


# ENHANCING ENGLISH LEARNING THROUGH INTERACTIVE GAMEPLAY: A CASE STUDY OF THE SPASS GAME IN RURAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

**\*Eric Spencer Benidict**

Sekolah Kebangsaan Sasandukon, Sabah

Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b></p> <p>Received: 30 Dec 2024 Revised: 10 Jan 2025 Accepted: 25 Jan 2025 Published: 1 Feb 2025</p>	<p>This action research aims to evaluate the efficacy of the SPASS Game, an innovative educational tool designed to enhance language learning outcomes in a rural primary school setting. The primary objectives are to assess the impact of the SPASS Game on students' proficiency in constructing simple sentences and to gauge its effectiveness in boosting motivation for English language learning. The study addresses specific issues such as low writing proficiency and lack of engagement among students in the rural school. Using convenience sampling, the target groups included students from Years 4 to 6. Methodologically, the research involved a nine-month intervention, utilizing pre and post-tests, along with classroom observations, to gather data on student performance and engagement. Statistical analysis of the data revealed a significant 40.86% improvement in students' English Language Performance levels, as measured by classroom-based assessments (PBD), and a marked increase in student enthusiasm and participation during SPASS Game sessions. These results suggest that the SPASS Game is a promising and scalable tool for overcoming language learning challenges in resource-limited educational environments. The study provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers seeking effective strategies to enhance language learning in rural primary schools.</p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>game classroom rural school english language writing skill</p> <p> OPEN ACCESS</p>	

**\*Corresponding Author:**

Email: [hypnohymn@gmail.com](mailto:hypnohymn@gmail.com)



Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the rural landscapes of Pensiangan district, traditional methods of English language instruction have encountered formidable challenges. The school, facing constraints such as limited resources and technological barriers, has observed a concerning trend: students grappling with foundational aspects of English language learning, particularly in basic sentence construction.

For instance, when tasked with composing simple sentences, students often struggle to piece together coherent structures due to a lack of engaging learning tools. Without interactive resources to aid their understanding of grammar and syntax, students find themselves disengaged and unable to grasp fundamental concepts. This deficiency in writing skills hampers their ability to express themselves effectively in written communication, hindering their overall language development.

Consequently, the urgent need for innovative solutions to address these deficiencies are recognized. Thus, the introduction of the SPASS Game (Sentence Puzzle and Structure Skills Game) - a dynamic educational intervention designed to elevate sentence construction skills - marks a pivotal moment in the school's journey towards transformative language education.

In this pursuit of transformative education, the SPASS Game serves as a beacon of innovation, promising to bridge the gap between traditional instruction and modern learning needs. Designed to transcend the limitations of conventional methods, the SPASS Game fosters creativity, collaboration, and engagement, offering a dynamic alternative to stagnant pedagogical practices. As the school embarks on its action research journey, the SPASS Game stands poised to redefine the educational experience, illuminating the path of learning for students in rural communities.

With a commitment to enhancing language proficiency and fostering a love for learning, the SPASS Game represents not only a shift in educational paradigms but also a testament to the teacher's reflection to empowering students for success in the 21st century.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the realm of English language learning, particularly within the context of rural primary schools, innovative approaches are crucial to overcoming the myriad challenges faced by students and educators. Traditional methods often fall short in addressing the unique needs of students in these settings, prompting a search for alternative strategies that foster engagement and proficiency. This literature review explores existing research on language learning interventions and the role of educational games in enhancing student outcomes.

## **LANGUAGE LEARNING CHALLENGES IN RURAL SETTINGS**

Rural primary schools often grapple with limited resources, minimal exposure to the target language, and motivational barriers, all of which contribute to academic disparities among students. Studies by Weiss et al. (2023) and Muremela et al. (2023) underscore the persistent challenges faced by rural schools in providing quality language education and highlight the urgent need for innovative interventions.

These challenges manifest in various ways, including the scarcity of qualified language instructors, inadequate access to learning materials, and a lack of cultural immersion opportunities. Students in rural settings may also experience limited exposure to English outside the classroom, further impeding their language acquisition progress. Moreover, motivational barriers stemming from socio-economic factors and cultural contexts can significantly affect students' willingness to engage with language learning activities.

## **ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL GAMES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Educational games have garnered attention as effective tools for promoting engagement and skill development in various academic domains. Research by Falciani (2023) and Hartt et al. (2020) emphasizes the benefits of game-based learning approaches in enhancing student motivation, collaboration, and cognitive skills. These

studies suggest that games offer a dynamic and interactive learning experience that resonates with students, particularly in contexts where traditional methods may be ineffective.

Games provide a platform for experiential learning, allowing students to explore language concepts in a low-pressure and enjoyable environment. Through gameplay, students can practice language skills, receive immediate feedback, and collaborate with peers, fostering a deeper understanding of linguistic concepts. Additionally, games can accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences, making them accessible to a wide range of students.

## **INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Emerging research has focused on the design and implementation of innovative language learning interventions tailored to the needs of specific student populations. Projects such as the GBLL Game by Govender and Arnedo-Moreno (2021) exemplify the potential of game-based approaches to address language learning challenges in schools. By integrating elements of play, collaboration, and skill development, these interventions aim to create engaging and effective learning experiences for students.

These innovative approaches often leverage technology to enhance the accessibility and scalability of language learning interventions. Digital games, mobile applications and online platforms offer opportunities for interactive and personalized learning experiences, catering to the diverse needs of students in rural settings. Furthermore, these interventions may incorporate elements of gamification, such as rewards, progress tracking, and social interaction, to enhance student motivation and engagement.

## **IMPACT OF GAME-BASED INTERVENTIONS ON STUDENT OUTCOMES**

Several studies have investigated the impact of game-based interventions on student outcomes, including language proficiency, engagement and motivation. Articles by Francis (2023) and Blume (2023) suggest that educational games can significantly improve student performance and attitudes towards learning. These findings highlight the transformative potential of game-based approaches in promoting positive outcomes in language education.

Educational games have been shown to enhance students' linguistic competence, vocabulary acquisition and grammar skills through repeated practice and reinforcement. Moreover, games can foster a sense of autonomy and ownership over learning, empowering students to take an active role in their educational journey. As a result, students may exhibit increased motivation, persistence and self-efficacy in language learning tasks.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

The literature reviewed underscores the importance of innovative approaches, such as educational games, in addressing the complex challenges of language learning in rural primary schools. By leveraging the interactive and immersive nature of games, educators can create dynamic learning environments that enhance student engagement, proficiency, and overall learning experiences. However, further research is needed to explore the long-term impact and scalability of these interventions in diverse educational contexts.

Moving forward, educators should consider integrating game-based approaches into their instructional practices, taking into account the specific needs and preferences of their students. Professional development opportunities and resources should be provided to support teachers in designing and implementing effective game-based learning experiences. Additionally, collaboration with researchers, developers and community stakeholders can facilitate the development of culturally relevant and contextually appropriate educational games for rural primary schools.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology of this study draws inspiration from Lewin's (1946) and Laidlaw's (1992) action research model, which emphasizes a cyclical process of planning, action, observation and reflection, as presented in

Figure 1. Through iterative cycles, this approach facilitates continuous improvement based on feedback from participants.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a quantitative research design to evaluate the impact of the SPASS Game on language learning outcomes among rural primary school students. The action research principles guide the implementation process, allowing for iterative refinement of the educational intervention.

## PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this study include students aged 10 to 12 from Year 4 to Year 6 at a rural primary school in Pensiangan district, ensuring the confidentiality of the school's name. Convenience sampling is utilized to select participants based on their availability and consent to participate.

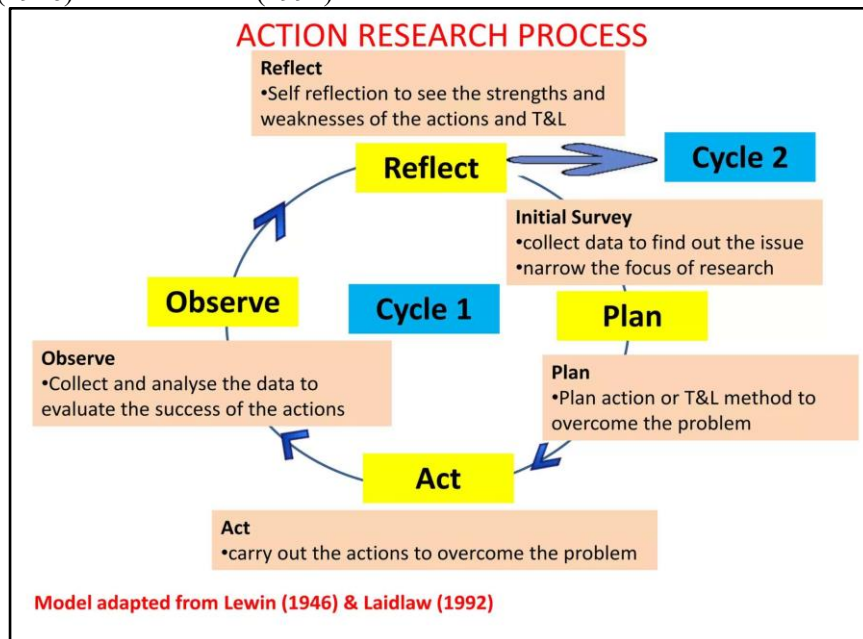
## DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection primarily involves quantitative techniques:

**Pre and post-test PBD Assessments:** Standardized tests are administered to measure students' sentence construction skills before and after the implementation of the SPASS Game, providing quantitative measures of learning outcomes based on classroom-based assessment (PBD).

**Classroom Observations:** The researcher conducts systematic observations during SPASS Game sessions to assess student engagement and language proficiency. These observations are then recorded based on a structured scale constructed prior to the intervention.

Figure 1: Lewin's (1946) and Laidlaw's (1992) action research model



Quantitative data from pre- and post-test assessments are analysed using descriptive statistics to measure changes in students' sentence construction skills. Qualitative data from classroom observations and student artifacts are thematically analysed to identify patterns and insights into the impact of the SPASS Game on language learning outcomes.

By adhering to Kurt Lewin (1946) action research model and employing rigorous quantitative methods, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the SPASS Game in enhancing language learning among rural primary school students while ensuring the confidentiality of the participating school.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Before delving into the specific findings of the SPASS Game implementation, it is essential to contextualize the research within the broader framework of addressing language learning challenges in rural primary school settings. The SPASS Game emerges as a promising solution to enhance students' writing proficiency, particularly in the domain of sentence construction, amidst limited resources and technological constraints. This section presents a reflective analysis of the research findings, encompassing quantitative analysis for both pre and post-test results and insights from observational checklists, shedding light on the transformative impact of the SPASS Game on student learning experiences.

### PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Analysing pre-implementation and post-implementation in classroom based assessments (PBD) provides valuable insights into the SPASS Game's impact on students' language proficiency as can be seen in *Table 2*. PBD assessments covered various levels of understanding, application, and creativity in sentence construction. Notably in *Table 2*, there's a significant 40.86% average increase in performance levels (TP), demonstrating the game's efficacy.

Following the implementation of the SPASS Game over the course of several months, significant improvements were observed in students' sentence construction skills as can be seen in *Table 1*. Analysis of the post-test data revealed a notable increase in the average performance result across all classes, indicating enhanced competency in constructing grammatically correct and coherent sentences. This upward trend in performance was consistent across different proficiency levels, suggesting that the SPASS Game effectively catered to the diverse learning needs of students within the target age group.

Table 1 : Pre-implementation and Post-implementation assessment results

Students	Year/Class	April <i>PBD</i> result	August <i>PBD</i> result
A	4	TP 2	TP 3
B	4	TP 2	TP 2
C	5	TP 3	TP 4
D	5	TP 3	TP 4
E	5	TP 2	TP 4
F	5	TP 2	TP 4
G	5	TP 3	TP 4
H	6	TP 3	TP 4
I	6	TP 4	TP 4
J	6	TP 4	TP 5

Furthermore, individual student progress was evident through comparative analysis of pre-test and post-test scores. Many students demonstrated substantial growth in their ability to construct sentences with clarity and accuracy, as evidenced by higher post-test performance level compared to their baseline performance. This improvement underscores the effectiveness of the SPASS Game in facilitating meaningful learning outcomes and skill development among students.

Overall, the pre-test and post-test results validate the positive impact of the SPASS Game intervention on students' sentence construction proficiency. The significant improvement observed post-intervention highlights the efficacy of the game-based approach in addressing the inherent challenges of language learning in the rural primary school setting.

## Observational Checklist Results

Complementing the quantitative data from pre and post-test assessments, the observational checklist provided more quantitative insights into students' engagement and interaction during SPASS Game sessions. Through systematic observation of student behaviours and classroom dynamics, the checklist aimed to capture the multifaceted aspects of student participation and learning experiences as can be seen in *Table 2*.

Analysis of the observational checklist data presented in *Table 2* revealed several key findings regarding student engagement and enjoyment in language learning facilitated by the SPASS Game. High frequencies of participation, enthusiasm, and interaction with peers were consistently observed across various observation items, indicating a positive and dynamic learning environment fostered by the game-based approach. Students were actively engaged in collaborative sentence-building activities, demonstrating creativity and confidence in constructing sentences within the game framework.

Moreover, students exhibited a willingness to take risks in sentence creation, embracing challenges and experimenting with different linguistic structures. This adaptive and exploratory approach to learning reflects a shift in attitudes towards language acquisition, with students displaying increased motivation and confidence in their abilities.

No	Observation Item	Low (1)	Moderate (2)	High (3)
1.	Frequency of participation	2	4	4
2.	Enthusiasm level	3	4	3
3.	Interaction with peers	2	5	3
4.	Time-on-task	4	4	2
5.	Verbal expression of enjoyment	2	5	3
6.	Non-verbal expression of enjoyment	1	6	3
7.	Cooperative play (e.g., helping others)	2	3	5
8.	Creativity in forming sentences	4	4	2
9.	Confidence in sentence construction	4	4	2
10.	Use of vocabulary and grammar	2	5	3
11.	Engagement with game rules	2	5	3
12.	Attention to game instructions	2	5	2
13.	Willingness to take risks in sentence creation	1	5	4
14.	Adaptation to game challenges	2	5	2
15.	Overall engagement and enjoyment	2	4	4

Table 2: Final observational checklist results

Additionally, the observational checklist highlighted the role of cooperative play and peer collaboration in enhancing student learning experiences. Students actively supported and encouraged each other during gameplay, fostering a sense of camaraderie and mutual learning within the classroom community. This collaborative ethos contributed to a positive and inclusive classroom culture, where every student felt valued and supported in their language learning journey.

In summary, the observational checklist results corroborate the quantitative findings from pre and post-test assessments, providing rich insights into the transformative effects of the SPASS Game on student engagement and enjoyment in language learning. Together, these findings underscore the holistic impact of the intervention in promoting meaningful learning experiences and skill development among students in the rural primary school context.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The implementation of the SPASS Game, a transformative educational intervention tailored for rural primary school settings, marks a significant milestone in addressing challenges in language learning. Through meticulous design, diligent implementation, and thorough evaluation, this initiative has showcased its potential to enrich language education in resource-constrained environments. The outcomes of pre and post-test assessments underscore the game's effectiveness in enhancing students' sentence construction skills. The observed improvements serve as quantitative evidence of the SPASS Game's impact on students' linguistic competencies, validating its educational efficacy. Furthermore, the results gleaned from the observational checklist illuminate the positive influence of the SPASS Game on student engagement and enjoyment in language learning. The frequency of observed behaviours such as active participation, enthusiasm, and cooperative play highlights the game's ability to create an interactive and dynamic learning atmosphere. Looking forward, the success of the SPASS Game project sets the stage for future endeavours aimed at refining and expanding its reach. Armed with insights from this implementation, educators can continue to innovate and develop customized educational interventions that empower students to excel in their language learning endeavours. In conclusion, the SPASS Game represents more than a mere card game - it embodies a commitment to overcoming educational hurdles and instilling a passion for learning among students in rural primary schools. As we reflect on the achievements of this innovation project, we are reminded of the transformative potential that arises when ingenuity, dedication, and collaboration converge to enhance educational outcomes.

## REFERENCES

- Blume, C. (2020). Games people (don't) play: An analysis of pre-service EFL teachers' behaviors and beliefs regarding digital game-based language learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 33(1-2), 109–132.
- Falciani, I. (2023). Game-based learning: What is it? GBL vs gamification: Types and benefits. *Europass Teacher Academy*. <https://www.teacheracademy.eu/blog/game-based-learning/>
- Francis, J. (2023). 6 benefits of including online learning games in a curriculum plan. *Alludo Blog*. <https://blog.alludolearning.com/online-learning-games/>
- Govender, T., & Arnedo-Moreno, J. (2021). An analysis of game design elements used in digital game-based language learning. *Sustainability*, 13(12), 6679.
- Hartt, M., Hosseini, H., & Mostafapour, M. (2020). Game on: Exploring the effectiveness of game-based learning. *Planning Practice and Research*, 35(5), 589–604.
- Laidlaw, M. (1992). Action research: A guide for use on initial teacher education programmes. *ActionResearch.Net*.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 4(2), 34–46.
- Muremela, M. G., Kutame, A. P., Kapueja, I. S., & Ajani, O. A. (2023). Impact of managing the supply and demand for scarce skill subject teachers on the quality of learning and teaching in rural secondary schools. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*, 4(40).
- Weiss, M. P., Rowe, D. A., Mims, P. J., & Farmer, T. W. (2023). There's no place like us: Beyond fidelity of implementation in rural contexts. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 31(2), 154–167.
- Ziarno, M. (2023). Gamification and games-based learning. *Technology and the Curriculum Summer 2023*. <https://pressbooks.pub/techcurr2023/chapter/games/>