

The Effectiveness of Using Games to Teach Remedial Instruction (RI) Pupils

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Abstract

This article explores the use of games as an instructional strategy to enhance English language skills among Remedial Instruction (RI) pupils at SK Sungai Jejawi, Teluk Intan, Perak. The primary aim is to support Year Four RI pupils in acquiring basic English language skills through game-based learning. Data for this study were collected through classroom observations and pre- and post-tests administered before and after the intervention. The pre-test was used to identify the RI pupils, while the post-test measured learning outcomes following the implementation of game-based teaching. The findings indicate that incorporating games into English lessons fosters active learning, improves pupil engagement, and enhances attention span. Moreover, pupils demonstrated a better understanding of simple English concepts when taught using games. The study concludes that games are an effective pedagogical tool for teaching English, particularly for learners in remedial programmes.

Keyword: Remedial Instruction (RI), Games, Effectiveness, Teach, English

Introduction

The teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) remains a central focus in Malaysian primary education, especially due to the varying levels of language proficiency among pupils (Ismail & Hashim, 2020). Learners at different proficiency levels require differentiated instruction to ensure effective language acquisition. Among these learners, remedial pupils often face greater challenges, particularly in grasping basic English elements such as phonics, vocabulary, and simple sentence construction (Tan, 2021). Addressing the needs of these learners is not just an educational concern but a national priority, as language proficiency has long-term implications for academic achievement, future employment opportunities, and social inclusion.

These pupils are typically grouped under the Remedial Instruction (RI) programme introduced by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in collaboration with the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC), aimed at supporting low-achieving learners in mastering fundamental literacy and numeracy skills (MoE, 2018). Remedial learners represent one of the most vulnerable groups, often falling behind due to limited exposure, low confidence, and learning gaps that begin early and widen over time. A major concern for RI pupils is their limited exposure to English outside of designated classroom hours, which restricts language practice and retention. This lack of consistent reinforcement often results in low motivation, poor engagement, and difficulties in understanding the language (Nor & Yusof, 2023). Learning a second language can be inherently challenging, and sustaining learners' interest and motivation is critical to success (Lee et al., 2019).

Despite these efforts, one key issue remains unresolved which is on how to engage and motivate RI pupils who often lack interest in conventional classroom instruction. Research highlights that poor engagement and minimal reinforcement outside school hours hinder their language development (Nor & Yusof, 2023). Therefore, finding alternative instructional approaches that make learning English enjoyable and effective is crucial.

In response to these challenges, the integration of game-based learning has gained attention as a viable pedagogical approach in ESL classrooms. Educational games offer a dynamic, interactive, and enjoyable learning experience that can enhance pupils' engagement and cognitive development while promoting critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative learning (Rahim et al., 2022; Wong & Low, 2020). Teaching English through games aligns with the learning needs of remedial pupils by reducing anxiety, boosting self-confidence, and increasing willingness to participate in language tasks (Mustafa & Subramaniam, 2020).

This study focuses on Year Four RI pupils who continue to struggle with the basics of the English language. It aims to examine the effectiveness of using games in teaching English to RI pupils, specifically in improving language acquisition and fostering positive attitudes toward learning. Additionally, the study explores how the integration of games, as embedded in the RI teaching module, can offer a practical and motivating alternative to traditional methods often seen as monotonous and ineffective for low-proficiency learners. The findings

are expected to provide insights into whether game-based instruction can improve learning outcomes and enhance pupils' willingness to engage with English in meaningful ways.

Significance of the Study

This study is important for English language teachers, curriculum developers, and school administrators working with low-proficiency pupils in Malaysian primary schools. Although the Remedial Instruction (RI) programme provides support for these learners, many still struggle with engagement and motivation during English lessons. By exploring the use of game-based learning in actual RI classrooms, this study offers practical strategies that can help improve pupils' interest, confidence, and learning outcomes.

Focusing on Year Four RI pupils, the research highlights a group often underrepresented in ESL studies. The findings are expected to guide teachers in making lessons more interactive and meaningful, while also contributing to potential enhancements in the RI teaching module. By doing so, the study bridges the gap between classroom needs and effective teaching practices tailored to remedial learners.

Problem Statement

The teaching of English as a second language (ESL) remains a significant challenge in Malaysian primary schools, particularly due to the wide range of learners' proficiency levels. Among these are pupils placed under the Remedial Instruction (RI) programme, who often struggle even with the basic components of the English language such as phonics, vocabulary, and sentence structure. These pupils typically have minimal exposure to English outside of the classroom, which further limits their ability to acquire the language effectively (Ismail & Hashim, 2020). Traditional, teacher-centered instructional methods often fail to meet the diverse learning needs of remedial pupils, resulting in low motivation, limited engagement, and poor language acquisition outcomes (Tan, 2021; Nor & Yusof, 2023).

To address these issues, there is a growing call for the integration of more interactive and student-centered strategies in ESL teaching. One such approach is the use of games, which have been shown to foster learner engagement, enhance motivation, and support the development of critical thinking and collaboration skills (Rahim et al., 2022; Wong & Low, 2020). Game-based learning provides a fun and dynamic environment that can reduce learning anxiety and make language acquisition more meaningful and memorable, especially for low-proficiency learners (Lee et al., 2019). Despite its proven potential, the use of games in the teaching of English to RI pupils remains underutilized in Malaysian classrooms.

This study focuses on Year Four pupils identified under the Remedial Instruction (RI) programme introduced by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in collaboration with the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC). It aims to examine the effectiveness of using games to teach English to remedial learners and to explore how such an approach can positively influence pupils' attitudes, motivation, and engagement. Ultimately, the research seeks to determine whether game-based instruction can serve as a practical and effective alternative to conventional methods for improving English proficiency among RI pupils.

Research Objectives

To evaluate the effectiveness of using games in improving English language skills among Year Four RI pupils.

Research Questions

How effective are games in enhancing the English language skills of Year Four RI pupils?

Literature Review

The use of games in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) has gained increasing attention as an effective pedagogical approach, particularly for pupils with low proficiency levels such as those in Remedial Instruction (RI) programmes. Remedial pupils are learners who require additional instructional support due to their struggles in acquiring foundational language skills. For these pupils, traditional classroom methods may be insufficient or even counterproductive, often resulting in disengagement, anxiety, and lack of motivation (Hang, 2017; Ismail & Rahman, 2021). In contrast, game-based learning has emerged as a promising strategy to address these challenges by providing a dynamic and inclusive learning environment.

Research has consistently shown that games can foster a positive and engaging atmosphere conducive to language learning, especially among low-achieving pupils. Games create an interactive, low-stress environment that encourages risk-taking and active participation, thereby reducing language anxiety and boosting learners' confidence (Oliveira & Pereira, 2019; Yunus et al., 2021). This is particularly crucial for remedial learners who often experience repeated failures and low self-esteem in traditional ESL settings.

Games also offer flexibility and can be adapted to the linguistic levels and learning styles of different pupils. This adaptability allows teachers to differentiate instruction in a manner that is both inclusive and effective (Khan, 1996; Al-Masri & Abu-Rmaileh, 2019). For example, vocabulary-focused games such as word puzzles or matching activities can help pupils retain new words more effectively, while role-playing games can improve communicative skills like speaking and listening (Hua, 2021). Studies also indicate that syntax and grammar can be reinforced through interactive board games and card-based activities, which promote repeated exposure and contextualised use of target language structures (Al-Masri & Abu-Rmaileh, 2019).

Furthermore, motivation is a critical factor in second language acquisition, and games are widely recognised for their ability to enhance learner motivation (Wang & Li, 2011; Rahim et al., 2022). When pupils are engaged and emotionally invested in their tasks, they are more likely to retain information and persist in their learning. For remedial pupils, this motivation can be the key to overcoming persistent language barriers.

Overall, the literature supports the integration of educational games as a viable and effective tool for teaching ESL, particularly for remedial learners. Games not only provide meaningful and enjoyable language practice but also help to create a relaxed, supportive, and learner-centred environment. As such, educators are encouraged to incorporate game-based strategies to enhance engagement, improve learning outcomes, and meet the diverse needs of ESL pupils.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach supported by quantitative data to investigate the use and effectiveness of games in teaching English to Remedial Instruction (RI) pupils. The research was conducted at SK Sungai Jejawi, Teluk Intan, Perak, with Year Four RI pupils as the primary participants. The study focused on understanding how game-based instruction could improve the English language skills of low-proficiency learners.

Participants

The participants consisted of a group of Year Four pupils identified as requiring Remedial Instruction (RI) based on their performance in a diagnostic assessment conducted prior to the intervention. These pupils demonstrated significant difficulties in foundational English skills, including reading, writing, vocabulary recognition, and sentence construction. The selection ensured that the participants represented the target group in need of intensive and differentiated instruction.

Data Collection Methods

Pre- and Post-Tests

To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, a pre-test was administered before the implementation of game-based teaching to establish baseline proficiency levels. Following the intervention period, a post-test was conducted using similar question structures and content areas to measure the pupils' improvement in English language skills.

Observation

Non-participant classroom observations were conducted systematically throughout the intervention. These observations focused on pupils' engagement, motivation, participation levels, and their behavioural and emotional responses to the game-based activities. Detailed field notes were taken during each session to capture authentic classroom interactions.

Intervention

The intervention was implemented over a period of [insert duration, e.g., four weeks], during which educational games were integrated into English language lessons. The games selected were simple, interactive, and tailored to suit the language proficiency levels of RI pupils. Examples of the games used include:

- i. Vocabulary Bingo – to enhance word recognition and recall
- ii. Matching Word Cards – to build vocabulary and comprehension
- iii. Sentence Building Games – to improve syntax and sentence structure
- iv. Action-Based Language Games to reinforce listening and speaking skills through physical movement and verbal commands

Each lesson was designed to align with specific learning outcomes while promoting active learning through play and repetition.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed descriptively to determine improvements in the pupils' English language proficiency. Mean scores and percentage increases were used to illustrate learning gains. Qualitative data from classroom observations were analyzed thematically to identify emerging patterns related to pupil engagement,

motivation, participation, and behavioural changes throughout the intervention. These themes provided contextual insights into the effectiveness and practicality of the game-based learning approach for RI pupils.

Findings

Pre-Test And Post Reading Test

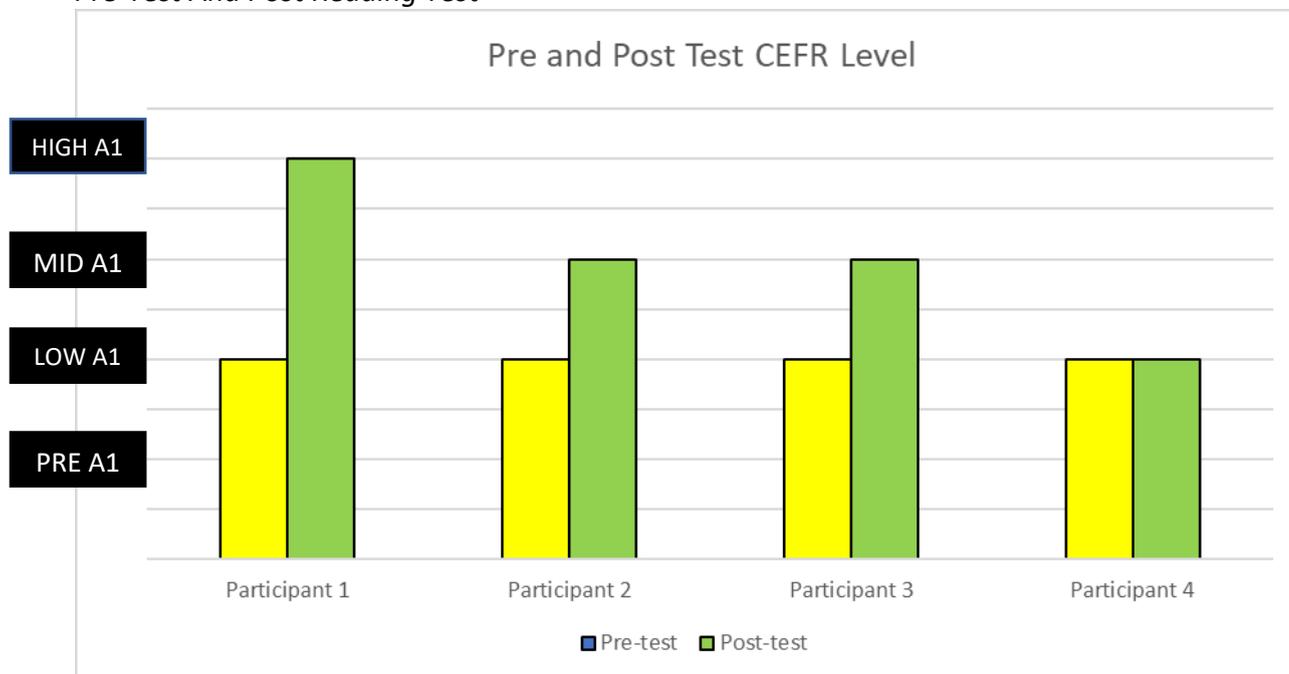


Chart 3: Pre and Post Test CEFR Level

Based on the data presented in Chart 3, all four participants initially scored at the Low A1 level in the pre-test, indicating limited proficiency in basic English skills. Following the intervention, notable improvements were observed among three participants. Participant 1 demonstrated the most significant progress, achieving a High A1 level in the post-test. Participants 2 and 3 both progressed to the Mid A1 level, reflecting moderate gains in their language proficiency. However, Participant 4 remained at the Low A1 level, showing no observable improvement in the post-test. These findings suggest that the majority of the participants benefited from the game-based instructional approach, indicating that such interventions, when supported by active teacher facilitation, can positively impact the acquisition of basic English skills among Remedial Instruction (RI) pupils.

Discussion

The results of the pre- and post-tests, as illustrated in Chart 3, provide meaningful insights into the effectiveness of game-based learning in teaching English to Remedial Instruction (RI) pupils. All four participants initially scored at the Low A1 level in the pre-test, reflecting minimal English proficiency and affirming their placement within the RI programme, which is designed for pupils who face difficulties in core language areas.

Following the implementation of game-based strategies, three out of four participants demonstrated measurable improvement in their English reading proficiency. Specifically, Participant 1 progressed to the High A1 level, while Participants 2 and 3 advanced to the Mid A1 level. These findings suggest that the integration of educational games into English

instruction positively impacted pupil engagement, motivation, and comprehension of basic language concepts.

Several factors may have contributed to this improvement. The interactive and enjoyable nature of games likely reduced language anxiety and fostered a more supportive learning environment, thereby increasing pupil confidence. The repetitive and contextualized exposure to vocabulary and reading patterns within the games provided meaningful reinforcement of key language skills. Moreover, consistent teacher support and scaffolding played a crucial role in guiding pupils to stay focused and make sense of the learning material.

However, it is noteworthy that Participant 4 did not demonstrate any progress in the post-test, remaining at the Low A1 level. This outcome underscores the presence of individual differences in learning, such as varied learning paces, differing levels of language anxiety, or external factors such as limited exposure to English outside the classroom. It suggests that while games can be effective for many learners, certain pupils may require additional, differentiated interventions tailored to their specific needs.

In conclusion, the findings support the use of games as a valuable instructional tool in the Remedial Instruction classroom. Games promote active participation, repeated exposure to essential language elements, and create a low-stress environment conducive to learning. However, to maximize their impact, game-based strategies should be complemented with targeted teacher guidance and individualized support to ensure that all pupils, regardless of their learning profile, can benefit from the approach.

Conclusion

The use of games in teaching English to Remedial Instruction (RI) pupils has shown to be a promising pedagogical approach. Games offer an engaging and interactive learning environment that can support the acquisition of foundational language skills such as phonics, vocabulary, and basic grammar. Their playful nature not only fosters enjoyment but also enhances learners' motivation and active participation, which are often lacking in traditional instruction, especially among struggling learners.

Moreover, games serve as a medium through which pupils can build confidence and experience success in small, manageable steps. The immediate feedback and positive reinforcement embedded within game-based activities help to create a sense of progress, which can be particularly encouraging for pupils who face difficulties in language learning.

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of game-based learning is influenced by multiple factors. These include the appropriateness and educational value of the games used, the pupils' individual learning needs and preferences, and the teacher's ability to effectively facilitate and integrate games into the instructional process. Therefore, while games can be a powerful instructional tool, they should not be used in isolation.

In conclusion, games hold significant potential as a supplementary strategy for teaching English to RI pupils. When used thoughtfully alongside other evidence-based teaching approaches and tailored to the unique needs of each learner, game-based learning can contribute meaningfully to improving English language proficiency in remedial settings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for enhancing the use of game-based learning in teaching English to Remedial Instruction (RI) pupils:

- i. **Integrate Games with Traditional Methods:** While games have proven to be effective, they should be used as a supplement to traditional teaching methods. Combining games with other instructional strategies ensures a balanced approach that addresses the diverse needs of RI pupils.
- ii. **Choose Age-Appropriate and Educational Games:** It is essential to select games that are suitable for the cognitive and language abilities of Year Four RI pupils. Games should be engaging, simple, and designed to reinforce key language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and sentence construction.
- iii. **Differentiate Instruction:** Recognizing that pupils progress at different rates, games should be tailored to meet the varying levels of proficiency and learning styles within the class. This could involve offering different types of games that target specific language skills or providing additional support to students who need more guidance.
- iv. **Provide Teacher Guidance and Support:** To maximize the effectiveness of games, teachers should actively facilitate the game-based activities, providing clear instructions and offering real-time feedback. This ensures that pupils remain focused on the learning objectives and receive support as needed.
- v. **Monitor and Assess Progress Continuously:** Regular assessment, both formal and informal, should be conducted to monitor pupils' progress. Teachers can use observations and post-game discussions to evaluate the learning outcomes and identify areas where additional support is required.
- vi. **Encourage Collaboration and Peer Learning:** Games that promote teamwork and peer interaction can help foster a collaborative learning environment. Encouraging pupils to work together can enhance their language skills, provide opportunities for social interaction, and reinforce the learning process.
- vii. **Incorporate Home-Based Language Activities:** For pupils who may not receive sufficient exposure to English outside of the classroom, incorporating simple game-based activities that can be practiced at home may help reinforce their learning and encourage continued progress.
- viii. **Professional Development for Teachers:** Teachers should be provided with ongoing training on how to effectively integrate games into their language teaching strategies. This will help ensure that educators are equipped with the skills and knowledge to design and implement game-based learning activities that align with educational goals

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