

# Transforming ELT Through Game-Based Learning

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the integration of games into English Language Teaching (ELT) has attracted substantial scholarly attention. Although games are often perceived primarily as entertainment, within educational contexts, they serve functions that extend beyond enjoyment (Atmaja, 2025). When designed and implemented with pedagogical intent, games act as effective instructional tools that promote meaningful language learning experiences (Reinhardt & Sykes, 2014). Recent studies indicate that game-based learning (GBL) significantly improves learner engagement, motivation, and academic achievement across a range of instructional settings (Islam et al., 2025; Nursetyo et al., 2024).

One of the primary advantages of incorporating games into ELT is their ability to enhance learners' motivation and engagement. (Hafiza & Pratolo, 2024). Learners are more inclined to participate actively in educational activities that are both enjoyable and interactive (Dörnyei, 2001). Systematic reviews suggest that game-based learning reduces anxiety, promotes collaboration, and improves teacher-student interaction (Susaniari & Santosa, 2024; Hwang et al., 2023). Furthermore,

recent research demonstrates that electronic platforms, such as gamified quizzes and online games, effectively support integrated language learning and offer specific benefits for vocabulary and grammar acquisition (Earichappan & Hashim, 2024). Games also address prevalent learning challenges, including low confidence, limited vocabulary retention, and passive classroom behaviour (Wright et al., 2006). Repeated exposure and purposeful language use contribute to the development of fluency and accuracy in authentic contexts.

The effectiveness of games in English Language Teaching (ELT) is substantiated by several learning theories. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) prioritizes meaningful interaction, a characteristic frequently integrated into game-based activities (Littlewood, 2007). Total Physical Response (TPR) highlights the significance of physical movement in language acquisition (Nqoma, 2026). Experiential learning theory emphasizes the value of learning through direct experience, with games providing practical opportunities for learners to experiment, reflect, and apply language in real-world contexts (Pole & McGee, 2026). Together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that games are not merely supplementary but constitute essential elements of effective language instruction.

## **2. DISCUSSION**

### **2.1 Defining “Games” in ELT**

Within English Language Teaching (ELT), games are structured learning activities that combine educational objectives with enjoyment, challenge, interaction, and problem-solving (Pertiwi & Kalisa, 2026). Rather than serving only as entertainment, games serve as pedagogical tools that foster meaningful and engaging English-language practice. They facilitate natural communication, peer collaboration, and active language use during task completion or problem-solving. Recent studies demonstrate that game-based learning enhances learner engagement, motivation, and communicative competence in language classrooms (Razali et al., 2023; Shofyana et al., 2024).

Games help establish a low-anxiety learning environment and foster greater student confidence in English activities. In communicative language teaching, games provide opportunities for authentic interaction and student-centred learning (Tienkow & Charuchinda, 2025). Motivation is enhanced as games offer enjoyable experiences that increase attention and participation. Additionally, games can support the development of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, depending on the objectives and design of the activity (Hockly, 2022). Game-based approaches are increasingly recognised as effective strategies in contemporary ELT because they integrate interaction, technology, and meaningful communication (Fajaria et al., 2026).

## **2.2 Types and Examples of Games in ELT**

Various types of games may be implemented in ELT classrooms, selected based on learning goals, student proficiency levels, and classroom contexts. Vocabulary games, for instance, are designed to facilitate the acquisition and retention of new vocabulary. Gamified activities such as word searches, crossword puzzles, matching games, charades, and vocabulary bingo have been shown to significantly enhance learning outcomes, motivation, and satisfaction in English vocabulary learning, thereby supporting vocabulary retention and encouraging active classroom participation (Huo, 2023).

Grammar games constitute another significant category, emphasising the practice of language structures through interactive activities. Sentence races, board games, grammar auctions, and correction games enable students to apply and actively memorize, rather than rely solely on rote memorisation (Taş & Keleş, 2025). Speaking games, such as role-plays, storytelling activities, information-gap tasks, and guessing games, promote communication in realistic contexts and foster fluency and confidence in spoken English (Razali et al., 2023).

Listening and pronunciation games are widely used in ELT to improve students' comprehension and speaking accuracy.

Activities such as songs, whispering games, listening quizzes, and minimal pair competitions enhance listening discrimination and pronunciation skills. Furthermore, digital game-based platforms such as Quizizz, Kahoot! Word wall, and Duolingo have become popular in contemporary English classrooms by offering interactive experiences, immediate feedback, and gamified environments (Jannah et al., 2023). Digital games are considered particularly effective for increasing learner motivation and participation in technology-enhanced language learning settings (de Carvalho et al., 2025).

### **2.3 Principles of Game-Based Learning**

Game-Based Learning (GBL) involves integrating games into instructional processes to achieve specific educational objectives. In ELT, the use of games should follow clear pedagogical principles to ensure meaningful learning experiences. A fundamental principle is that games must have explicit learning objectives aligned with lesson goals and language outcomes. Teachers should select or design games that support language acquisition, rather than use them solely for entertainment purposes (Aprea & Ifenthaler, 2021).

Active participation and interaction represent another essential principle. Effective language learning occurs when learners communicate, negotiate meaning, collaborate, and solve problems using the target language. Therefore, games should provide opportunities for meaningful interaction and authentic language use. Additionally, games must present an appropriate level of challenge; activities that are too easy may reduce motivation, while those that are too difficult can cause frustration and decrease participation. Teachers should consider students' proficiency levels, age, learning styles, and classroom needs when implementing game-based activities.

Feedback and reflection are essential components of game-based learning. After the activity, teachers should review the language points addressed, provide corrective feedback as necessary, and encourage students to reflect on their learning

experiences. Research shows that positive emotional engagement, such as enjoyment, curiosity, and excitement, enhances learning motivation and retention. Game-based learning creates supportive, student-centred environments that promote active participation in English learning activities (de Carvalho et al., 2025; Hou, 2023).

## **2.4 DO's and DON'Ts in Teaching English with Games**

When incorporating games into English teaching, teachers should use strategies that maximise learning outcomes. Providing clear instructions before starting the game is essential, as students must understand the objectives, rules, and procedures to participate effectively. Teachers should also ensure that games align with lesson objectives and are appropriate for students' language proficiency levels and classroom conditions. Well-prepared games can enhance students' motivation, engagement, and confidence in using English (Shofyana et al., 2024).

Teachers should promote equal participation by engaging both active and less confident learners in the activity (Astawa et al., 2026). Monitoring students during the game is necessary to maintain classroom management and ensure meaningful use of English. Additionally, providing feedback and discussing learning outcomes after the game reinforces students' understanding and supports language development.

Conversely, teachers should avoid using games solely as time-fillers without clear educational objectives. Excessive competition can induce anxiety, discourage less proficient students, and hinder collaboration. Games that are overly complex or unsuitable for students' proficiency levels may confuse and reduce participation. Teachers should act as facilitators, guiding, supporting, and encouraging students throughout the learning process rather than dominating the activity (Hasbi, 2026). While games are valuable instructional tools, they should be balanced with other teaching strategies to achieve comprehensive language learning outcomes (Razali et al., 2023).

### 3. RECOMMENDATION

Games should be regarded not simply as supplementary activities in English Language Teaching (ELT), but as essential pedagogical tools that promote communicative competence, learner engagement, and active participation. Recent studies demonstrate that game-based learning significantly enhances students' motivation, collaboration, creativity, and language achievement across diverse educational contexts (Islam et al., 2025; Hafiza & Pratolo, 2024). Furthermore, contemporary research indicates that game-based learning fosters student-centred and interactive environments, allowing learners to practice English in authentic, low-anxiety settings (Earichappan & Hashim, 2024). With this in mind, it is recommended that teachers integrate games strategically into instruction to support both enjoyable and meaningful language development.

Building on this, a balanced and context-sensitive approach that incorporates both digital and non-digital games is recommended for ELT classrooms. While digital games provide immersive, technology-enhanced experiences, non-digital games remain highly relevant, especially in settings with limited technological resources (Öztürk-Taş et al., 2025). Importantly, games should align with learning objectives, promote meaningful interaction, and facilitate the integration of multiple language skills (Hasbi, 2025). Recent literature further emphasises that effective game-based learning should also support broader educational outcomes, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and learner autonomy (Nursetyo et al., 2024). The principles and practical guidelines presented in this chapter, including the DO's and DO N'Ts of using games in ELT, are intended to help teachers bridge pedagogical theory and effective classroom practice.

This chapter contributes to ongoing discussions on innovative, learner-centred ELT practices by presenting a comprehensive, theory-informed, and practice-oriented framework for game-based learning. Unlike previous studies that

focus on isolated language skills or technology-driven instruction, this chapter adopts a holistic perspective that integrates theoretical foundations, practical applications, and recent empirical evidence (2020–2025). The inclusion of updated research strengthens the contemporary relevance of this discussion and offers insights into emerging trends in ELT. Further research is needed to investigate the pedagogical impacts, implementation strategies, and challenges of integrating artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality, and culturally responsive game design into language learning to support the development of more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable educational practices.

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