



DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH A GAME-BASED APPROACH FOR ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS IN THE ESP CONTEXT

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Abstract: This study investigates the effectiveness of a game-based approach in developing speaking competence among architecture students within the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). While many ESP courses remain focused on grammar and translation, students in technical disciplines often lack opportunities to practice spoken English in meaningful professional contexts. To address this gap, the present research integrates gamification techniques into ESP speaking instruction, aiming to enhance learners' motivation, engagement, and oral communication skills.

The study was conducted with undergraduate architecture students and employed a quasi-experimental design. Participants were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received ESP instruction through game-based tasks, including role plays, interactive simulations, and design-related speaking games, while the control group followed a traditional curriculum. Pre- and post-tests were administered to assess learners' speaking performance based on criteria such as grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, pronunciation, fluency, and coherence.

The results revealed a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking abilities, particularly in vocabulary usage, confidence, and professional discourse. The findings support the integration of game-based learning strategies in ESP programs as a viable and effective method for enhancing oral communicative competence among students in architecture and related technical fields.

Keywords: game-based learning, speaking competence, ESP, architecture students, gamification, oral communication, communicative approach, English for Specific Purposes, interactive tasks, professional discourse

Introduction

In today's globalized world, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a crucial role in preparing students for professional communication within their fields of study. However, many ESP courses, particularly in technical disciplines such as architecture, remain dominated by grammar translation methods, offering limited opportunities for students to develop real-world speaking skills. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue, ESP instruction must be rooted in learners' professional needs, focusing on purposeful communication in relevant contexts¹. Despite this, classroom practices often fail to address the practical oral competencies required in architectural professions.

Architecture students, like those in other technical programs, frequently perceive English as an academic requirement rather than a communicative tool. This perception leads to low motivation, minimal speaking practice, and difficulty applying language in professional

¹ Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-Centred Approach*. Cambridge University Press.

discourse. Consequently, there is a growing need to redesign ESP courses to foster active engagement and build learners' confidence in speaking tasks that simulate real architectural interactions.

One promising approach to address this issue is the integration of game-based learning strategies—also referred to as gamification—into ESP instruction. According to Prensky (2001), games create engaging, goal-oriented environments that support language acquisition by increasing learner motivation and lowering affective filters². In ESP contexts, games can simulate workplace communication scenarios, such as presenting a design, explaining technical details, or negotiating with a client.

The present study explores the impact of a game-based approach on the development of oral communication skills among architecture students in an ESP setting. It aims to determine how gamified, task-based activities influence learners' fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and ability to express ideas clearly in professional contexts. By grounding the research in communicative language teaching principles and learner-centered methodology, this study provides both theoretical justification and practical recommendations for integrating game-based strategies into ESP courses for architecture and related fields.

Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is widely acknowledged as a learner-centered approach to language instruction that aligns with the professional and academic goals of students. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize, ESP is not a separate product, but an approach that considers learners' needs, their future workplace environments, and relevant discourse communities¹. In architecture-related ESP programs, the ability to communicate orally—such as presenting a project, describing a design, or negotiating with clients—is essential, yet often overlooked in traditional classroom settings.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) frameworks offer strong foundations for promoting speaking competence in ESP courses. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), communicative competence involves more than grammatical knowledge; it requires the ability to use language meaningfully in real-life contexts³. This is particularly important for architecture students who must develop specialized vocabulary, fluency, and confidence to function in professional environments.

Despite these pedagogical frameworks, the actual implementation of communicative and task-based instruction in ESP remains inconsistent, particularly in technical fields. Students are often limited to textbook-based drills, grammar translation exercises, and passive learning, with little opportunity for interactive, speaking-focused engagement (Hyland, 2006)⁴. As a result, there is increasing interest in integrating digital and interactive strategies—most notably, game-based learning.

Gamification, or the application of game elements in non-game educational contexts, is gaining attention as an effective tool for motivating learners and enhancing participation. Prensky (2001) notes that digital games can lower affective barriers and promote risk-free language experimentation. Similarly, Gee (2007) argues that games foster situated learning by placing students in simulated, meaningful environments where language is tied to action and decision-making⁵.

Recent studies have applied gamification specifically to the development of speaking skills in ESP. For instance, Godwin-Jones (2014) highlights how role-playing games and simulations support vocabulary acquisition and speaking fluency in professional contexts⁶. In the field of

² Prensky, M. (2001). *Digital Game-Based Learning*. McGraw-Hill.

³ Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Hyland, K. (2006). *English for Academic Purposes: An Advanced Resource Book*. Routledge.

⁵ Gee, J. P. (2007). *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶ Godwin-Jones, R. (2014). Games in Language Learning: Opportunities and Challenges. *Language Learning & Technology*, 18(2), 9–19.

architecture, gamified speaking tasks have been shown to improve students' ability to articulate complex ideas, describe visual elements, and communicate with clarity and confidence (Tarnopolsky, 2012)⁷.

In Uzbekistan's context, Jalolov (2012) emphasizes the importance of learner-centered, communicative methodology in foreign language teaching, noting that traditional grammar-translation methods are insufficient for modern professional demands⁸. Toshpulatova (2020) further supports the use of interactive tasks for architecture students, concluding that well-designed speaking activities aligned with real-world contexts significantly enhance oral competence⁹.

Taken together, these theoretical and practical insights form a strong rationale for integrating game-based speaking activities into ESP instruction for architecture students. The literature highlights both the challenges and the potential of using gamified tasks to bridge the gap between language learning and professional communication.

Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to examine the impact of a game-based instructional approach on the development of speaking skills among architecture students in an ESP course. The research was conducted at Fergana state technic university and involved a total of 68 second-year undergraduate students majoring in Architecture. Participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group (n = 34), which received instruction through game-based tasks, and a control group (n = 34), which followed a traditional ESP curriculum with a focus on reading and translation.

The experimental group participated in an 8-week intervention, with two 80-minute sessions per week. The instruction integrated game-based speaking tasks specifically designed for architecture students. These included:

Project Pitch Simulations (students presenting building concepts),
Client-Designer Role Plays (negotiating design decisions),
Vocabulary Bingo and Taboo (targeting technical terminology),
Design Critique Debates (explaining and justifying architectural choices).

Tasks were aligned with ESP principles, focusing on real-life professional scenarios and encouraging the use of specialized vocabulary and spontaneous speech.

Both groups completed pre- and post-tests to measure their speaking performance. The tests were evaluated using descriptors adapted from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), covering five key criteria:

1. Grammatical accuracy
2. Vocabulary range
3. Pronunciation
4. Coherence and fluency
5. Communicative adaptability in professional contexts

Each criterion was scored on a 20-point scale, resulting in a total score out of 100.

Quantitative data were collected through the pre- and post-tests and analyzed to identify differences between the two groups. Improvements in the experimental group were compared against the control group to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated, and significance was determined using standard comparative analysis procedures (without relying on specific software names here for

⁷ Tarnopolsky, O. (2012). *Constructivist Blended Learning Approach to Teaching English for Specific Purposes*. Versita.

⁸ Jalolov, J. (2012). *Chet tillarni o'qitish metodikasi*. Toshkent: O'zbekiston Respublikasi Oliy va o'rta maxsus ta'lim vazirligi.

⁹ Toshpulatova, M. (2020). Developing ESP Speaking Skills of Architecture Students through Interactive Tasks. *Uzbek Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 3(1), 34–39.

clarity and accessibility). Additionally, qualitative data were gathered from student reflections and short interviews to explore their engagement and perceptions of the game-based lessons.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study revealed a significant improvement in the speaking performance of students in the experimental group compared to those in the control group. At the beginning of the intervention, both groups demonstrated similar levels of speaking competence, with average total scores ranging between 62 and 65 out of 100. However, after the 8-week period, the post-test scores showed a notable increase in the experimental group, while only minimal progress was observed in the control group.

Specifically, the experimental group showed the following average improvements across five CEFR-based criteria:

Vocabulary range: increased from 12.9 to 17.3

Pronunciation: from 13.0 to 18.1

Coherence: from 13.2 to 17.6

Grammatical accuracy: from 12.5 to 16.5

Communicative adaptability: from 12.7 to 17.4

In contrast, the control group showed only modest gains of 0.5 to 1.0 points across most criteria, which suggests that the traditional ESP approach did not significantly enhance students' speaking competence.

The analysis of qualitative data, obtained through student reflections and short interviews, provided further insights into the learning experience. Students in the experimental group reported feeling more motivated, confident, and actively engaged in classroom discussions. They appreciated the relevance of the speaking tasks to their future profession and expressed a preference for the interactive nature of the lessons. One participant commented:

"It was easier to speak when we imagined real design situations. The games helped me use new words and express ideas without fear."

These results align with previous findings by Gee (2007) and Godwin-Jones (2014), who emphasized that game-based learning environments promote meaningful engagement and reduce anxiety in speaking tasks. Moreover, the increased use of professional vocabulary in spontaneous speech suggests that gamified tasks facilitated deeper language internalization and improved fluency.

Overall, the study confirms that integrating game-based speaking activities into ESP instruction for architecture students significantly enhances oral communicative competence. By simulating real-world professional scenarios, the intervention bridged the gap between language learning and the students' future workplace needs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that game-based instruction is a highly effective method for improving the speaking competence of architecture students in an ESP context. By incorporating interactive, task-oriented activities rooted in professional scenarios, the experimental group showed significant progress in vocabulary usage, pronunciation, coherence, and overall communicative performance. In contrast, the control group—exposed to traditional ESP instruction—showed only marginal improvements, indicating the limited impact of grammar-translation approaches on speaking development.

The results highlight the pedagogical value of gamification in language learning. Game-based tasks created a dynamic and meaningful learning environment in which students engaged in realistic communicative situations relevant to their future careers. These activities not only improved students' language production but also increased their motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate in oral tasks.

Based on the outcomes of the research, the following recommendations are proposed for educators and curriculum developers:

1. Integrate game-based speaking tasks into ESP syllabi to simulate real-world professional communication, such as project presentations, client consultations, and technical discussions.

2. Design activities that align with students' disciplinary needs, using authentic vocabulary and context-specific speaking situations to make language learning more relevant and purposeful.
3. Incorporate collaborative and competitive elements, such as role plays, simulations, and speaking games, to foster peer interaction and encourage spontaneous use of language.
4. Use CEFR-aligned assessment criteria to evaluate students' speaking performance holistically, focusing on fluency, accuracy, and the ability to adapt language to professional contexts.
5. Provide teacher training on how to effectively design and implement gamified speaking tasks in ESP classrooms, especially in technical and design-related disciplines.

In conclusion, the study supports the use of game-based methodologies as a practical and impactful approach to enhancing oral communication skills in ESP programs, particularly for students in architecture and other applied fields. Future research may explore long-term effects of gamified learning, its adaptability to blended or online formats, and its effectiveness across various disciplines.

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