

Integrating Digital Games-Based Language Learning for EFL Speaking Skills Development: A Case Study in an Indonesian University

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ABSTRACT

Digital learning has become a potential learning tool since the COVID pandemic which causes the use of new technologies including digital games-based language learning. However, the implementation still has challenges due to technical, instructional, and financial barriers. Previous studies suggest exploring more teaching experiences related to the use of digital games-based language learning for future contributions. This study aims to explore the implementation of digital games-based language learning in an Indonesian University. To achieve this goal, this study was conducted in an Indonesian university, the State University of Makassar by applying a qualitative case study to collect data. The researcher collected the data from 2 lecturers recruited using a convenient sampling technique. The thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. This study explores teacher experiences in using digital games-based language learning in a speaking classroom. This study found that the lecturers plan, implement, and evaluate digital games-based language learning in three categories namely well, moderate, and low implemented. From this result, it is claimed academically that digital games-based language learning (DGBLL) can be planned, implemented, and evaluated strategically in speaking classrooms based on learning objectives, learning outcomes, and students' learning needs. Combining technology with game-based learning, education can be more dynamic and relevant, accommodating a variety of learning styles and motivating students to be more actively involved in the learning process.

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INTRODUCTION

When digital games first appeared in the 1970s, educators quickly realized their potential as learning tools, and the connection between learning and games became a center of attention among instructional technologists and educational theorists. Second and foreign language educators also noticed the potential of games for second and foreign language learning (Reinhardt, 2019, pp. 5-6). Digital learning games have become a much-applied tool inside and outside of schools due to the increased availability of computer and multimedia technologies (Tisza et al., 2021). According to Gee (2005), good game designers are practical theoreticians of learning, since what makes a game deep is that players get to exercise their learning muscles, often without knowing it and without having to pay attention to the matter (Gee, 2005, p. 5). Due to the COVID-19 outbreak at the end of 2019, teachers had to come up with new and creative ways to teach online as social distancing was mandatory. Online platforms are used by many countries. Online learning tools ranged from educational content that pupils could explore on their own and formalized learning programs that they could work on at their own pace, to real-time online lessons led by teachers using virtual meeting platforms (Schleicher, 2020, p. 15).

The researcher conducted preliminary research at the State University of Makassar and found that there were some lecturers who used Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) settings when they taught English as a Foreign Language to the students in the English Study Program, especially in teaching speaking. In the preliminary research, the lecturer found that the lecturers had experienced using DGBLL for over five years of teaching English, especially speaking subjects. During the preliminary interview, the researcher also found that the lecturers still had barriers or challenges while implementing DGBLL. The lecturers also conducted research during their teaching using DGBLL and found the problems of the students in using and interacting through DGBLL. Most students tend to have problems with vocabulary, a lack of experience in using digital games, and a lack of motivation and interest.

This study also wants to explore the implementation of DGBLL in speaking classroom. In this case, EFL learners often need help with their speaking skills; even those with a clear idea about the language system face the same problems. However, speaking problems such as environment, lack of motivation, and time reference can be major challenges to effective foreign language learning and communication. The environment is the first cause that makes speaking difficult for students and does not support them in speaking frequently. Speaking a foreign language outside the classroom atmosphere makes people think that students want to show off. The response and attitude of a learner of English make him/her lose self-confidence. To avoid being rejected by the people around them and society in general, students tend to use their native language to interact in daily life

communication. Therefore, students will need help to progress and speak English fluently (Hetrakul, 1995).

The lack of motivation is also one of the reasons that discourage and prevent students from speaking English. Most EFL students do not see a real need to speak English, but it is considered only an academic subject because of the need for more involvement of English in real-life situations. Motivation can be driven by parents, classmates, teachers, and even by students themselves. Communicative skills can only occur if learners increase their self-confidence and have a defined goal to achieve. Nunan (1999) stressed that motivation is important to notice because it can affect students' reluctance to speak in English. In this sense, motivation is a key consideration in determining the preparedness of learners to communicate. Zua (2008) further added that motivation is inner energy. She said that no matter the learners' motivation, it will enhance their study interest.

Some prior studies have indicated that students speaking skills improved after using digital game-based language learning (Wu et al, 2014; Hwang et al, 2015; Yeh et al, 2017; Hidayah & Sukmawati, 2022). These studies found that digital games do have significant outcomes and influence on students' achievements including the improvement of soft skills and spatial skills; problem solving and critical thinking. In addition, these studies indicated that the interactive and enjoyable nature of the game motivates students to participate more actively and provides ample opportunities for practicing speaking skills. Furthermore, incorporating game-based learning strategies can be a highly effective approach to improving educational outcomes in language learning contexts.

Based on the problems, the researcher compared some studies related to the use of DGBLL and different method and objectives used. This study aims at addressing the research gap regarding the use of digital game-based language learning in speaking classroom.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative design with case study approach. A case study involves an in-depth investigation of a single case or a number of cases within their real-life context and allows for a more detailed and nuanced exploration of complex phenomena, where understanding the specifics of a single situation can require qualitative analysis to provide insights into broader patterns and issues. Understanding the patterns of insights from cases is not easy without appropriate interpretation.

This study applied convenient sampling technique (Kothari, 2004) in order to recruit the research participants with some criteria. The lecturers were willing to participate with a maximum of three interview sessions and the lecturers were appointed to teach interactive speaking, the lecturers used digital games in speaking classroom. In addition, the lecturers were recruited based on their experience with minimum 5 years in teaching speaking and their familiarity with digital games

based language learning. Based on the above criteria there were 2 lecturers who were invited and meet the criteria.

This study uses qualitative and thematic analysis to interpret the data. Thematic analysis is the best way to interpret data for a case study before analyzing the pattern into broader insights qualitatively. Thematic analysis is a research method used to identify and interpret patterns or themes in a data set; it often leads to new insights and understanding (Boyatzis, 1998; Elliott, 2018; Thomas, 2006). Users of thematic analysis develop core skills for conducting other kinds of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study used implementational space to categorize the findings related to implementation of DGBLL.

Planning

The following evidences illustrate how the lecturers plan the DGBLL in speaking classroom.

Extract 1

In planning speaking lesson, there are several factors I consider in using digital games in language learning such as technology aspect, accessibility and supported features. I think those are important things to create effective learning when I want to incorporate digital game-based language learning. (Interview RRS, 12/02/24)

In the extract above, the lecturers described several factors to consider in implementing Digital Games Based Language Learning (DGBLL). In the extract 1, Mrs. RRS explains the importance of considering technology aspect, accessibility and supported features. Those factors can help the lecturer in implementing effective Digital Games Based Language Learning (DGBLL) in speaking classroom.

Extract 2

In selecting digital games I see the features, if the features of digital games are good such as great visual and easy to use then it will be appropriate for language learning. For example word wall with good visual and audio, it is also easy to play. (Interview RRS, 12/02/24)

In the extract above, Mrs. RRS explains the importance of selecting appropriate features whether the features are good to use in incorporating Digital Games Based

Language Learning (DGBLL) in speaking classroom. In addition, the features here can be visual or audio which plays importance role in implementing digital learning.

Extract 3

Ok, next my role is as a lecturer or lecturer in a teaching and learning process while I'm using digital game based learning a first of all I would like to tell the students all the guidance and also the instructions how do we run the game itself okay so before we play it. There is like eemm.. eee.. Team split yeah in order to choose which one is the team A and team B then I give the instructions what are they going to do in that game. Eemm.. and while they are having the activities by using digital games-based I still insist eemm in that game actually sometimes eemm.. I I act like a facilitator and also a motivator because some students are not really confident to speak so I need to boost them and support them by giving the motivation or try to cheers them up so all the students can participate in that in that games and the last one is I am the evaluator. (Interview NA,15/1/24)

The third extract, Mrs. NA mentions three roles namely lecturer, facilitator and evaluator. As a lecturer in a teaching and learning process, the lecturer tells to the students all the guidance and also the instructions while using digital game-based learning. In this case, how do the students run the game before playing it and team split or how to organize the students into group. As a facilitator and also a motivator, the lecturer should facilitate and support some students to boost their confidence. The last one is as an evaluator; this is when and how the lecturer gives assessment.

Action

The following evidences illustrate how the lecturers introduce the DGBLL to the students in speaking classroom.

Extract 4

I introduce digital games by showing some types of interactive games and explain the features, how to play, rules and benefits of playing interactive games. In this case, I adjust the games with our learning objectives. (Interview RRS, 12/02/24)

In the extract above, the lecturers described action or the ways of implementing Digital Games Based Language Learning (DGBLL) in speaking classroom. In the second extract, Mrs. RRS explains that introducing digital games can be started by showing some types of interactive games and explain the features,

how to play, rules and benefits of playing interactive games. In this case, adjusting the games with our learning objectives is necessary for effective learning.

Extract 5

I use interactive digital game like word wall with spin wheel. The function of spinwheel is to give the students optional question or theme to explain. This is how I integrate the games with speaking material. (Interview RRS, 12/02/24)

In the extract above, Mrs. RRS explains that using interactive digital game like wordwall with spin wheel. The function of spinwheel here is to give the students optional question or theme to explain. This is how she integrates the games with speaking material.

Evaluation

The following evidences illustrate how the lecturers evaluate the effectiveness of DGBLL in speaking classroom.

Extract 6

Eem.. ee.. we need to prepare like evaluation or the assessment for every stages example of our teaching and learning process it's not only for digital games-based learning but also the traditional method and ee.. what else I can say I'm personalization as well the effectiveness of digital game based learning emm.. offer personalized learning experiences by adapting the difficulty level based on the player performance and also the students preferences so ee.. but then when we we need to consider ee.. sometimes we have a student they are in a different mood so of course the first thing that we need to do is try to grab their attention first before we try to eemm.. integrate the digital games-based language learning. (Interview NA,15/1/24)

In the extract above, Mrs. NA explains she needs to prepare evaluation or assessment for every stages of teaching and learning process not only for digital games-based learning but also the traditional method to see the effectiveness of digital game based learning compared other method. Then the lecturer needs to consider students' attention to see their attitude before integrating Digital Games Based Language Learning (DGBLL).

Extract 7

Of course, I have to adjust whether these game activities seem to be integrated into the overall curriculum, so they have to be umm... reinforced or help me, yeah, to achieve goals or objectives that are of course in accordance with the outline in the

curriculum. (Interview NA,15/1/24)

In the extract above, Mrs. NA explains that she has to adjust whether these game activities seem to be integrated into the overall curriculum. In achieving goals or objectives, the materials and learning tools should be appropriate with the outline in the curriculum.

Discussion

This study discusses the implementation of Digital Games-Based Language Learning in EFL Speaking Classroom. In the lecturers' interview, they explain how familiar they are with DGBLL on their experience in teaching speaking. Their experiences in teaching speaking here involve planning, action, and evaluation. In addition, the students' interviews are about their learning experience during DGBLL in speaking classroom. The implementation explains every step or procedure of incorporating Digital Games Based Language Learning (DGBLL) in speaking classroom. Key aspects of Hornberger's concept of implementational space include plans, actions, and evaluations.

Plans refer to the design and organization of language education programs and lessons, which aim to create opportunities for students to practice and develop their language skills (Hornberger, 2021). In the interview, the lecturers explain their determination for incorporating DGBLL in lesson plan before the lecturers give lecture in digital learning setting. The implication of planning the lesson with classroom setting and media is for sure to enhance effective learning, engagement and interactive communication.

In the interview about planning, the lecturers explain their experience in planning the lesson plan and how they integrate it with DGBLL. They explain how to select games before incorporating DGBLL in speaking class. The process of selection should match with learning objectives and students' learning outcomes. In the interviews, the lecturers use wordwall and bamboozle as digital games. Those games are digital serious games that can be integrated in digital learning so they are good for educational purposes especially in language learning. As mentioned by Becker (2016) that digital serious games are designed for the purpose of education (Becker, 2016, p., 43, 44). This study is also in line with Farhang & Ghorianfar (2023), they found that the curriculum in the learning process causes teachers to be ready to teach and formulate their learning activities according to the level of student preparation.

Actions refer to the actual implementation of education programs and lessons involving the use of various teaching methods and strategies to engage students in learning activities (Hornberger, 2021). In the interview, the lecturers explain their determination for incorporating DGBLL during teaching-learning process in

speaking classroom. The implication of using DGBLL in speaking classroom is for sure to enhance active participation and students' engagement with digital learning.

In the interview about action, the lecturers explain their experience in introducing DGBLL to the students and ensuring their role when incorporating in DGBLL. They introduce DGBLL by showing interactive games and ensuring their role as guide or facilitator. The important action in incorporating DGBLL is integrating the material and activities for students for effective learning. In this case, digital game based learning makes effective learning where the students can feel fun learning, the learning focused on the students if compared to other teaching methods. It is in line with Pesare et al (2016) that game-based learning method can create easier learning with educational purpose, more focused on student, can create more fun learning, and more effective than traditional classroom teaching (Pesare et al., 2016, p. 3). The importance of introducing digital technology in English language learning also stated by Liklikadze, T. (2023) that digital technologies make it possible to make the learning process more interesting, diverse and dynamic. The use of digital technologies in English language learning contributes to increasing learning motivation, activation of students' cognitive skills, diversity of teaching methods, timely monitoring of training results and student-oriented learning.

Evaluation refers to the assessment of students' proficiency and the effectiveness of education programs and lessons with aim to identify areas for improvement and adjustments (Hornberger, 2021). In the interview, the lecturers explain their determination to see the effectiveness DGBLL after the teaching-learning process. The implication of preparing assessment for DGBLL is for sure to recognize the students' learning strategies.

In the interview about evaluation, the lecturers explain their experience in assessing the effectiveness of DGBLL. They also determine criteria in evaluating students' speaking performance when using DGBLL. The last is any adjustment in teaching based on feedback or observation in incorporating DGBLL. The lecturer explained how she used bamboozle, a digital game where the students are asked to answer question based on given clue. This kind of game is designed to evaluate students' understanding and how they use digital game. This evaluation method shows the technological proficiency of the students, students' positive attitudes towards technology, and also learning engagement (Tay, 2015).

The findings provide perception about the teaching strategy, learning process and assessment related to Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL). For further explanation, the lecturers implement the process of selecting digital games based learning objectives and outcomes, introducing digital games, adjusting with feedback and finally evaluating the effectiveness.

The findings in relation to the implementation of Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) in speaking classroom can be categorized into three types namely (1) well implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL); (2) moderate implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL); and (3) Low implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL).

In the well-implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL), the lecturers give clear instructions when the students are ready and explain guidance about the features of digital games, their functions and the rules. The determining factors of a lesson succeed or fails are the instructions and the delivery of the teacher (Scrivener 2011; Ur 1996). In addition, monitoring the learning activities and facilitating interaction and collaboration are the main activities of the lecturer while integrating students with DGBLL. From those processes and activities in implementing DGBLL, the results are positive engagement and enhancement of speaking performance.

Similarly with this study, Vazirabad, A. F., & Farrokhi, F. (2020) did Investigation in using digital apps. Four different methods are used in this study to enhance phrasal verb knowledge using digital apps (Vazirabad & Farrokhi, 2020). Though the methods included blended learning, apps as main tutors, autonomous play outside the classroom, and gamified non-digital approaches, the research reveals the improvement in knowledge and digital games were used as a significant tool. These perspectives explore that digital game-based learning can be effectively implemented by lecturers in EFL classrooms (Vazirabad & Farrokhi, 2020).

From the well-implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL), it is found that DGBLL can give educational contribution to the teachers, lecturers and other researcher related to provision of clear instruction in using digital media. In this case, the future teachers or lecturers need to provide appropriate instruction in teaching material and the teaching delivery.

In the moderately implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL), the lecturer also gives clear instruction and guidance but the interaction can be moderate because of the lack of confidence and less motivation. Thus, the lecturers tried to facilitate and motivate students with a lack of confidence so all of the students could participate actively. Effective games happen an entertaining nature and ability to engage foreign language learners for extended periods without stress and boredom (Ebrahimzadeh, M., & Sepideh, A., 2017, p. 87-112)

Other related study entitled Incorporation of a Game-Based Approach into the EFL Online Classrooms: Students' Perceptions focuses on the integration of a game-based student response system, specifically Kahoot!, into English literature courses in an online EFL context (Almusharraf, 2023). The research investigates the effects of this integration on student engagement and classroom dynamics, particularly in

reviewing writing structure, terminologies, and related knowledge. The premise of the study is grounded in the concepts of intrinsic motivation and game flow. With a significant sample size of 276 undergraduate learners, the research provides a comprehensive view of students' perceptions of Kahoot! in enhancing their learning experiences. The use of t-tests and one-way ANOVA to analyze the data indicates that students hold positive attitudes towards the game-based approach in English learning. The findings suggest that educational competitions facilitated by tools like Kahoot! can diminish distractions and improve the quality of teaching and learning, surpassing traditional classroom methods. This study is particularly valuable in understanding how lecturers can effectively implement GBL to boost students' enthusiasm, encourage curiosity, and facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter in EFL online classrooms (Almusharraf, 2023)

From the moderately-implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL), it is found that DGBLL can be a new challenge for future educators to provide better instruction in using digital media. In this case, the future researchers are expected to evaluate the detail of unclear instruction in moderate category for better understanding.

In low-implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL), the lecturer may give unclear instructions or the students may not pay attention when the lecturer explain the guidance, so the students are confused or cannot engage well. The students' lack of knowledge or ability is another cause of the low implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL). When the students find difficulties, it can lead them to anxiety. The causes the learners often hesitate to speak in the target language are nervousness, anxiety about negative evaluation, lack of vocabulary, and sentence problems. The lack of participation or engagement creates these problems (Ockey, G. J., Gu, L., & Keehner, M., 2017, p.,346-359).

A study called Potential Barriers to the Implementation of Digital Game-Based Learning in the Classroom (Kaimara et al., 2021). This research extends to the exploration of pre-service teachers' perceptions of the barriers to DGBL implementation. It identifies major obstacles such as the inefficient allocation of resources and the need for professional development. Understanding these barriers is crucial for lecturers who face challenges when implementing digital game-based learning in EFL classrooms. The study suggests practical solutions such as utilizing accessible devices and implies that overcoming these barriers is not just a matter of resource allocation but also involves curriculum reform and political will (Kaimara et al., 2021).

From the lowly-implemented Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL), it is found that DGBLL still have challenge to implement. The future

researchers are expected to evaluate the detail of challenges especially in instructional challenges for effective DGBLL.

The importance of teacher training for effective DGBLL cannot be overlooked. Educators must be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to integrate digital games into their teaching practices effectively. Professional development programs that focus on the pedagogical use of technology can empower teachers to design and facilitate game-based learning experiences that align with curricular goals. For instance, workshops that explore how to select appropriate games, assess student learning through gameplay, and incorporate game mechanics into lesson plans can enhance teachers' confidence and competence in using DGBLL.

Moreover, the ethical considerations surrounding DGBLL should also be addressed. As educators navigate the integration of technology in language learning, they must remain vigilant about issues such as screen time, data privacy, and the potential for distraction. It is essential to establish guidelines that promote healthy technology use while maximizing the benefits of digital games. For example, setting clear objectives for gameplay, monitoring student engagement, and providing opportunities for reflection can help ensure that DGBLL serves its intended educational purposes without compromising students' well-being.

The integration of DGBLL into EFL instruction also raises questions about assessment practices. Traditional assessment methods may not adequately capture the learning outcomes associated with game-based learning. Therefore, educators must consider alternative assessment strategies that reflect the skills and knowledge acquired through gameplay. This might include performance-based assessments, portfolios, or peer evaluations that provide a more comprehensive view of student learning. For instance, a student's progress in a language game could be documented and analyzed to inform their overall language proficiency, offering insights that standardized tests may overlook.

Some previous studies are supported collectively and show that DGBLL activities significantly influence students' engagement and motivation in EFL classrooms. While one study demonstrates the impact of DGBLL on enhancing classroom dynamics and student enthusiasm, the other highlights the role of DGBLL in boosting students' self-efficacy, a key factor in language learning success. These insights are invaluable for EFL educators seeking to integrate DGBLL into their teaching strategies, as they provide evidence of the benefits of such methods in creating a more interactive, engaging, and confidence-boosting learning environment.

In summary, the implementation of Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) in EFL Speaking Classroom can vary from high to low levels. The role of the lecturer as a facilitator is not easy, especially to create effective Digital Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) in EFL Speaking Classroom. Using Digital

Games-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) as a learning tool for students can help students in learning speaking skills. Through DGBLL, the students are also actively engaged in speaking class and increase motivation to learn more.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Digital Games Based Language Learning was categorized into three broad types namely well, moderate, and low implementation. But the process of implementing DGBLL is well implemented. From the classroom observation, it is found that the implementation depended on the lecturers' and students' participation in the speaking classroom. While, the perception of the lecturers and students showed that the lecturers strategically planned, implemented, and evaluated digital games to integrate into the speaking classroom. In this case, they make plans based on learning objectives, learning outcomes, and students' learning needs. In implementing digital-based Language learning (DGBLL) in EFL-speaking classrooms, the lecturers are careful to select appropriate digital games like quizzes, bamboozle, and Wordwall. The last is the lecturers monitor and evaluate the students learning while integrating in Digital Games based Language learning (DGBLL) in EFL-speaking classrooms.

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