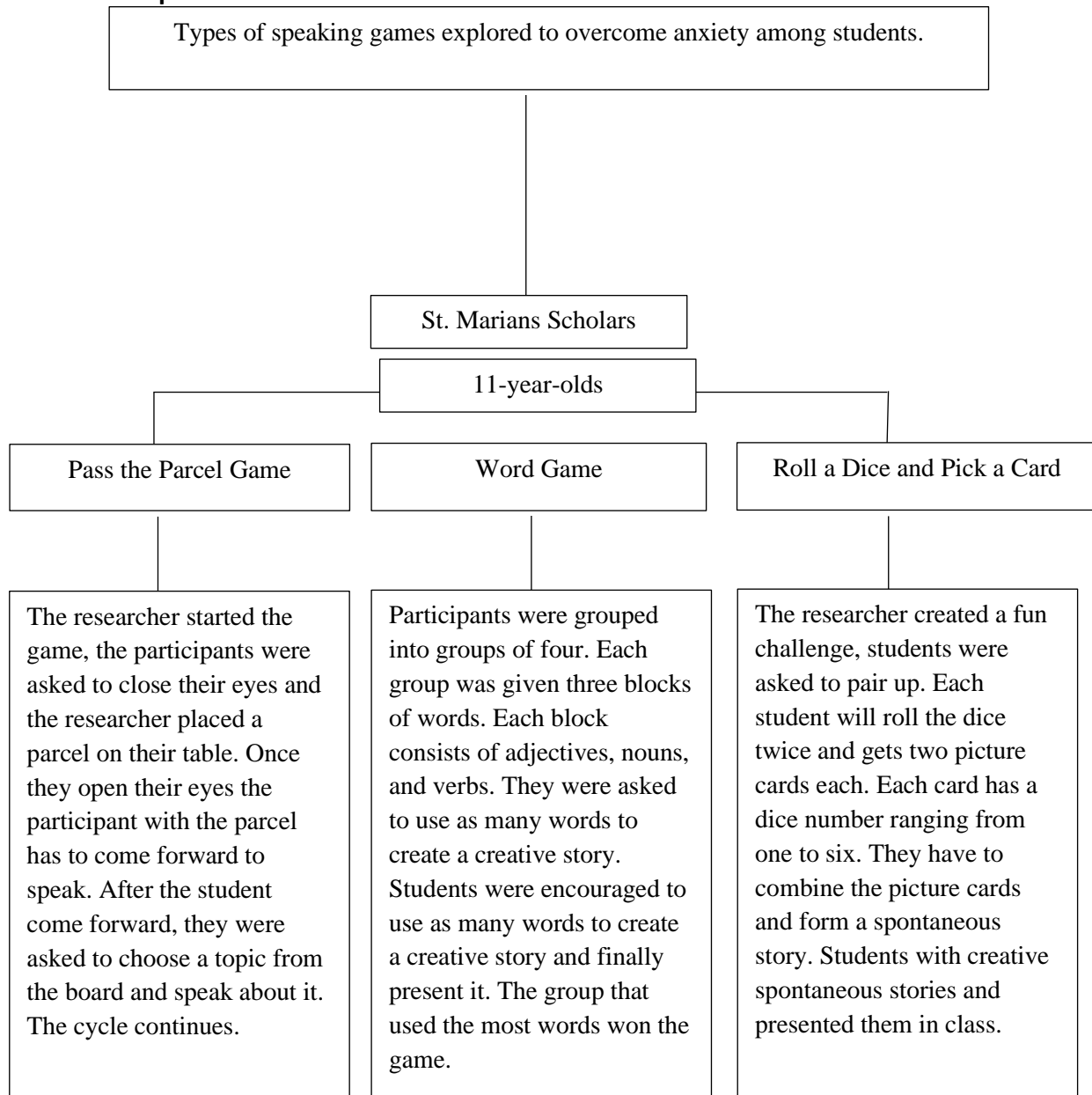


Figure 1.2 Games explored in Cubs Enrichment Centre

The researcher added extrinsic motivation in the activities. The approach was successful. Students enjoyed group activities more than individual presentations. Group activities and discussions allowed them to share more ideas and brainstorm the continuity of the story narratives. The results showed that students overcame their speaking anxiety with the games approach while willingly participating in the activities.

Games explored at Cubs Enrichment Centre

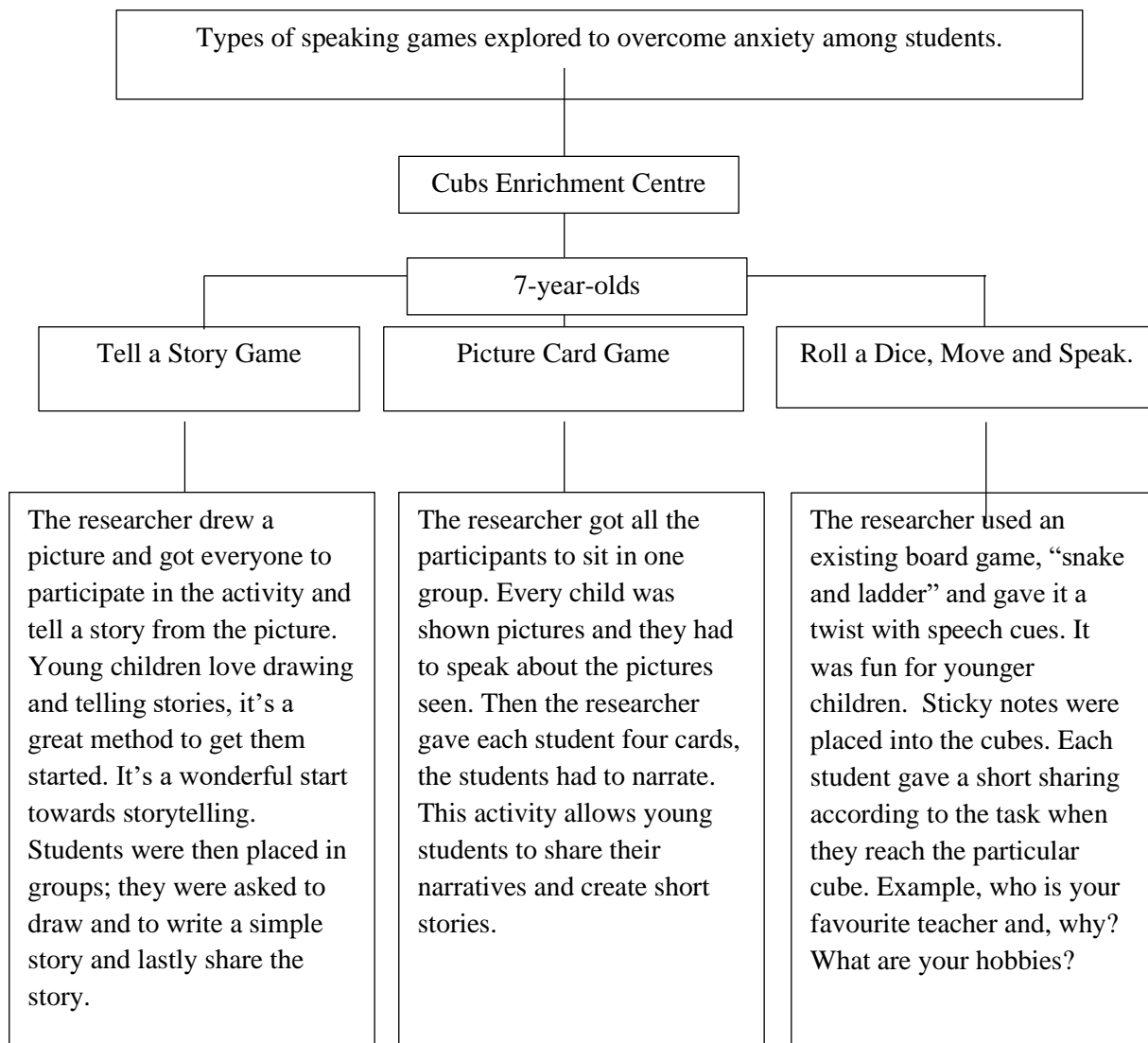


Figure 1.3 Games explored in Cubs Enrichment Centre

The game approach was made simpler for younger students according to their understanding, and the researcher added more fun to the games for student engagement. With guidance, students could understand the flow and participate in the activities while speaking up during their turn. It was challenging at first, but as the students built their understanding, the sessions were more engaging, and students participated willingly.

It was found that students prefer to play speech games as it helps them narrate better and have more confidence to speak while overcoming anxiety in public speaking.

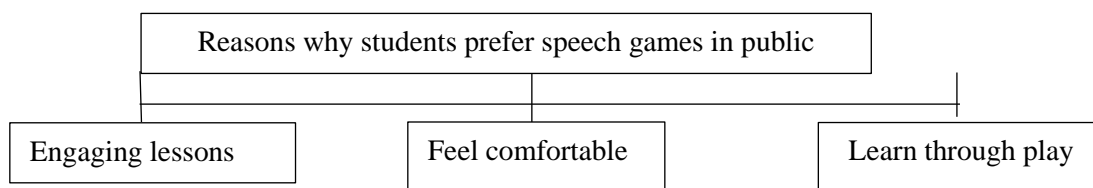


Figure 1.4 Reasons why students prefer games in public speaking.

The communicative games influenced students with speaking ability. Students became more motivated to speak up and willingly participate in the activities. Students also said they felt more comfortable speaking in groups and during game activities. The activities allow students to strengthen their speaking skills and help them improve their speaking ability. The students felt comfortable with the game session and looked forward to it, and it was also entertaining. While playing games, they could also practice their speaking skills while allowing them to discuss and play simultaneously. As a result, they were pouring out their creative juices, and the researcher saw students feeling more comfortable. To create a balance, the researcher also changed their grouping between games to bring them out of their comfort zone. Some students have become more vocal around their friends and quiet in a different group. It can also be seen that once students warm up, they start talking to each other. The games ran smoothly through discussions, and they took turns sharing input.

When students feel comfortable with the lesson while having fun, they create memories of it, impacting their learning. The positive connection in learning will positively impact their learning and stimulate their minds. Students will also be introduced to different stimuli, allowing them to remember the concept of storytelling, vocabulary, gestures they applied, and clues they read. The effect of using games on primary students to overcome anxiety in public speaking would align with the activities experimented on in the classroom, as students responded positively towards the games that helped them reduce their anxiety. Studies have shown that games can increase feelings of general wellness and self-esteem while overcoming anxiety in children. According to Vygotsky (1978), children learn through social interactions. This helped students interact and shape their mental abilities while helping them develop confidence in their learning journey.

Methodology

This article examines the use of games to overcome anxiety in public speaking. The data were compiled and reviewed using both methods qualitatively and quantitatively. To develop a thorough understanding of the study, this approach consists of multiple sources of evidence using a range of qualitative research that includes videos and interviews. Questionnaires were provided to the students and the English teacher for quantitative research findings. The lessons were conducted every week to guide students to speak up and be confident while sharing how they could share stories, using hand gestures, facial expressions, and body language to make their storytelling more engaging while providing examples for improvements with constructive feedback. The objective of the lessons was to help students overcome anxiety and how they can confidently share a story in class through games and interactions. The lessons would allow students to improve their communication skills, build confidence, and be more aware of their body language.

Data Collection

In the first stage, I presented an opening question to the students. "If you join the circus, what would you perform?" the question will be progressed based on the initial response. The question itself would allow students to share stories as there are many roles to play at a circus, and the question can lead to many exciting ideas. Some students may have anxiety about sharing their ideas, while others may know what they will perform in a circus. Hence, I added game techniques to boost students' enthusiasm in class, allowing all students to participate in the speaking activity. Data were developed when I supervised and coached a group of eight students instead of just one student. The observational method was chosen since this case study included games in the lesson for students to overcome anxiety in public speaking. The study focused on primary students between ages 7 and 11.

The participants were selected via the purposive sampling method. The 11-year students were all female, and eight participated in this study. Meanwhile, the 7-year students were a mix between males and females; five students participated in this study. Regarding their family background, the 11-year-old students communicated in the English language in the classroom. However, the 7-year-old communicated in English, and a few codes switched to Mandarin. In terms of race and religion, they were mixed races. The triangulation method generated data, including video recordings, interviews, and questionnaires. The researcher has tabulated the information gained to generalize the findings of this study. The findings were based on the researcher's judgment and detailed explanation of the data analysis. Triangulation data shows that the data were fully obtained and reliable while achieving the objective.

Table 1.1

Demographics Information (11-year-old students)

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	English Fluency	Family Communication
Alyx	11	Female	Caucasian	Proficient	English
Ella	11	Female	Chinese	Intermediate	Mandarin
Lisa	11	Female	Germanic	Proficient	French/English
Faleesha	11	Female	Malay	Intermediate	Malay/English
Alisa	11	Female	Malay	Intermediate	Malay/English
Miya	11	Female	Chinese	Intermediate	Cantonese/English
Adinda	11	Female	Malay	Proficient	English
Sarah	11	Female	Malay	Intermediate	Malay/English

Table 1.2

Demographics Information (7-year-old students)

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	English Fluency	Family Communication
Yik Hong	7	Male	Chinese	Elementary	Mandarin
Xin Ru	7	Female	Chinese	Pre-Intermediate	English
Emerson	7	Male	Chinese	Elementary	English and Cantonese
Zara	7	Female	Malay	Elementary	Bahasa
Iskandar	7	Male	Malay	Pre-Intermediate	English

Results and Discussion

This article has found types of games that should be explored for primary students to build their speaking skills and overcome their anxiety towards public speaking. This study also shared how students responded and used games to overcome public speaking anxiety. This was a case study among primary students aged 11 years old and seven years old. The study compared how students responded to the games and how it helped them gain speaking confidence. Allowing students to work in pairs and groups helps students discuss, generate ideas, and help one another build a story. Playing together makes them feel more motivated to try and explore the game. Games can promise the full participation of students because they are fun, and they can enjoy it while learning (Mahmoud & Tanni, 2014). The process starts when students are involved in the game. The eleven-year-olds were presented with three games: pass the parcel game, word game, roll the dice, and pick a card.

Meanwhile, the seven-year-old was presented with a story game and picture card game, rolling the dice, moving, and speaking. The interactive games allowed students to interact with one another, and they had to discuss. This would lead to selecting words and sharing sessions among students, and they will be asked to share them aloud in front of the class. While sharing it with the class, they will be in the action mode that involves gestures, body language, and facial expressions. Students will be encouraged to improve their actions and verbal modes while playing the game.

This action creates a meaningful purpose, and it helps students integrate the skills they learn and apply them in the classroom. Playing speech games brings an advantage to students as it helps them reduce anxiety and allows students to feel positive while building up their self-confidence. As a result, when students play games, they are unafraid to share. This action leads to achievement for students when showing progress and overcoming anxiety during public speaking. Based on the findings, it was found that students enjoyed playing games. Upon completing the lessons, interviews were conducted with students, and satisfactory results obtained from the study showed that games impact students.

As a recommendation, teachers may use the method to overcome speaking anxiety and the effects of using games on primary students to overcome anxiety in public speaking. A post-interview with the English teacher was held after four sessions were completed. The aim was to know the teacher's view of teaching-learning activities using communicative games. According to the teacher's response in the post-interview, students may not be so comfortable with presentations, and it feels more like they are talking casually to a friend instead of presenting to a classroom; they get a little anxious and nervous. They added that the game approach was a great initiative. She saw students responding positively towards the games; from her observation, even the quiet students participated. They were more comfortable with group presentations as they did not find speaking challenging. From the responses received, it was perceived that students responded with improvement in comparing their attitudes before regarding their confidence level, engagement in the classroom, participation, enthusiasm, and fluency in speaking. (Huang & Levinson, 2012) found that playing games in the classroom promotes students' maximum potential in a fun and engaging manner, and the purpose of adding games is to stimulate students' motivation and interest. Students prefer mastering speech confidence in public speaking by playing games because they don't feel pressured; instead, it makes it fun. It was also seen that 9 over 12 students looked forward to the session due to the games, and they saw it as a tool that helped them excel in speech delivery in public speaking. It is seen that communicative games

do impact students, allowing them to build the courage to speak up. The game's strategy could be improved to obtain the best results within the classroom.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution

The present study attempts to address multiple gaps and contributes to enhancing public speaking confidence in primary students. First, the study explores the impact of game-based intervention on anxiety reduction. The study aims to bridge the gap and assist primary students in building the confidence to speak up effectively. Second, the study presented the factors contributing to anxiety among students during assessments via observations and recorded students' performance for weekly comparison. Thus, the motivation enhanced students' ability to speak with confidence and improved competency. Third, from the research study, students' progress increases with fluency when speaking. (Chambers & Yunus, 2017) Teachers and educators may benefit from the study while implementing speech games to reduce anxiety and understand student learning proficiency to create a conducive learning environment. Fourth, the existing research enhancing public speaking confidence in primary students- explores the impact of game-based intervention on anxiety reduction. The effect of game-based lessons should be practiced in schools to improve communication among students and bring more excitement to the classroom. In contrast, students feel encouraged and motivated while practicing their public speaking skills.

Good motivating strategies increase students' motivation, and Krashen (1982) mentioned a few components that increase the value of encouragement. Malaysia implemented 21st-century learning in 2004. It is divided into four segments: communication, cooperation, creativity, and critical thinking, also known as the 4C's. During the learning process, students are taught how to collaborate and communicate (Ahmad, 2017). The goal was also to generate competent English speakers in Malaysia (Arif & Amin, 2021). Hence, based on game-based learning to bridge the gap in speaking competency, the study intends to ascertain the importance of game-based lessons and motivation in shaping competent speakers. The study would add to the theoretical development by integrating speech games theory with speaking skills and how it fosters children into fluent English speakers.

Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that students responded positively towards speech games, and they would prefer teachers to include speech games as a teaching and learning tool to help them with sharing sessions that would encourage them to speak up. Instead of teaching public speaking solely using presentation techniques such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, and vocal variety, it can be conducted with a fun approach using games, as students will be more comfortable adapting. With the mixed teaching approach using games, students may learn quickly as they have fun during the public speaking class. This approach also boosts student-teacher communication and peer communication within the classroom. When teachers acknowledge students' efforts, it will encourage them to do better and keep improving. Teachers need to foster love in learning and mastering public speaking skills from primary schools as they will continue to develop during secondary school and excel in practical communication skills and presentation skills in higher education.

English teachers may also choose content that would be appropriate for students to learn and that will enhance their speaking and presentation skills during a sharing session. When a teacher adds games in the classroom, the teacher may need to prepare the lesson with creativity and return to the objective of the effects of using games to overcome anxiety

among students. Teachers may be the role models to build students' confidence using scaffolding techniques and a variety of activities to encourage students to improve. To build comfort among students in public speaking, many activities can be explored in class that would help students focus and improve their delivery skills, ability to control their voice, articulation, pacing, flow body language, eye contact, and poise while speaking. The purpose of adding games to the activity is to create a comfortable environment for students to speak up and overcome anxiety.

Speech games are important in public speaking as they reflect how students overcome anxiety in public speaking through games. Through the research, we can conclude that a speech game is a tool to help teachers, educators, and students improve their speech delivery and presentation skills by overcoming their anxiety. Games are great because they add a fun element and interaction among students. This study may also give teachers ideas on how to implement different speech games and adjust them according to the learner's proficiency in public speaking. With these findings presented in this study, it is hoped that it can fill the gap in the teaching and learning process of how primary school students overcome anxiety in public speaking, especially in Malaysian schools.

Therefore, this research study has provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of game-based interventions in enhancing public speaking confidence among primary students by reducing anxiety. The findings of this study contribute to both theoretical and practical aspects of educational psychology and pedagogy. The theoretical contribution lies in the validation of the applicability of gamification principles in addressing anxiety-related challenges in the context of public speaking, shedding light on the potential of immersive and interactive learning experiences in primary education. Moreover, this research serves as a significant addition to the existing knowledge base by emphasizing the importance of early interventions in building essential life skills, such as public speaking confidence, which can have a lasting impact on a child's academic and personal development. In the broader context, this research holds substantial significance as it aligns with the evolving educational landscape, where innovative and engaging approaches are needed to nurture well-rounded individuals capable of effective communication in an increasingly competitive and interconnected world.

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Corresponding Author

Sharenjit Kaur A/P Kolwant Singh

Email: mc201012627@student.unitar.my

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