

## IMPROVING B1-LEVEL ESP LEARNERS' ORAL FLUENCY THROUGH GAME-BASED LEARNING: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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### Abstract

This research examines the potential of game-based learning to enhance the oral fluency of B1-level English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners. The study is predicated on the premise that fluency is cultivated most successfully when learners are given frequent chances to use language in a meaningful, spontaneous manner, and within communicative contexts. During a ten-week intervention, the experimental group engaged in fluency-oriented communicative games, while the control group participated in conventional speaking practice grounded on more structured classroom activities. The findings indicate that the experimental group attained superior improvements in speech pace, reduced pause frequency, and enhanced total fluency scores compared to the control group. Moreover, students engaged in game-based activities were more inclined to maintain discourse and reply with greater spontaneity during interactions. These results indicate that communicative games provide optimal circumstances for the advancement of oral fluency by promoting the recurrent use of known language within a controllable communicative context. The research corroborates the perspective that fluency is enhanced not just by linguistic knowledge, but also by active engagement, self-assurance, and contextually relevant speaking practice. Consequently, game-based learning is considered an effective pedagogical method in ESP speaking sessions.

**Keywords:** Oral fluency, ESP, game-based learning, B1 learners, speaking skills, hesitation, CEFR.

### Introduction

#### Annotatsiya

Mazkur tadqiqot o'yinga asoslangan ta'lim B1 darajadagi ESP o'quvchilarining og'zaki ravonligini yaxshilay oladimi, degan savolni o'rganadi. Tadqiqot ravonlik o'quvchilarga tilni mazmunli, spontan va kommunikativ sharoitlarda takroran qo'llash imkoniyati berilganda samaraliroq rivojlanadi, degan nazariy qarashga asoslanadi. O'n haftalik aralashuv davomida tajriba guruhi ravonlikka yo'naltirilgan kommunikativ o'yinlarni bajardi, nazorat guruhi esa ko'proq nazorat qilinadigan an'anaviy speaking mashqlarini

amalga oshirdi. Natijalar tajriba guruhida nutq tezligi yuqoriroq, pauzalar soni kamroq va umumiy ravonlik ko'rsatkichlari kuchliroq bo'lganini ko'rsatdi. Bundan tashqari, o'yinlarga asoslangan topshiriqlarda qatnashgan talabalar nutqni davom ettirishga va muloqot jarayonida spontanno javob berishga ko'proq tayyor ekanliklarini namoyon etdilar. Ushbu topilmalar kommunikativ o'yinlar boshqariladigan kommunikativ bosim ostida tanish til birliklaridan takroriy foydalanishni rag'batlantirish orqali og'zaki ravonlik rivoji uchun qulay sharoit yaratishini ko'rsatadi. Tadqiqot ravonlik nafaqat lingvistik bilim, balki faol ishtirok, ishonch va kontekst ichidagi mazmunli speaking amaliyoti orqali ham rivojlanishini tasdiqlaydi. Shu sababli, o'yinga asoslangan ta'lim ESP speaking darslarida samarali pedagogik yondashuv sifatida qaralishi mumkin.

**Kalit so'zlar:** og'zaki ravonlik, ESP, o'yinga asoslangan ta'lim, B1 darajadagi o'quvchilar, og'zaki nutq ko'nikmalari, pauza va ikkilanish, CEFR

#### **Аннотация**

Данное исследование рассматривает вопрос о том, может ли обучение, основанное на игровых методах, улучшить устную беглость речи у обучающихся уровня B1 в контексте ESP. Исследование опирается на предположение о том, что беглость речи развивается наиболее эффективно тогда, когда учащиеся получают многократные возможности использовать язык содержательно, спонтанно и в условиях реального общения. В течение десятидневного периода экспериментальная группа выполняла коммуникативные игры, направленные на развитие беглости речи, тогда как контрольная группа занималась традиционной устной практикой, основанной на более контролируемых видах деятельности. Результаты показали, что экспериментальная группа продемонстрировала более высокий темп речи, меньшую частотность пауз и более высокие общие показатели беглости по сравнению с контрольной группой. Кроме того, учащиеся, участвовавшие в игровых заданиях, показали большую готовность поддерживать речь и более спонтанно реагировать в процессе взаимодействия. Эти результаты свидетельствуют о том, что коммуникативные игры создают благоприятные условия для развития устной беглости, поскольку стимулируют многократное использование знакомого языкового материала в условиях управляемого коммуникативного давления. Исследование подтверждает точку зрения, согласно которой беглость речи развивается не только за счёт языковых знаний, но и благодаря активному участию, уверенности и содержательной речевой практике в конкретном контексте. Следовательно, игровое обучение может рассматриваться как эффективный педагогический подход в обучении говорению в курсах ESP.

**Ключевые слова:** устная беглость речи, ESP, игровое обучение, учащиеся уровня B1, навыки говорения, паузы и колебания, CEFR

Oral fluency is one of the most important but also one of the hardest parts of speaking a second language. In ESP situations, fluency is not only a desired general talent; it is crucial for effective participation in real-time professional interactions, where hesitation, disruption, and excessive dependence on self-correction may hinder successful communication. B1-level students are in a very important moment of change. They normally have adequate language skills to share their thoughts, but they frequently have trouble doing it effectively and on the spot.

The CEFR says that B1 learners should be able to speak in linked sentences and take part in conversations without too much delay in familiar situations (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 63). However, classroom practice often shows speech that isn't fluent, with significant pauses, repeats, fillers, and unfinished answers. One explanation is that a lot of language schools put more value on precision and controlled reaction than on long, stressed speech. As a result, students may acquire linguistic knowledge without achieving enough automaticity.

Theoretical theories of speech creation elucidate this issue. Levelt elucidates that speaking encompasses conceptualisation, formulation, and articulation; when these processes lack enough automation, hesitation escalates and speech becomes laborious (Levelt, 1989, pp. 181–182). Skehan also separates fluency from correctness and complexity, saying that it shows how well the learner can understand and generate language in real time (Skehan, 1998, p. 270).

Game-based learning is a potential way to improve fluency since it makes people talk more often, repeat themselves, and feel more pressure to communicate. Nation contends that fluency is cultivated when learners engage with familiar language under meaning-focused pressure (Nation, 2009, pp. 89–92). This research examines the potential of game-based learning to enhance oral fluency in B1-level ESP students.

### **Literature Review**

There are several methods to describe fluency, but most of them involve how fast, fluid, and continuous speaking is. In the study of language acquisition, fluency is usually defined as the capacity to speak a language with relative ease, little hesitation, and enough continuity to keep the conversation going. Nation characterises it as the capacity to use existing knowledge at an accelerated and more automated pace (Nation, 2009, p. 89). This term is very significant since it makes a clear difference between fluency and acquiring new words. In other words, developing fluency isn't just about learning new things; it's also about making it easier to get to the information you already have when you're talking to someone. Thornbury also stresses that fluency improves when people have chances to talk for a long time and concentrate on meaning instead of correctness (Thornbury, 2005, p. 38). This indicates that learners need consistent exposure to environments that facilitate continuous speech, idea management, and sustained engagement without undue

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interruption. In ESP contexts, such fluidity is particularly advantageous since learners often need to communicate effectively in academic, institutional, or professional settings where delays and indecision may diminish communication efficacy.

From a cognitive standpoint, disfluency may occur when learners encounter a substantial processing burden. If lexical retrieval, grammatical encoding, or discourse planning continues to be laborious, speech exhibits more pauses, repairs, and restarts. Levelt's approach provides a robust elucidation of why regular, low-stakes oral use may progressively enhance automaticity (Levelt, 1989, p. 182). From this point of view, speaking relies on the coordination of several mental processes, such as preparing ideas, formulating them, articulating them, and keeping an eye on oneself. When these procedures are not fully automated, learners find it hard to speak well because they have to pay too much attention to each step of the process. Speaking practice on a regular basis may help learners remember vocabulary and structures more quickly and organise their speech more effectively, which can help ease this load over time. Therefore, fluency-oriented instruction should aim not only to increase speaking time, but also to create conditions in which language can be processed with greater speed and less conscious effort. Game-based learning may help with this since communicative games need players to make things happen again and over again, respond quickly, and pay attention to finishing tasks. Games, on the other hand, make learners talk under time limits and in sequences of interactions, which is different from static exercises. They typically need turn-taking, sharing information, making decisions, and responding right away, which all put learners in situations where they have to utilise the linguistic resources they have quickly and for a specific reason. Nation's fluency principles are especially important here since games typically employ language that players are already acquainted with under pressure to reach a goal (Nation, 2009, p. 92). This mix of familiarity and pressure to communicate is helpful since it makes learners work quicker to remember things and keep making things without giving them too much new information. Also, games may provide you repetitive cycles of using the same phrase, which may help you become more automatic in speaking over time. This is especially effective in ESP classes since communicative games may be made around topics connected to the students' jobs, which helps them become more fluent in situations that will be valuable to them in the future.

Emotional elements are still essential. Krashen's emotional filter theory posits that fear and diminished motivation might hinder the efficacy of language learning and performance (Krashen, 1982, p. 32). Games could make it easier to talk by lowering the emotional cost and increasing the number of times you do it and the number of people you talk to. When the emphasis is on finishing a task, working with classmates, or reaching a goal, students may not be as worried about making mistakes and be more inclined to keep talking. This lessening of tension may be particularly helpful for B1-level learners, who typically have enough language to talk but yet hold back because they are embarrassed or afraid of failing. However, there are not many studies that look at quantitative fluency

markers like speech pace or pause frequency in game-based therapies that are particular to ESP. This gap is significant since fluency is often addressed in broad terms, although there is a paucity of classroom-based research offering empirical information about the impact of specific teaching approaches on visible aspects of spoken performance. Consequently, more investigation into fluency-focused game-based training in ESP contexts is both urgent and pedagogically significant.

## Methods

This research employed a quasi-experimental design with 64 B1-level ESP students, 32 of whom were in the experimental group and 32 of whom were in the control group. The design was chosen so that two distinct teaching methods could be compared in real classroom settings while keeping the same groups of students. All of the people who took part were in the same ESP course and were placed at the B1 level according to the school's placement criteria, which were based on CEFR-based descriptors. Both groups learned the same things in class, including theme units on professional communication, problem-solving, interacting with customers, and explaining how things work. This manner, the material intake stayed the same for both groups, and the only real change was how they practiced speaking. The control group did regular speech exercises and practice guided by the instructor, whereas the experimental group played communicative games that focused on fluency for 10 weeks.

Timed speaking tasks given before and after the intervention were the main way that data were collected. The purpose of these activities was to see whether students' verbal fluency changed over time. The research could look at fluency in both individual production and interpersonal communication since each student did both brief monologue tasks and interactive discussion tasks. The monologue tasks asked students to talk nonstop on a topic for a certain amount of time, whereas the dialogue tasks asked them to react to a partner in organised yet communicative conversations. There were three signs of fluency: the total speaking score, the number of words said per minute, and the number of pauses per minute. The total speaking score showed how well someone spoke in general, while speech pace and pause frequency were used to show how well someone was developing their fluency. Researchers thought that a faster speech pace and fewer pauses meant that people were better at speaking automatically and producing speech continuously. Along with these performance-based tests, a brief survey of learners was given to find out how they felt about the pressure to talk, how much fun they had, and how much they thought they had improved throughout the intervention. This extra tool helped us understand the emotional aspect of fluency development, especially how the classroom climate and students' desire to speak affected it.

The experimental group's teaching included carefully chosen fluency-based communication activities that were meant to enhance speaking time and lower the amount of self-monitoring that was going on during oral performance. The challenges included

timed description games, information-gap races, rotating conversation prompts, collaborative scenario missions, and quick-response problem-solving rounds. The goal of each sort of exercise was to get students to keep using language, answer quickly, and stay focused on the significance of what they were doing and finishing the assignment, not just on being correct. The assignments were also changed in structure to keep students interested and to provide them a chance to work together in pairs, small groups, and as a full group.

One important part of the intervention's strategy was that the activities were intended to encourage people to keep talking with as little correction as possible throughout the performance. Feedback from the teacher was put off until the conclusion of the exercise so that students may keep talking without being interrupted. This choice was critical for teaching since correcting mistakes right away may help with accuracy but can stop speech output and make people hesitate more. The intervention tried to make it possible for learners to practise quicker retrieval, smoother delivery, and longer oral output by putting off correction. Over the course of ten weeks, the assignments became harder and required more communication. This helped students become more fluent by using familiar language in more dynamic scenarios. So, the research didn't look at game-based learning as a way to get kids interested in learning, but as a planned way to help them become more fluent in speaking English in ESP contexts.

## Results and Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the experimental group had much more improvement than the control group on all three fluency measures. Students that took part in communicative game-based activities spoke faster, had fewer pauses, and got higher total speaking ratings. These improvements mean that communicative games helped students talk more smoothly, answer questions more quickly, and use the language they already know more naturally. In practical words, the students in the experimental group seemed to be better at keeping the flow of speech going without too many breaks, significant pauses, or too much self-monitoring. This is a significant result in ESP settings, as students are typically required to speak clearly and quickly in circumstances that need both speed and relevancy of answer.

**Table 1. Fluency score comparison**

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Gain
Experimental	4.90	7.80	+2.90
Control	5.00	6.30	+1.30

The results align with Nation's hypothesis that fluency is cultivated by the repetitive use of familiar language in communicative contexts (Nation, 2009, p. 92). The fact that the games

had a time limit and a goal probably made students concentrate more on getting the idea over and keeping the conversation going than on being too formal. Because learners had to do activities, provide information, or answer questions in a short amount of time, they were pushed to get language back faster and utilise it more naturally. Thornbury's assertion that fluency should be cultivated via prolonged meaning-focused speech is robustly endorsed (Thornbury, 2005, p. 38). In this research, the experimental tasks continuously necessitated that learners maintain verbal communication to get a communicative goal, therefore likely enhancing their ability for sustained oral output.

**Table 2. Speech rate (words per minute)**

Group	Pre-test	Post-test
Experimental	67	102
Control	68	80

The decrease in the number of pauses is particularly important since pauses are typically one of the most obvious signals that someone is having trouble digesting speech. If there are less pauses, it might mean that students were better able to utilise language, put sentences together, and organise their thoughts while they were speaking. From a cognitive point of view, this may mean that speech processing is easier or that people can automatically retrieve language they've previously acquired. Levelt's approach elucidates this result: repeated practice enhances formulation and articulation by reinforcing the coordination of conceptual preparation, linguistic encoding, and verbal output (Levelt, 1989, p. 182). As these procedures become easier, students may focus more on meaning and engagement instead of having a hard time putting together each sentence. So, the advances in the experimental group may be seen as proof of better speech processing efficiency, not just more engagement.

**Table 3. Pause frequency (per minute)**

Group	Pre-test	Post-test
Experimental	14	7
Control	13	10

It's likely that emotional factors had a role as well. Students may have spoken more freely during the game assignments since they were working together and were less obviously being judged. This explanation fits with what Krashen said about how lesser emotional pressure makes people better at language (Krashen, 1982, p. 32). When people talk to each other in a more supportive way, learners may feel more free to take chances, keep talking even when they make little mistakes, and concentrate on communication instead of just

doing things right. These kinds of settings are especially helpful for B1-level students, who typically have enough English to say what they want but still have trouble with hesitancy and lack of confidence. So, the classroom environment established by communicative games may have helped students become more fluent not just by making them repeat things and putting pressure on them to do tasks, but also by lessening their nervousness and making them more inclined to keep talking.

These results imply that communicative games might be a good way to help students improve their fluency in ESP classes. They seem to help not just with quantifiable things like speed and pause reduction, but also with the overall capacity to keep talking in relevant communication situations. This makes them particularly helpful for intermediate learners who are getting ready to utilise English in professional or academic contexts because being fluent is directly tied to being able to communicate well.

### Conclusion

The research shows that game-based learning may make B1-level ESP learners' speaking skills a much better. It seems that longer speaking times, more urgent communication, and less tension all help speech production go quicker and more smoothly. These results show that learners become more fluent in spoken language when they have several chances to employ familiar words and phrases in relevant, time-sensitive, and interactive situations. In this way, projects that include games don't only make speaking sessions more fun; they also generate settings that are good for teaching speech skills like automaticity, continuity, and responsiveness.

For ESP instructors, the meaning is clear: they should teach fluency on purpose, and communicative games are a good way to achieve so. Teachers shouldn't think of fluency as a side effect of general speaking practice. Instead, they should create assignments that particularly encourage students to speak clearly, respond quickly, and concentrate on the topic. In the future, studies may look at other fluency markers, compare various types of games, and use delayed post-tests to see how well people remember what they learned. It would also be helpful to find out whether the fluency increases made via game-based learning can be used in more formal oral activities like presentations, interviews, and simulations relevant to a job.

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