

Speak and Shine: "Talk Dice Game" for Young English Learners

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this community service project is to investigate the implementation of the "Talk Dice Game" to improve the students' vocabulary skill in sentence construction in the fifth grade students of SD Kristen 1 Dobo which amounted to 28 students (Class VA). Although animals and body parts were previously introduced in English, students' lexical knowledge was extended to four new categories: hobbies, food, family and jobs. Students played a game in which they rolled three dices to get a topic, a sentence starter, and the style of speaking; and then they each had to read the sentence they created in the style indicated by the third dice. The game promoted the technique of thinking on-the-spot, and also, created some rather surprising sentences. The findings were that not only did the game serve to promote vocabulary retention, it also enabled students to experiment with sentence-construction even with minimal training in grammar. The game supports the value of gamified, scaffolded language learning methods to early English instruction in an Indonesian primary school.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of English language instruction at the elementary school level in Indonesia, traditional approaches such as textbook-based instruction and rote memorization continue to dominate classroom practices. These methods often result in passive learning, where students are primarily recipients of knowledge, with limited opportunities to engage in active language use. Given that English functions as a foreign language in Indonesia, students' exposure to the language is mostly limited to classroom settings, creating a gap between language knowledge and actual communicative competence.

To address this issue, there is a growing need to adopt more communicative and interactive methods of teaching that provide meaningful exposure and opportunities for students to use English in context. Young learners, particularly those at the primary school level, benefit significantly from learning

environments that are dynamic, playful, and centered around interaction. Research in language pedagogy emphasizes the importance of engaging students in authentic language use through enjoyable activities that lower their affective filter and encourage experimentation with language.

One such approach is the use of language learning games, which have been shown to enhance students' motivation and willingness to communicate. As Pinter (2017) highlights, games offer a safe and stimulating environment where learners can take linguistic risks, make mistakes without fear of embarrassment, and learn collaboratively with peers. Furthermore, when games are integrated within structured lesson plans—such as through pre-teaching of vocabulary and the provision of sentence frames—they can effectively support the development of vocabulary and sentence construction skills among young learners (Moon, 2018).

This community service activity was conducted in class VA of SD Kristen 1 Dobo, involving 28 fifth-grade students. Prior to the activity, most students had been introduced to vocabulary related to animals and human body parts; however, they had not yet received instruction in forming English sentence patterns. The primary objective of this program was twofold: first, to introduce new vocabulary items relevant to the students' level; and second, to create opportunities for them to practice using English in simple sentence-making through engaging, game-based activities. By incorporating communicative games into the learning process, the activity aimed to enhance students' linguistic competence, boost their confidence, and foster a more positive attitude toward learning English.

This initiative also aligns with broader educational goals that promote student-centered learning and encourage the integration of fun, meaningful activities into the curriculum, especially for early language learners. Through this community service program, it is hoped that teachers will be inspired to explore alternative teaching strategies that make English learning more accessible, interactive, and enjoyable for primary school students.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

The participants of this community service project were 28 fifth-grade students from Class VA of SD Kristen 1 Dobo, located in the Aru Islands. The students, aged approximately 10–11 years old, had previously been introduced to English vocabulary related to animals and parts of the human body through traditional classroom instruction. However, they had not yet received structured instruction or practice in constructing English sentences, particularly in spoken form. This lack of prior exposure to sentence building provided a relevant starting point for implementing an interactive language learning intervention focused on oral production and vocabulary application.

2.2 Topics and Materials of Vocabulary

In order to expand students' lexical repertoire, the project introduced four additional categories of vocabulary: hobbies, food, family, and professions. These categories were selected based on their relevance to the students' everyday experiences and their potential to support simple sentence construction. The vocabulary was introduced in a structured manner using visual and textual aids. Each student was given printed materials that included:

- a. Labeled pictures corresponding to each vocabulary category,
- b. Word lists grouped thematically with simple translations or visual cues,
- c. Mini-posters or flashcards for classroom use.

Before engaging in game-based activities, students participated in short, focused vocabulary lessons. These pre-game sessions involved identifying words in pictures, repeating pronunciation after the teacher, and participating in guided question-and-answer practice. The purpose of these sessions was to ensure that all students were sufficiently familiar with the meaning and pronunciation of new vocabulary items, thereby allowing them to participate more confidently in the subsequent speaking activities.

2.3 Game Structure: The "Talk Dice Game"

The main instructional strategy employed in this project was a communicative game called the "Talk Dice Game", which was designed to stimulate spontaneous spoken English production in a fun and supportive environment. The game used three dice, each serving a specific function to guide the content and style of student responses:

Dice 1: Vocabulary Topic Selector

This die determined the semantic field from which the student would draw vocabulary. The six categories were:

- a. Hobbies
- b. Food
- c. Family
- d. Parts of Body
- e. Animals
- f. Jobs/Professions

Dice 2: Sentence Starter Generator

This die provided an open-ended sentence prompt to initiate a student's spoken response. These sentence stems were designed to support simple sentence construction while allowing room for creativity. The six prompts included:

- a. "I always..."
- b. "I don't like..."
- c. "Last weekend, I..."
- d. "When I was a child..."
- e. "One thing I want to learn is..."
- f. "I never..."

Dice 3: Speaking Style Modifier

This die introduced an element of expressive variation by assigning a particular speaking style to be used when delivering the sentence. This element served both to make the activity more enjoyable and to develop students' ability to manipulate their intonation, rhythm, and expression in English. The six speaking styles were:

- a. Speak slowly
- b. Speak happily
- c. Speak like a teacher
- d. Speak in a whisper
- e. Speak dramatically
- f. Speak like a cockatoo (to encourage mimicry and expressive fun)

Each turn in the game involved one student rolling all three dice and responding accordingly. For example, a student might roll "Food" (Dice 1), "I don't like..." (Dice 2), and "Speak dramatically" (Dice 3), resulting in a sentence such as: "I don't like spicy noodles!" delivered with dramatic expression. The activity allowed for repetition, peer feedback, and teacher facilitation to correct errors and encourage participation. Peer cheering and laughter created a low-anxiety environment conducive to learning.

The use of the "Talk Dice Game" promoted not only vocabulary retention but also fluency, confidence, and the creative use of sentence structures. The combination of familiar themes, guided sentence starters, and playful speaking styles contributed to a holistic language learning experience aligned with the developmental needs of primary school learners.

2.4 Procedure

The session began with an ordinary school routine: singing the national anthem (Indonesia Raya), a prayer for the whole class, and a warm-up song "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," in order to activate the prior knowledge on body parts.

The students were then divided into six groups (four groups of five and two groups of four). After vocabulary session was over, the rules of the game were introduced. The team asked the students to sit in groups and the students took turn rolling the three dices and building a sentence using the topic, sentence starter, and style of speech they rolled. Facilitators helped the students retrieve the vocabulary, pronounce words, and correct grammar when needed. To make it easy for the students, each of them wrote their sentence first before reading it aloud with the style they got through the dice. Lastly, students shared some of the sentences they came up with at the conclusion of the game with the whole class.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Talk Dice Game was a hit with the students. Throughout the exercise, extensive participation, laughter, and openness to talk were evident. Many shy and quiet students were enthusiastic talkers when they employed amusing roles (e.g., "like a cockatoo").

The use of controlled sentence starters and open-ended vocabulary questions allowed students to set serious attempts at sentence construction. Without formal grammar teaching, the students were able to build communicative sentences, at times with support. Some of the sentences shared with whole class included:

- a. I always drink milk before go to school.
- b. When I was a child, I always playing.
- c. One thing I want to learn is how to be a pilot.
- d. I never have eye pain.
- e. When I was a child, I hurt my foot.
- f. I always want to be a doctor.
- g. When I was a child, I always cry.
- h. I never see a camel.
- i. I never like my little sister because she is naughty.
- j. When I was a child, I like to play house.
- k. Last weekend, we had flag ceremony rehearsal.
- l. Last weekend, I watched a documentary about Albert Einstein on YouTube.

Errors in sentence grammar or tense were expected and not judged. Additionally, allowing errors is one of the communicative language teaching tenets that prioritizes fluency and meaning creation over accuracy at the moment (Richards & Rodgers, 2018). Research shows that vocabulary knowledge is best stored when it is activated in context (Nation, 2018). Furthermore, sentence starters offer a type of linguistic scaffolding that has the potential to mitigate cognitive load and offer learners a template to operate from (Gibbons, 2015). In this case, sentence frames helped learners to avoid being intimidated by having to generate complete ideas by themselves.

The application of the speaking style dice gave a playful and melodramatic spin to the exercise. This validates the argument that novelty and affect aid memory consolidation and learning (Sousa, 2017). Cackling while cockatoo-speaking or whispering their sentence made children laugh but also made them eager to participate, increasing positive associations with being able to communicate in English. Finally, the group collaborative setting and low-stakes gameplay atmosphere helped reduce stress levels to the point where students felt at ease to try things out. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) indicates that language acquisition occurs more effectively if learners are relaxed and self-assured—precisely what's established by playing the game.

Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5



The use of dice-based games, such as the Talk Dice Game, has been recognized in various studies as an effective strategy to enhance English language learning, especially in vocabulary development and speaking fluency among young learners. Research by Putri and Nurkamto (2020) found that incorporating a dice game into EFL speaking activities increased student engagement, boosted confidence, and encouraged spontaneous language use. The randomness introduced by the dice helped reduce learners' speaking anxiety by shifting focus from accuracy to creativity. Similarly, Sari (2019) demonstrated that elementary school students who participated in English vocabulary games, including dice-based activities, not only retained new vocabulary more effectively but also showed increased motivation to participate in class. Fitriana (2018) also observed that students became more willing to speak and take risks in English when using a speaking dice game, noting that the play-based context created a low-anxiety environment that was conducive to learning. Adding to this, Wijayanti and Susanti (2021) implemented a scaffolded version of a dice game in a primary classroom, combining sentence starters with topic prompts. They reported that the game structure enabled students to produce longer and more grammatically correct sentences compared to traditional classroom speaking tasks. Collectively, these findings highlight that dice-based games are not only enjoyable but also pedagogically sound tools for supporting vocabulary acquisition and sentence construction in early English education.

4. CONCLUSION

The Talk Dice Game successfully facilitated vocabulary learning and sentence construction practice among young EFL learners in SD Kristen 1 Dobo. In an enjoyable and supportive structure, the task bridged the gap between decontextualized vocabulary knowledge and productive language use. Even with timed conditions, students were creative, energetic, and more confident speakers in English. The model can be a useful, low-cost language learning intervention for other elementary classes in similar contexts.

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