HOW

The Contribution of Board Games to Pre-Kindergarten Students' Oral Production

La Contribución de los Juegos de Mesa en la Producción Oral de Estudiantes de Pre-Kínder

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Abstract

During the last decades, global interest in learning English as a foreign language has increased, encouraging countries to include it in school education. This trend was followed by the Chilean Ministry of Education, which suggests teaching English based on a communicative approach starting in early childhood education. To foster students' learning, it is imperative to acknowledge that children learn differently than older learners and that English as a foreign language teachers should be able to identify their needs and implement age-appropriate strategies. This article reports the action research findings that explore the contribution of board games, memory, and bingo on pre-kindergarten students' oral expression when participating in English lessons. A group of 19 children aged four from a private school in Concepción, Chile, took part in this study by playing online and board bingo, and memory games. Data were gathered by qualitative methods, such as an observation checklist, a semi-structured

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interview applied to the co-teacher, and group interviews carried out with students at the end of the intervention. The group and semi-structured interview data were analyzed through the thematic data analysis technique, along with frequency data analysis used to process the observational checklists. The results show that students increased their English oral production when games were implemented in their lessons.

Keywords: board games, English as a foreign language, early childhood education, games, oral production

Resumen

Durante las últimas décadas, el interés mundial por el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera ha aumentado, incentivando a los países a incluirlo como parte de la educación escolar. Esta tendencia fue seguida por el Ministerio de Educación de Chile, que sugiere la enseñanza del inglés basada en un enfoque comunicativo desde los primeros años de educación. Para fomentar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes, es imperativo reconocer que los niños aprenden de manera diferente a los mayores, y que los profesores deben ser capaces de identificar sus necesidades e implementar estrategias adecuadas para esa edad. En este artículo se presentan los resultados de una investigación-acción que explora la contribución de los juegos de mesa, memoria y bingo, en la expresión oral de los alumnos de educación preescolar cuando participan en la clase de inglés. Un grupo de 19 niños de cuatro años, de un colegio privado de Concepción, Chile, participó en este estudio jugando bingo y juego de memoria con material en línea y concreto. Los datos se recogieron mediante métodos cualitativos, como una lista de observación, una entrevista semiestructurada aplicada a la co-docente y entrevistas grupales realizadas a los estudiantes al final de la intervención. Los datos recogidos por la entrevista grupal y semiestructurada se analizaron mediante un análisis temático, y un análisis de frecuencia para las listas de observación. Los resultados evidencian un aumento en la producción oral en inglés de los estudiantes cuando se implementaron juegos en la clase de inglés.

Palabras clave: educación temprana, juegos, juegos de mesa, inglés como idioma extranjero, producción oral

Introduction

In recent years, parental interest in their children learning English at early stages has increased worldwide (Oliver & Azkarai, 2017). In Chile, this interest has been acknowledged by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) affecting the educational policy. For example, in 2020 MINEDUC published a suggested curriculum to be implemented in early childhood education based on the Communicative Language Approach. This has brought new challenges for early language teachers, who face demands on children's characteristics, motivation, and strategies to develop English language skills. Thus, there is a need to explore different ways to foster children's foreign language learning, in which games emerge as an appropriate strategy to support this process.

Games promote exploration and the development of meaningful learning which are the foundation of early childhood education in Chile; therefore, they are considered an important tool for children to learn (Ministerio de Educación, 2018). Furthermore, games create opportunities to learn through playful interactions with objects and others that lay the foundations to understand abstract concepts in the future (UNICEF, 2018) engaging and allowing students to repeat tasks without losing interest.

In early language learning, the role played by the English language teacher is essential. It has been shown that teachers working with children must have a deep knowledge of their cognitive development, learning needs, and skills (Mourão & Ellis, 2020; Pinter, 2011) to select and organize games that create conditions for all students to feel confident, and develop their language skills.

Against this background, the purpose of this article is to report the findings of an action research study, in which language practice games were implemented to foster Chilean pre-kindergarten students' oral production in English in their English as a foreign language (EFL) lesson. The results provide evidence of the relevance of games for engaging children in the use of English. Similarly, this study's results show the crucial role that teachers play in supporting children's foreign language development.

Theoretical Framework

Early Foreign Language Learning

The number of English language programs for early language learners has been increasing globally. According to Barahona (2016), English is regarded as a tool that facilitates access to economic development, leading governments all over the world to implement early English language learning programs as part of their educational systems. Similarly, parents have developed the assumption that learning English will be important for their siblings in the future (Tabalí, 2020). Thus, English has emerged as an international tool of communication fueled by the relentless forces of globalization (Barahona, 2016).

In Chile, the learning of English has been regarded as a key element to help the development of the country and to promote the globalization process (Tabalí, 2020). In this regard, English has become a compulsory foreign language subject since the 1990s. Nevertheless, the Chilean curriculum has changed substantially during the last 20 years (Barahona, 2016), moving gradually to introduce English in primary school (Inostroza, 2018; Tabalí, 2020). In 2012, the MINEDUC proposed the Communicative Language Approach as a key element of the curriculum as this approach involves students in an active role in incrementing the exposure to the target language (Tabalí, 2020). Moreover, in 2020, the

MINEDUC published a document called 'Curriculum Proposal for Teaching English as Foreign Language for Kindergarten', setting up as its main objective to allow students to communicate in English in a meaningful and contextualized way (MINEDUC, 2020).

Thus, a new demand for qualified English language teachers with an understanding of pedagogic principles and child development has emerged (Mourão, 2015).

Very Young Language Learners' Characteristics

Children are naturally interested in activities that help them make sense of the world and their place in it. According to Puchta and Elliott (2017), the term *very young language learner* is used when referring to children between three to seven years old. Children maturation is influenced by their culture, sex, environment, and parents (Ameer, 2016; Washington-Nortey et al., 2020). Early language teachers must know children's attitudes, interests, and learning circumstances to select appropriate tasks (Ameer, 2016).

In Chile, children often start attending school at the age of four. At this age, they are naturally curious and enthusiastic and have intrinsic motivation to explore the world around them (Pinter, 2017). However, Mourão and Ellis (2020) suggest that children's positive attitudes and high motivation do not guarantee future success and continued confidence. To keep their motivation and interest, they need to continue feeling good about learning a foreign language.

Recent studies (e.g., Hu, 2016; Pokrivčáková, 2020) have challenged the idea that very young learners have a cognitive advantage in learning foreign languages, focusing on the learning experiences as critical factors. As Pinter (2011) declares, early learners of English could become superior pupils to those who started later, only if the teaching was appropriate, teachers were qualified, and there was continuity between primary and secondary schooling. Similarly, Mourão and Ellis (2020) suggest that different factors contribute to successful learning, such as respect for the way children learn, close collaboration with parents, and planning the transition. By considering those factors, "it is more likely that the child will become a successful language learner and confident user of English" (p. 8). In this regard, Puchta and Elliott (2017) argued that it is vital to provide opportunities to practice the new language making children feel familiar with the concepts, which would allow them to use the language spontaneously. Similarly, Degirmency and Yavuz (2015) suggest that the implementation of concrete material, and physical and fine motor activities combined with the foreign language, could contribute to learning. Moreover, some scholars (e.g., Pokrivčáková, 2020; Emery & Al-Marzouki, 2018) remark that teachers should provide a variety of activities that encourage the use of their imagination, creativity, and energy; for instance, games.

Early Language Learners Speaking Skills

In pre-primary education, foreign language learning tends to be considered as a preparation for a further level of education; therefore, it generally aims to develop basic communication abilities, foster motivation by making language learning experiences fun, and develop cognitive, metacognitive, and metalinguistic skills through initial contact with a foreign language by integrating language and context. Hence, the development of oral production is gradual and connected to understanding development; children enjoy playing with words and experimenting with the language, even when they rely on limited resources (Pinter, 2017). Ameer (2016) argues that children start using their language skills before they become aware.

Thus, teachers must be aware of age-appropriate strategies to support the development of language-speaking skills. For instance, Pinter (2017) suggests that when learners begin to speak, they start using single words, nouns, adjectives, and short formulaic expressions. In the same line, Puchta and Elliott (2017) notice that children learn to speak by imitating what they hear and see, and emphasize that teachers expect children to start speaking, first imitating what they have heard, interacting with others, and then learning to say things by themselves.

Vocabulary Development in Early Language Learners

Vocabulary development is a key element when learning a language. It requires learners to have a solid mnemonic ability and a high level of metacognitive ability to encode the information in different ways (Tonhyani & Khanehgir, 2017). Pokrivčáková (2020) suggested that new vocabulary must be presented in a meaningful context because when words are linked to visual manifestations (pictures, photographs, drawings, flashcards, or real objects), they create opportunities for children to develop learning in a multi-sensory experience.

Likewise, Pinter (2011) highlights that learning new vocabulary is a critical process in which children hear relevant words in relevant contexts. Still, before starting to use them, they need to encounter the words several times. Consequently, identifying children's cognitive foundations (memory and recall ability), neurological maturation, communication with adults, and individual and cultural differences are important factors to consider. Moreover, Pinter (2017) notes that respecting students' first language and considering its use to support their second language is essential. Additionally, the scholar acknowledges that learners should have opportunities to reproduce patterns and vocabulary in a controlled way before expressing more freely highlighting the importance of remaining fun.

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Mourão and Ellis (2020) provide a set of recommendations related to vocabulary acquisition at early ages (Figure 1) emphasizing the relevance of teachers' preparation, students' exposure, and the importance of playing, among others.
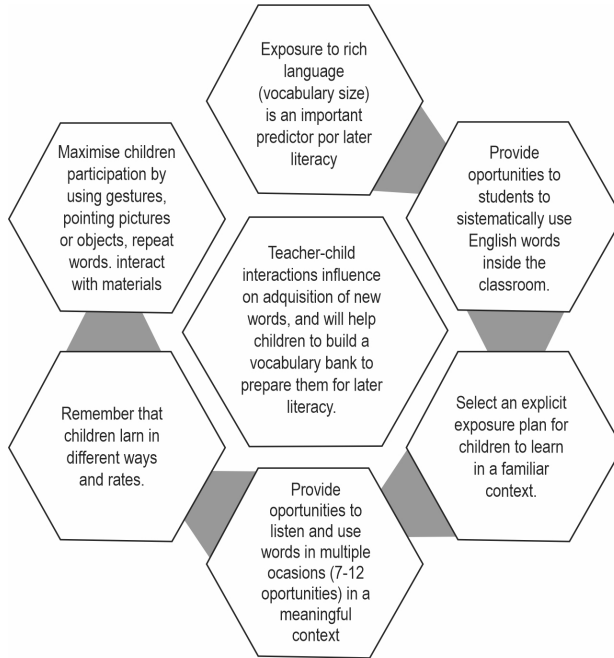
Figure 1. *Vocabulary Development Suggestions According to Mourão and Ellis (2020)*

Source: Own creation

For example, Emery and Al-Marzouki (2018) carried out a study in two Omani state primary schools about using language-learning tasks in the young learners' classrooms. Their findings showed that teachers perceived that those tasks involved learners in challenging themselves, promoted teamwork, required students to use the language in real-life situations, and gave opportunities to practice their speaking fluency.

Games in Early Language Learning

Playing is one of the pillars of early childhood school education in Chile; therefore, learning experiences and materials have an important role when teachers prepare their lessons (MINEDUC, 2020). According to Derakhshan and Davoodi (2015), vocabulary games make

the learning process more valuable, enjoyable, and relaxing as they help students retain target words quickly by allowing a more communicative language use. According to Putcha and Elliott (2017), games involve looking, listening, and moving all at the same time; thus, making language learning more memorable and emotionally engaging. Additionally, Pokrivčáková (2020) notices that when playing, children learn new words and phrases unconsciously.

In the same line, Pinter (2017) suggests that games offer great opportunities for hearing the same language repetitively, and for learning to take part in simple conversations. Additionally, educational games encourage to be physically and mentally active, represent student-centered activities, focus children's attention, and promote socialization; thus, they seem appropriate for early language learners (Derakhshan & Davoodi, 2015). However, not all games are appropriate for all students. For instance, Mourão (2018) informs that children differ in their favorite English language games and activities. In her study with pre-primary children, she found that these activities include dialogues with a puppet, a variety of games (many involving flashcards), looking at books, songs, rhymes, telling stories, and inventing games. Likewise, Inostroza's findings (2018), based on children's voices, inform that the implementation of games in the EFL lesson supported their motivation and made sessions feel shorter.

Method

This is an action research study exploring the contribution of games to foster the English oral production of a group of pre-kindergarten students. This involves action and reflection from the teacher, along with a critical and systematic exploration of her practices (Burns, 2010).

Research Problem

In 2020, the MINEDUC launched a proposed curriculum to teach English from pre-kindergarten. This document suggests considering games as a central element. In this regard, early language learners are expected to orally communicate in English using the target vocabulary when participating in class, interacting, and expressing themselves in the foreign language with peers and adults.

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In the study teaching context, after the first months of instruction, early-year students could identify and comprehend commands and questions in English, and they displayed great motivation for participating in the English language lesson. However, every time that they were asked to participate during the lesson, they tended to use their L1, Spanish. Thus, board games (Memory and Bingo games) were implemented during the lessons to foster students' oral skills.

Research Objectives

The current action research's general objective is to explore the contribution of board games (Memory and Bingo) on pre-kindergarten students' oral use of English in EFL lessons. There are three specific objectives of this study: (1) to describe the frequency of children's English language use when playing board games (Memory and Bingo); (2) to identify the co-teacher's perception of the use of games to support students oral use of English; and (3) to identify students' perception of the use of games in the EFL lessons.

Participants

One of the participants was a Chilean nursery schoolteacher, who has the expertise on teaching EFL to pre-primary students. She worked with the teacher-researcher, this was her first year teaching this group and her first time using board games to teach English.

The other participants were 19 pre-kindergarten students who were invited to take part in the study. These were children between four to five years old in their first year attending a private school in urban Concepción, who had daily 40-minute EFL lessons. All of them were L1 Spanish speakers, presented positive attitudes to the English language lessons, and had high levels of motivation towards games and activities where they were active. However, they tend to lose motivation and concentration when performing a passive role, such as answering questions, matching pictures, and textbook activities. All participants had presented consent from their parents to participate in the study.
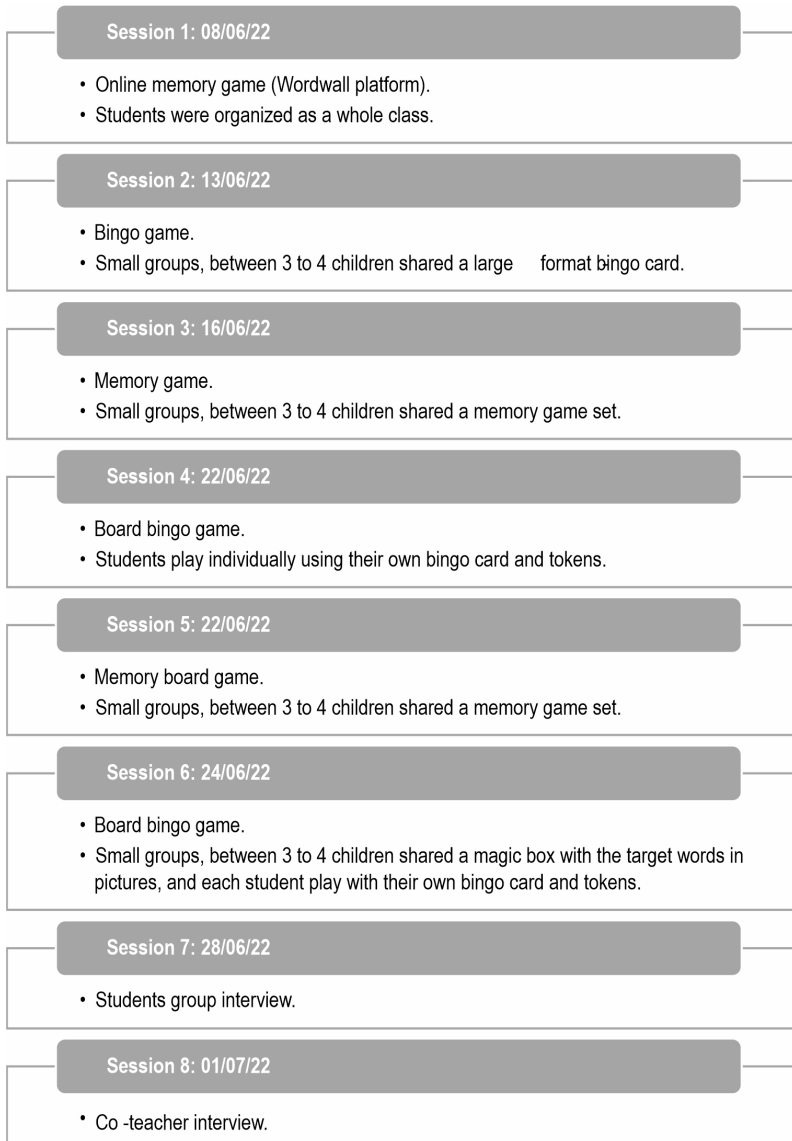
Procedure

The intervention lasted six 30-minute sessions that were part of their English lessons, in June 2022. Students worked in the classroom as a whole class and in small groups. Tasks were planned from guided activities to more independent ones, as can be seen in Figure 2 below.

Sessions were planned considering three stages: pre-, while, and post-task. During the pre-task stage, students were able to recall and reproduce daily vocabulary, such as colors, weather, and days of the week, among others. During the while-task stage, target lexical items were presented and students were given opportunities to practice them by playing Bingo and Memory games. Finally, in the post-task stage, children were provided with opportunities to recall and name the target vocabulary items (Figure 2).

In each of the six intervention sessions, which were part of the English lessons, students' participation was registered in an observational checklist.

In the first session, students played an online memory game displayed on the whiteboard; they selected two cards and named them. In the second session, they were organized into

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Session 1: 08/06/22

- Online memory game (Wordwall platform).
- Students were organized as a whole class.

Session 2: 13/06/22

- Bingo game.
- Small groups, between 3 to 4 children shared a large   format bingo card.

Session 3: 16/06/22

- Memory game.
- Small groups, between 3 to 4 children shared a memory game set.

Session 4: 22/06/22

- Board bingo game.
- Students play individually using their own bingo card and tokens.

Session 5: 22/06/22

- Memory board game.
- Small groups, between 3 to 4 children shared a memory game set.

Session 6: 24/06/22

- Board bingo game.
- Small groups, between 3 to 4 children shared a magic box with the target words in pictures, and each student play with their own bingo card and tokens.

Session 7: 28/06/22

- Students group interview.

Session 8: 01/07/22

- Co -teacher interview.

Figure 2. Intervention Summary

five groups and shared a large bingo card, a digital roulette was displayed on the whiteboard, and in turns, students were asked to name the vocabulary presented in English. In the third session, they were organized into two groups of four children and one group of five; altogether played a memory game (each group was monitored by the teacher and students were asked to name the target vocabulary in English). In the fourth session, they played bingo with individual bingo cards; the teacher walked around the classroom asking students to take a card from the magic bag and name it for the class. In the fifth session, they were organized into two groups of four kids and one group of three; they played a board memory game. In the last session, they were in two groups of four and one group of three and played a board bingo game.

Finally, the last two sessions were used to carry out two group interviews with students and a semi-structured interview with the co-teacher.

Data Collection Techniques

Three techniques were used: (1) observational checklist, (2) group interview, and (3) semi-structured interview. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, the interviewees' first language, to avoid issues of communication and to make them feel more comfortable.

Observational Checklist (Appendix A)

Observational sheets in the form of a checklist were used to register the students' oral use of English in each lesson. The items addressed the times children named, or did not, the lexical item in English or Spanish. These sheets were completed by the teacher-researcher and the co-teacher. In the last two sessions, students were divided into three groups and a teacher oversaw registering students' responses on an observational checklist for each group.

Semi-Structured Interview (Appendix B)

A semi-structured interview was applied to the co-teacher as this instrument is flexible, promotes reciprocity between the interviewer and participant, and allows the interviewer to follow up with questions based on participants' responses (Kallio et al., 2016). It considers five questions, and its purpose was to gather information about her perception of students' use of English during the games.

Group Interview (Appendix C)

A group interview was applied to seven students in two small groups, one group of three and another group of four children. According to Lewis (1992), this type of interview better responds to children's characteristics and age promoting their participation. Interviewees

were selected regarding their consistency in attendance at the intervention sessions. There were three questions, and their focus was to identify students' perceptions of the use of games in English lessons.

While both interviews were carried out in Spanish, they were translated into English for this article.

Data Analysis Technique

Thematic data analysis was used to process the obtained data from the interviews, which was transcribed, analyzed, and categorized from emergent codes related to motivation and the use of English during the lessons. The observational checklist data were analyzed through frequency analysis, by counting the number of times children carry out the actions described in the checklist according to the lesson stages of pre-, while-, and post-task.

Results and Discussion

In the present study, the results and discussion have been organized by each of the three specific research objectives (SO# henceforth). In addition, to protect children's identity, pseudonyms have been used to identify the participants.

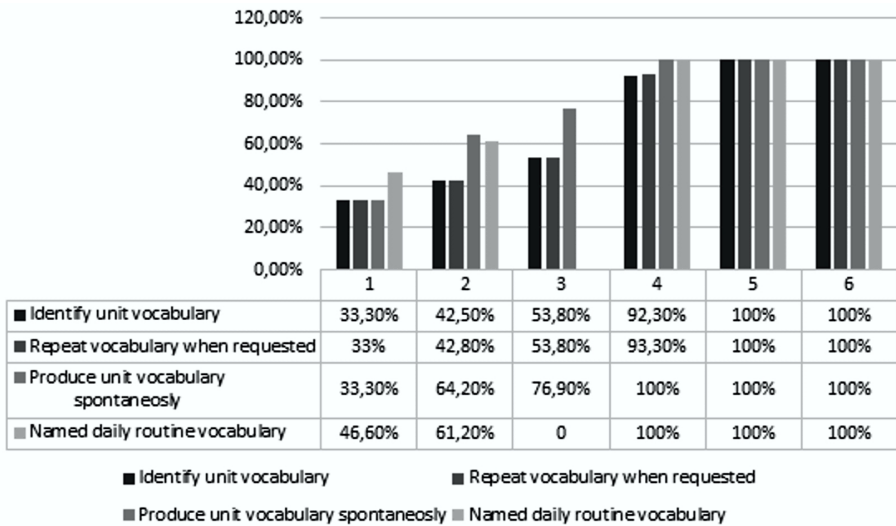### SO1: To Describe the Frequency of Children's English Use When Playing Board Games (Memory and Bingo)

Data were gathered using observational checklists that the teacher-researcher and the co-teacher applied during each session. The findings were organized by the stages of the session (pre-, while, and post-task).

Pre-task

Activities were carried out as a whole class and data were registered regarding (a) the number of students attending and (b) their participation in the lesson. Due to school internal activities in session 3, pre-task was not reviewed; therefore, data from that session were not reported in Figure 3.

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Considering the pre-task stage, by the end of the intervention, almost all the students were able to identify the unit vocabulary, repeat it when requested, produce it spontaneously, and name it related to the daily routine (Figure 3 below).

Results give evidence that regarding students' vocabulary repetition, there is a slight difference from the first to the last session while implementing the games. However, all other

	1	2	3	4	5	6
■ Identify unit vocabulary	33,30%	42,50%	53,80%	92,30%	100%	100%
■ Repeat vocabulary when requested	33%	42,80%	53,80%	93,30%	100%	100%
■ Produce unit vocabulary spontaneosly	33,30%	64,20%	76,90%	100%	100%	100%
■ Named daily routine vocabulary	46,60%	61,20%	0	100%	100%	100%

■ Identify unit vocabulary ■ Repeat vocabulary when requested
■ Produce unit vocabulary spontaneosly ■ Named daily routine vocabulary

Figure 3. Percentage of Students' Participation at the Pre-Task Stages

Source: Own creation

aspects observed increased while the students were exposed to the implemented games, such as students' identification (session 1: 33%, session 2: 42.8%, session 3: 53.8%, session 4: 93.3%, and sessions 5 and 6: 100%), spontaneous production of the unit vocabulary (session 1: 33.3%, session 2: 64.2%, session 3: 76.9%, and sessions 4, 5 and 6: 100%), and students' spontaneous naming of vocabulary related to the daily routine (session 1: 46.6%, session 2: 64.2%, session 3: no data, and Sessions 4, 5, and 6: 100%).

Results illustrate that students' use of English increased, as can be observed in Figure 3; by the last session, all students were able to identify and produce target vocabulary spontaneously.

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While-task

Results focused on the number of opportunities given to students to orally use English during their participation in the games. In general, students struggled with two lexical items: *wrench* and *tire*; therefore, none of them used English while playing the games.

These results show some consistency from session 1 to session 5 (Figure 4). Session 6 inconsistency is observed, this could be because of external and internal factors, such as poor
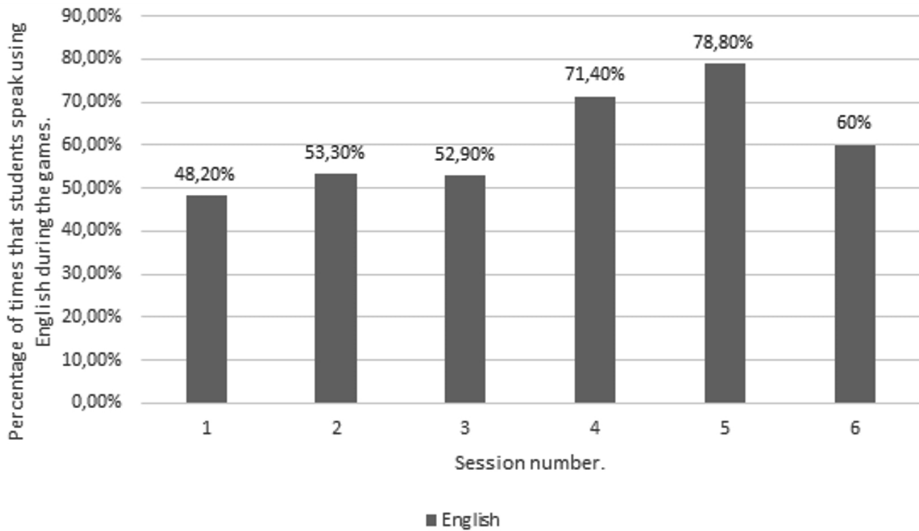
**Figure 4**. Percentage of Times Students Speak in English During While-Tasks

self-efficacy, motivation, and students' silent periods, among others. These results are in line with Clarke (2009) who demonstrated that early language learners vary in their willingness to start using English: while some take risks, others will be more reticent in starting to speak.

Results show that there was an increase in the number of times in which children used English from session 1 through session 5. In session 1, 48.2% of the time students named concepts in English; therefore, by session 5, 78.8% of the time students named concepts in English. In session 6, recoil is found, with only 60% of the time students named concepts in English. These results are consistent with those obtained by Shintani (2012) in which learners gradually reduce the use of L1 and increase more complex L2 output, with their motivation staying high throughout the cycles of repetition. The same scholar suggests that over time, they perform tasks more easily and their comprehension improves. In both Shintani's (2012) and the current action-research study, as students repeated the task, some started to switch from being listeners to becoming producers.

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The results showed that during sessions 4 and 5, students' use of English was more frequent than during sessions 1, 2, and 3 (as can be seen in Figure 5 below).

Post-task

Results were analyzed considering the number of opportunities given to students to orally use English during closing activities. There is an increase in the number of times they use English orally (Figure 5), but this increase was inconsistent during the sessions. In session 1, students answered using English 60% of the time during closing activities; in session 2, 53.3% of the time; in session 3, 50% of the time; in session 4, 84.6% of the time; in session 5, 71.4% of the time; and finally in session 6, 71.4% of the time.
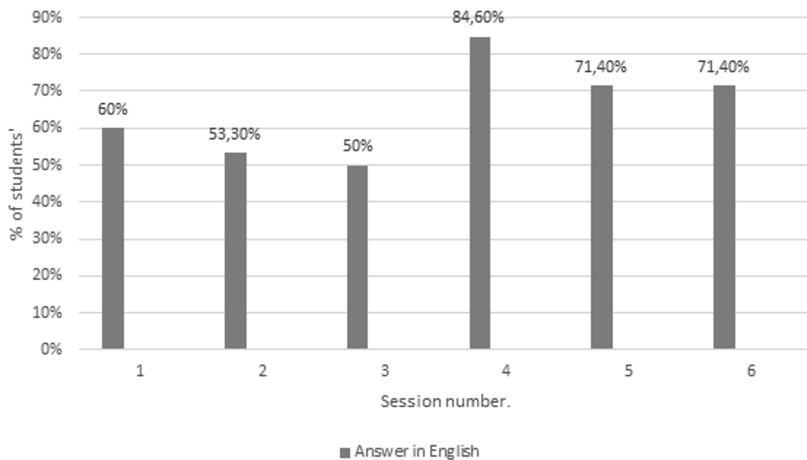
Figure 5. Percentage of Students' Use of English in Closing Activities
During Post-Task Activities

Source: Own creation

These results suggest that implementing games could foster students' oral use of English when participating in English language lessons. This would support the idea that games are a natural activity for children, which promotes motivation, reduces anxiety levels, and promotes enjoyment in early language learners (UNICEF, 2018). In addition, these results confirm Pinter's (2019) views that game-playing produces positive effects on language learning processes such as vocabulary. Furthermore, these results are in line with Inostroza (2018), who remarked that games are meaningful activities that give children opportunities to use language in a comfortable environment. Similarly, Derakhahan and Davoodi (2015) stated that vocabulary games allow students to use language communicatively, creating context to use and exchange language to communicate and express their opinions.

Following Clarke's (2009) argument and the current action research findings, games supported learners to use English based on their comprehension and proficiency level of English. This also shows that skilled early childhood professionals can support children's conversations, scaffold their oral language when engaging them in conversation, and find a balance between talking and listening to the children.

SO2: To Identify the Co-Teacher' Perception of the Use of Games to Support the Oral Use of English

Data to address specific objective two were gathered in a semi-structured interview applied to the co-teacher at the end of the intervention, the interview was transcribed, read, and analyzed through thematic analysis. Data were categorized into one theme: Use of English, and four sub-themes, namely, confidence, repetition, students' participation, and contextualized use of English (Figure 6).
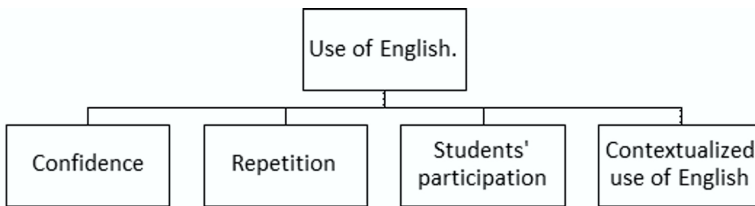
Figure 6. Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes Related to the Use of English

Source: Own creation

Sub-theme 1: Confidence

Regarding this first sub-theme, findings show that the co-teacher perceived that students tend to use English when feel confident. These findings suggest that when students were in the last stages of the intervention, they presented a better comprehension of English and their self-efficacy grew, therefore, they felt more confident to speak using the target language. The co-teacher advised that when students understood and had opportunities to use the vocabulary in a contextualized manner, they felt more confident in using English. The following quotes illustrate this point:

T: *More confidence to express them verbally.*

T: *In the end, this is received naturally, meaning, they have already internalized it even more.*

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T: [The use of English] was also seen in the children's confidence since contextualizing it through the games gave children more confidence.

These findings are in line with Pinter (2019) who suggested that repetition allowed children to get immersed in the task, express their potential, and increase their motivation, confidence, and self-efficacy. Over time, learners were able to perform tasks easily, their comprehension improved and there was a positive effect on their confidence. The same scholar noticed that repetition makes children more confident, fluent, and accurate; students became better at handling cognitive difficulties, as well as managed to consider each other's needs as listeners, which makes them more motivated and confident as speakers.

Sub-theme 2: Repetition

Regarding this second sub-theme, findings show that the co-teacher perceived that repetition helped students foster their participation using English when playing the games. The co-teacher suggested that games that required repetition helped students to express themselves in English. Furthermore, the co-teacher considered that the memory game promoted repetition, because of the mechanic of the game itself in which students name the concept each time they turn over a card. The following quotes show this point:

T: In my case, I feel more achievements of their oral expression with the memory game since it was repeated more.

T: Of course, they had more turns. The other thing is that when turning the flashcards over, they had to say it twice.

T: At the beginning, I only noticed a repetition of vocabulary, and this gave me the chance to observe that through these strategies, they were able to internalize and understand it more.

This point is also consistent with Rokita's study (2007) that informed that children learn English quickly but also forget it fast when frequent repetition and high-intensity exposure are not provided. This is also aligned with Pinter's (2019) findings that suggested that repetition is a valuable pedagogic tool because it promotes cooperation, enjoyment, motivation, and confidence; over three repetitions, children are allowed to focus on meaning and form simultaneously.

Sub-theme 3: Students' Participation

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About this third sub-theme, findings show that the co-teacher perceived that students were in general motivated to participate during the English lessons when games were implemented. She argued that students' oral participation using English was more frequent during the last sessions, and she identified the memory game as promoting better students' oral participation, as in this game children had more opportunities to interact with peers and to speak in general. The following quotes illustrate this point:

T: There was already a higher percentage of expression in English.

T: Yes, the use of English was evident, and it was registered more than anything else in the individual participation when I asked them directly, they tended to use English.

T: I can mostly identify the memory game, in which there was more verbal expression.

These findings are consistent with the Washington-Nortey et al.'s (2020) study, which showed that children benefited from peers' expressive language skills, and denoted that children are more likely to interact with peers than adults (teachers) in the classroom.

Another key element that emerges in these findings is repetition to engage children's participation during the lesson. In this regard, Pinter (2019) noted that when playing, children spontaneously engage in repetition, moreover when they want to repeat a game or activity that was fun the first time.

Sub-theme 4: Contextualized Use of English

Regarding this fourth sub-theme, the co-teacher argued that when students had a better comprehension of the target vocabulary, they used it more often. According to the co-teacher, when children understood the lexical items and had opportunities to use them in a contextualized manner, they felt more confident in using them. Furthermore, the co-teacher suggested that bingo promoted students' comprehension of the new language. The following quotes illustrate this point:

T: [The use of English] was also seen in the children's confidence since contextualizing it through the games gave children more confidence.

T: Bingo promoted more understanding.

T: That is not only naming but also understanding the vocabulary and everything related to it.

This is consistent with Mourão and Ellis's (2020) recommendations; they suggested teachers select a plan to develop explicit exposure to help students learn in familiar content and focus, providing opportunities for the children to listen and use words in a variety of contexts and on multiple occasions. In this manner, games are shown as an efficient strategy to foster English language learners.

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SO3: To Identify Students' Perception of the Use of Games in the English Lesson

Data to address specific objective 3 were gathered in two group interviews applied to seven students at the end of the intervention. These interviews were transcribed, read, and

analyzed through thematic analysis. Obtained data were categorized and reported into one theme, enjoyment, and three sub-themes, namely, games, memory, and bingo (Figure 7).
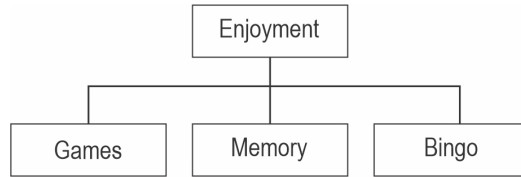
Figure 7. Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes Emerged from Children's Views

Source: Own creation

Theme: Enjoyment

Regarding this theme, findings show that students enjoyed the English language lessons, especially when games were implemented; most students identified games as their favorite aspect of the English language lessons. Furthermore, two children said that the lessons were fun. However, they were not able to refer to specific aspects they enjoyed. The following quotes show an example of this point:

Researcher: Do you like English language lessons?

Vane, Daniel, David [all at once]: Yes.

Andrea: I like everything.

Researcher: English language lessons are fun or boring?

David: Fun.

Vane: Everything [Referring to the fact that she likes everything about the ESL lesson].

Considering the interview answers, it can be concluded that in general children showed a positive attitude toward the English language lessons and they also enjoyed activities related to this specific subject. These findings are aligned with Pinter (2019) who suggested playful and fun tasks feed intrinsic motivation.

Sub-theme 1: Games

Regarding this first sub-theme, findings show that students enjoyed games in the English language lessons. Most students were able to identify their favorite game. However, it was hard for them to explain the reason behind this, with two students answering recursively *"just because"*, and because it was fun. One of the students mentioned that he enjoyed the mechanics

of games. Moreover, they suggested that in the future they would like to play games in the English language lessons. Examples of these points can be found in the following extracts:

Researcher: Did you like the games?

Vane, Daniel, David [all at once]: Yes.

David: When I work on the games.

Daniel: In the games.

Vane: The games.

Vane: [Nodded affirmatively with her head, referring that she likes both games: memory and bingo].

Researcher: Would you like to play more similar games later with some new words?

David, Daniel, and Vane [at the same time]: [Nodded their heads in agreement].

This positive perception about implementing games into English language lessons could be fostered by the game characteristics such as being useful, fun, and inviting to active participation; it is dynamic, and socially interactive (UNICEF, 2018). Similarly, the obtained data are consistent with the literature, when referring to the fact that the nature of the game fits children's nature. Games are a student-centered activity, which includes interaction, physical and cognitive activity, socialization, competition, and cooperation (Derakashan & Davoodi, 2015). These results are consistent with Inostroza's (2018) findings on children's views on games, their enjoyment, and engagement, which help them develop their language skills.

Sub-theme 2: Memory

Regarding this second sub-theme, findings show that four out of seven students identified the memory game as their favorite. However, they could not identify the reasons behind their choices, tending to say, *"Just because"*. Only three students verbalized them, two participants referred to their enjoyment, and one student referred to the mechanic of the game itself. The following quotes show this point:

Researcher: What do you like the most about the English language class?

David: Memory.

Daniela: Because it is fun.

Researcher: What was your favorite?

David: The memory.

David: Because…because you must find the same.

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Sub-theme 3: Bingo

Regarding this third sub-theme, findings show that students presented a positive attitude to the Bingo game, even when most of the students did not identify it as their favorite game.

Students liked playing during lessons. Three out of seven students selected bingo as their favorite game. However, they were not able to identify the reasons behind their choices when asked. The following quotes show this point:

Vane: Bingo.

Andrea: Eh, bingo.

Findings showed that implementing games in English language lessons can foster children's use of English and promote student participation and motivation.

Conclusions

The current action research results provide evidence that the use of board games (memory and bingo) could contribute to pre-kindergarten students' oral use of English. They also show that games are valuable for EFL lessons as they engage and motivate children, allowing them to repeat a task without losing interest.

This intervention highlighted the key role played by English language teachers when planning appropriate strategies to teach English to pre-kindergarten learners by considering their characteristics and interests to support their vocabulary development. Moreover, teachers must know how to select and organize games to encourage English use, create conditions for all students to participate boldly and confidently, and develop their language skills.

Another aspect that emerges from the current study is the importance of innovation in the classroom, and the search for new strategies that motivate students into the adventure of learning a foreign language, fostering their learning processes.

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While the current study presents insights into the contribution of games in EFL lessons, some limitations related to the study's data collection instruments have been identified. Unfortunately, video recordings were not allowed by the school authorities; this technique would have helped to clarify data obtained from each student's usage of language during the lessons. Further studies need to be carried out in the field of early foreign language learners, especially when referring to children under six years old.

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Appendix A
Observational Checklist

Session:			Date:		
Teacher:					
T.	**Item**	**Yes**	**No**	**Frequency**	
Use of English.	Pre-task				
	Students identify vocabulary from the unit.				
	Students repeat vocabulary when requested (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				
	Students spontaneously reproduce vocabulary related to the unit (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				
	Students spontaneously reproduce vocabulary related to daily routines (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				
	When asked a question, students respond to it in English (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				
	While-task				
	When participating in the games, students verbalize the concept presented in English (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				
	When participating in the games, students verbalize the concept presented in Spanish (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				
	When participating in the games, the student does not respond verbally or physically about the concept presented (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				
	Post-task				
	When asked a question, students respond to it in English (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				
	When asked a question, students respond to it in Spanish (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				
	When asked a question he/she does not answer (the number of times this occurs is recorded).				

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Appendix B
Co-teacher Semi-structured Interview

English version

Theme: Use of English.

1. Do you think there were changes with the implementation of the games? If yes, what changes did you observe on the part of the students?

2. Among the games implemented, in which of them did you observe a greater use of English by the students?

3. In which session of the intervention did you observe a greater use of English by the students?

4. In which session of the intervention did you observe a greater use of Spanish by the students?

5. Was spontaneous use of English by the students observed, and if so, on what occasions was this situation evidenced?

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Appendix C
Student Group Interview

English version

Sub-themes	Questions:
Perception of the English class	1. Do you like English lessons? why? 2. What do you like most about the English classes? 3. What do you like least about English classes?
Perception of games	4. Do you like it when we play games in English class? why? 5. Which game was the one you liked the most? (images of the games played are shown to remember "Memory game" and Bingo are presented) Why? 6. What did you like the most when you were playing that game (images are presented of the students playing the game they mentioned in the previous question) Why?
Use of English	7. Did you speak English when you played? 8. Did you speak in Spanish when you played? 9. Did you speak in both English and Spanish when you played?