

Speak, Play, Repeat: Turning EFL Classrooms into Game-Based Speaking Arenas

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1. INTRODUCTION

In many EFL classrooms, speaking is avoided more than encouraged. Students are scared to speak out of anxiety, fear of making a mistake, or lack the opportunity to interact authentically (Islamiah & Hasbi, 2024). Many of these issues are not individual to each student, but are caused by a focus on form over communication and accuracy over fluency (Halim et al., 2025; Yousif, 2025). Classrooms become places where students know about English but seldom use it effectively.

A desire to better communicate has driven teachers to develop more engaging, communicative ways to approach speaking instruction. One example is game-based learning (GBL) which transforms classrooms into fun and productive environments for intentional language use. Through games, an anxious atmosphere is created, students participate, and are encouraged to take risks when speaking in the desired language (Ulviani, 2025; Gunawan, 2025). Games also provide a way for the student to move from “learning about language” to “learning through language use,” making it natural for speaking.

Speaking games can be considered to be effective due to their Output Hypothesis and Interaction Hypothesis. Language production allows students to highlight where they are missing information, while interaction is a chance for reflection and negotiation of meaning (Karim, 2025; Gass & Mackey, 2014). Games are not simply devices of entertainment, but places for meaningful communication. This chapter describes how different types of speaking games can transform classrooms in English as a foreign language into dynamic speaking spaces.

2. DISCUSSION

Imagine a classroom where students are not afraid to speak, where laughter replaces silence, and where communication happens naturally. This is the promise of game-based learning. However, not all games are equally effective. This section presents four types of speaking games that serve different communicative purposes and can be strategically used to enhance speaking skills.

2.1 Information Gap Games: When Communication Becomes Necessary

Information gap games are particularly beneficial to passive, unconfident second-semester EFL students as they do not have the language skills needed to interact effectively with their peers. In information gap games, students have to speak to complete a task, and they are required to do so.

In this game, two students have completely different campus maps. They must find the missing information. They can't look at each other's papers. Student A doesn't know where the language lab is, and Student B doesn't know where the canteen is. The only way to find out more information is to ask questions, explain, and confirm. At first, students might hesitate and use short sentences, but as the task proceeds, students start to speak more because they need the information to complete their work.

Here are the steps to regulate the game:

- Partner Student A and Student B up.
- Give each student different but related information (e.g., incomplete maps).
- Instruct students to share their information verbally without showing their materials.
- Monitor interaction, and end with feedback on language use.

This activity teaches students to negotiate meaning and practice using real-world communication strategies, such as clarification and confirmation, that are essential for language development (Hartono & Ihsan, 2017; Liao, 1997).

2.2 Role-Play Games: Bringing the Real World into the Classroom

Role-play games offer second-semester students the opportunity to practice talking in a realistic situation, helping them overcome anxiety and focus on their roles instead of themselves. This is especially useful for students who are uncomfortable speaking in public.

In this game, one student acts as a university staff member, and the other as a student asking about course registration. The students are given a simple scenario to work with in English. They get to know each other and can interact using their English. At first, the students may ask questions off the top of their heads, and they may not take notes. As they get to know their roles, they begin to respond naturally, saying things like, “Could you explain that again?” or “I need help with my schedule.” They feel less nervous for acting and not being evaluated directly.

Here are the steps to regulate the game:

- Assign student roles based on what students do on the campus.
- Provide a short scenario or prompt.
- Give the students a few minutes to prepare.
- Pair or small group the students in their dances.

- Provide feedback on fluency, pronunciation, appropriateness.

Through repeated role-play, students gain confidence and develop communicating skills in meaningful ways (Zulianingrum, 2025; Nugraheni & Pramana, 2025).

2.3 Guessing Games: Speaking Without Saying the Word

Guessing games are effective in encouraging reluctant students to speak because they reduce pressure and make speaking more playful and engaging. These games shift the focus from correctness to communication.

In this game, one student stands in front of the class and is given a word such as “dictionary” or “assignment.” The student must describe the word without mentioning it, while others try to guess. For example, a student may say, “It is something you use to find the meaning of English words.” At first, some students struggle to express their ideas, but the supportive and fun atmosphere encourages them to try. Gradually, even quieter students begin to participate and volunteer.

Here are the steps to regulate the game:

- Prepare a list of vocabulary related to students’ academic life.
- Ask one student to describe a word without saying it.
- Let other students guess the word.
- Rotate roles among students.

This activity promotes spontaneous language use, vocabulary development, and increased participation in a low-anxiety environment (Rohimah & Kiptiyah, 2025; Ardayati & Ramasari, 2025).

2.4 Storytelling Games: From Sentences to Stories

Storytelling games help students develop the ability to produce longer and more coherent spoken discourse. This is particularly important for second-semester learners who are still accustomed to producing short responses.

In this game, the lecturer begins with a sentence such as “Yesterday, something strange happened on campus...” and asks students to continue the story one by one. Each student adds one or two sentences. At first, students produce very simple sentences, but as the story develops, they become more creative and engaged. The story often becomes humorous, which makes the classroom atmosphere more relaxed and encourages participation.

Here are the steps to regulate the game:

- Provide a story starter or prompt.
- Ask students to continue the story sequentially.
- Encourage each student to add one or two sentences.
- Conclude with feedback on coherence and language use.

This collaborative activity reduces individual pressure and helps students improve fluency, coherence, and confidence in speaking (Altun, 2020; Meilinasari et al., 2025).



Figure 1 shows a game-based speaking skills framework that has four different game types serving different purposes. It depicts the model of input, interaction, and output of a game-based activity for improving speaking skills. Each type of game improves communication skills through meaningful use of language based on SLA theories (Gass & Mackey, 2014; Karim, 2025).

Figure 1. A game-based speaking skills framework.

3. RECOMMENDATION

A game-based learning approach to speaking may be a benefit, but only if it is planned and designed correctly (Novalina & Sari, 2025). Games should not be just an entertaining activity; they should be designed to improve the skill of speaking, expand the vocabulary, or increase the use of interaction strategies in a particular situation. For example, information gap games should focus on questioning and clarification, while role-playing games should focus on using language to communicate with others in a realistic context. If games are not designed properly, they may be disconnected from the learning goals and lose their effectiveness (Hasbi, 2025). Plus, games should be embedded in a coherent lesson planning period consisting of pre-task planning, during the task, and post-task reflection, so that the student enjoys the activity and achieves the outcomes. The results of game-based instruction, when executed correctly, have been reported in previous research (Elmahdi et al., 2025; Susaniari & Santosa, 2024). Planning and designing games for speaking is crucial to maximizing the potential of the game-based activities.

Another issue to consider is adapting the game to the individual's level of skill, learning style, and classroom situation. Second-semester EFL students are anxious and may lack confidence in speaking, requiring teachers to provide a supportive, low-pressure environment. Games must be selected so that all students can participate, regardless of ability level. For example, language input could be simplified, vocabulary reinforced, or students could be allowed time to prepare before speaking. Grouping strategies such as pairs and small groups can also reduce anxiety and encourage participation among less confident learners. There are also cultural and social factors to be considered, as some students may not feel comfortable speaking in front of the class. With an interactive and collaborative game, teachers can gradually build confidence and willingness to communicate (Astawa et al., 2026). Research indicates that reducing anxiety and increasing participation are important factors in improving the performance of speaking (Yousif, 2025;

Halim et al., 2025). Adapting games for the abilities of the learner will allow teachers to provide a supportive, friendly, and effective speaking classroom.

The use of feedback and reflection is also important. While games may encourage interaction and participation, students' learning will be more meaningful if they get feedback on their performance. Teachers should give both immediate and delayed feedback to students on their pronunciation, fluency, and the appropriateness of their use of language. Student feedback, as well as reflection from peers, helps students see their strengths and weaknesses. After a role-play activity, ask the student to reflect on which expressions they used successfully, or which ones they struggled with. This reflective process encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and practice metacognitive skills. Feedback should be supportive so that the student feels safe and motivated. Studies have shown that when communicative activities are used together with feedback, students learn better language and speak more confidently (Karim, 2025; Yousif, 2025). Including feedback and reflection in game-based learning can ensure that learners achieve sustainable learning.

Author



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