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Analog role play and board games for developing efl speaking skills
Role play analógico y juegos de mesa para desarrollar las habilidades de expresión oral en inglés como lengua extranjera

Autores:

Flor Katy Toscano Caisalitin
Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas (ETFA)
Latacunga – Ecuador
flortoscanoetfa@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4325-8653>

Jeremin Adrian Toscano Caisalitin
Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Babahoyo – Ecuador
jtoscanoc@uteq.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3745-9600>

Evelyn Amanda Pérez Sigcha
Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Riobamba – Ecuador
eperezs3@uteq.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8180-3667>

Johanna Isabel Barriga Fray
Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Riobamba – Ecuador
jbarrigaf@uteq.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7995-6475>

Milton Eduardo Vargas Salazar
Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas
Latacunga – Ecuador
mevargas2@espe.edu.ec / kraken62@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4069-329X>

Autor de correspondencia: *Flor Katy Toscano Caisalitin*, flortoscanoetfa@gmail.com

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RESUMEN

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar el uso del role-play analógico y los juegos de mesa como estrategias pedagógicas para fortalecer las habilidades de expresión oral en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Se realizó una revisión integrativa de la literatura con un proceso de búsqueda sistemática, siguiendo las directrices PRISMA 2020. La búsqueda se efectuó en Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, ERIC y Google Scholar. Tras aplicar los criterios de inclusión y exclusión, se seleccionaron 16 publicaciones científicas.

Los resultados mostraron que los juegos de mesa y las actividades de role-play favorecen la expresión oral al generar oportunidades de interacción directa, práctica repetida, toma de turnos, negociación de significado y comunicación contextualizada. También se identificaron beneficios en fluidez, pronunciación, vocabulario, participación, confianza, motivación e interacción oral. Los juegos de mesa facilitan una participación estructurada mediante reglas y turnos, mientras que el role-play permite practicar el inglés en situaciones comunicativas con propósitos específicos. Se concluye que ambas estrategias poseen un importante potencial para fortalecer las habilidades orales en EFL, siempre que su implementación incluya objetivos comunicativos claros, una adecuada planificación pedagógica y mediación docente.

Palabras clave: role-play, juegos de mesa, expresión oral, EFL, aprendizaje basado en juegos.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze the use of analog role-play and board games as pedagogical strategies for strengthening speaking skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. An integrative literature review with a systematic search process was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The search was carried out in Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, ERIC, and Google Scholar. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 16 scientific publications were selected.

The results showed that board games and role-play activities support speaking development by providing opportunities for direct interaction, repeated practice, turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, and contextualized communication. Benefits were also identified in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, participation, confidence, motivation, and oral interaction. Board games facilitate structured participation through rules and turns, whereas role-play allows learners to practice English in communicative situations with specific purposes. It is concluded that both strategies have significant potential to strengthen EFL speaking skills, provided that their implementation includes clear communicative objectives, appropriate pedagogical planning, and teacher mediation.

Keywords: role-play, board games, speaking skills, EFL, game-based learning.



1. INTRODUCCIÓN

English speaking competence is essential for academic, professional, social, and intercultural communication. However, many EFL learners face difficulties such as limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, speaking anxiety, and few opportunities for authentic communication. For this reason, interactive strategies such as board games and role-play have gained attention as practical alternatives for improving oral communication, motivation, and confidence. Syakur (2020) highlighted that board games encourage active participation and verbal interaction, while Wong and Yunus (2021) found positive effects on speaking competence, motivation, confidence, and classroom interaction. Ng et al. (2021), using the *Pick and Speak* board game, reported improvements particularly in vocabulary and pronunciation.

Role-play also provides meaningful communicative situations in which learners can interact, negotiate meaning, and produce spontaneous language. Torres-Rodriguez and Martínez-Granada (2022) showed that tabletop role-playing games encourage collaborative communication and narrative interaction, while Dwiyantri and Lolita (2023) reported improvements in students' speaking performance. Likewise, Zhang and Hasim (2023) found that game-based learning can improve language abilities, attitudes, and engagement. Wong and Yunus (2023) reported favorable results in speaking practice through *Flippity*, and Chan and Lo (2024) emphasized benefits in motivation, participation, and language learning when games are appropriately planned.

Recent studies provide further evidence of these benefits. Qalbina et al. (2025) found that the *Dixit* board game improved speaking performance, motivation, and confidence, while Tran et al. (2025) reported improvements in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, content, and fluency through authentic role-play. Sa'adah and Abid (2026) also identified positive effects on vocabulary, fluency, confidence, motivation, and participation. Therefore, analog board games and role-play can provide meaningful opportunities for developing EFL speaking skills, although their effectiveness depends on appropriate pedagogical planning, teacher guidance, and clear communicative objectives. This study aims to analyze their applications, benefits, limitations, and implications for EFL speaking instruction.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



Speaking in EFL involves more than producing grammatically correct sentences. It also requires learners to interact, respond to others, negotiate meaning, and adapt language to different communicative situations. Friatin et al. (2026) emphasize that speaking is a socially situated practice influenced by linguistic, affective, and contextual factors. Therefore, activities that promote direct interaction can provide meaningful opportunities for oral communication.

Situated learning also supports the use of role-play in speaking instruction. Yan et al. (2024) explain that learners can develop oral skills more effectively when language is practiced within realistic and meaningful contexts. Through role-play, students assume different roles, respond to situations, solve problems, and use English for specific communicative purposes. This encourages spontaneous language production rather than simple memorization.

Game-based learning provides another foundation for analog activities. Hwang et al. (2023) indicate that games can promote interaction and language learning when rules, goals, and challenges are connected to educational objectives. In board games, students may need to describe, explain, ask questions, justify opinions, or negotiate in order to participate, transforming English into a practical tool for communication.

Board games can also structure oral participation through turn-taking. McCaughey and Rosenberg (2024) highlight that turn-based activities provide more balanced opportunities for students to speak. This can be particularly beneficial for quieter learners who may participate less frequently in traditional classroom discussions.

Role-play and role-playing games also provide different types of communicative practice. Winardy and Septiana (2023) explain that role-play usually focuses on specific situations, whereas role-playing games may include characters, rules, decision-making, and longer narratives. Both formats can support vocabulary use, fluency, interaction, and spontaneous communication.

Finally, Reinhardt and Bain (2026) note that non-digital games, including board games, card games, and tabletop role-playing activities, remain less explored than digital games in language education. This highlights the relevance of studying analog strategies as complementary tools for developing speaking skills through direct, face-to-face interaction. Overall, analog role-play and board games can be understood as structured communicative environments in which learners practice speaking through interaction,



contextualized tasks, turn-taking, collaboration, and decision-making. Their effectiveness depends on clear learning objectives, appropriate teacher guidance, and activities adapted to students' language proficiency.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted as an integrative literature review with a systematic search process to analyze the contribution of analog role-play and board games to the development of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This methodological design allowed empirical studies, educational interventions, qualitative and quantitative research, and systematic reviews to be examined within a common analytical framework.

A qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was used to organize and interpret the selected publications. The analysis focused on speaking proficiency, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, oral interaction, communicative competence, confidence, motivation, participation, and willingness to communicate.

The review covered publications published between 2020 and 2026. The final corpus consisted of 16 publications addressing board games, role-play, tabletop role-playing games, game-based learning, situated learning, and EFL speaking development.

Information Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted on 8 June 2026 using Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, ERIC, and Google Scholar.

Table 1

Search Strategies and Records Retrieved by Information Source

Information source	Search strategy	Records retrieved
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("board game" OR "analog game" OR "role-play" OR "role playing" OR "tabletop role-playing game*" OR "game-based learning") AND ("EFL" OR "English as a foreign language" OR "English language learning") AND ("speaking skill*" OR "oral communication" OR "speaking proficiency" OR "fluency" OR "oral interaction" OR "communicative competence"))	22
Web of Science	TS= (("board game" OR "analog game" OR "role-play" OR "role playing" OR "tabletop role-playing game*" OR "game-based learning") AND ("EFL" OR "English as a foreign language" OR "English language learning") AND	18



Information source	Search strategy	Records retrieved
	("speaking skill*" OR "oral communication" OR "speaking proficiency" OR "fluency" OR "oral interaction" OR "communicative competence"))	
ScienceDirect	("board game" OR "analog game" OR "role-play" OR "role playing" OR "game-based learning") AND ("EFL" OR "English as a foreign language") AND ("speaking skills" OR "oral communication" OR "speaking proficiency")	17
SpringerLink	("board game" OR "analog game" OR "role-play" OR "role playing") AND ("EFL" OR "English as a foreign language") AND ("speaking skills" OR "oral communication")	15
ERIC	("board games" OR "role-play" OR "game-based learning") AND ("EFL" OR "English language learning") AND ("speaking skills" OR "oral communication")	12
Google Scholar	("board games" OR "role-play" OR "analog games") AND ("EFL speaking" OR "English speaking skills")	20
Total		104

Note. The searches were limited to publications from 2020 to 2026 and were conducted using search strings adapted to the syntax and characteristics of each information source. A total of 104 records were retrieved before duplicate removal and initial screening. The searches were conducted on The searches were conducted on 8 June 2026.

These information sources were selected to provide access to peer-reviewed research and relevant educational literature concerning game-based language learning and oral communication.

Search terms were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR. The general search equation was:

("board game" OR "analog game" OR "role-play" OR "role playing" OR "tabletop role-playing game" OR "game-based learning") AND ("EFL" OR "English as a foreign language" OR "English language learning") AND ("speaking skill*" OR "oral communication" OR "speaking proficiency" OR "fluency" OR "oral interaction" OR "communicative competence")*

Complementary searches were also conducted using narrower combinations:

- “board games” AND “EFL speaking”



- “role-play” AND “speaking skills”
- “tabletop role-playing games” AND “EFL”
- “analog games” AND “oral communication”
- “game-based learning” AND “speaking proficiency”
- “role-playing games” AND “English language learning”

The identified references were organized in a Microsoft Excel matrix. Duplicate publications were detected by comparing author names, titles, publication years, journals, and DOI information.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Publications were included when they:

1. Were published between 2020 and 2026.
2. Examined board games, analog games, role-play, tabletop role-playing games, or closely related game-based strategies.
3. Were conducted within EFL, ESL, or English-language learning contexts.
4. Addressed speaking skills, oral communication, or communicative competence.
5. Examined variables such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, oral interaction, confidence, motivation, participation, or willingness to communicate.
6. Provided sufficient methodological or analytical information.
7. Corresponded to empirical research, educational interventions, systematic reviews, or other relevant academic studies.
8. Contained sufficient bibliographic information to permit academic verification.

Publications were excluded when they:

1. Focused primarily on reading, writing, grammar, or translation without a clear relationship to speaking.
2. Did not address English-language learning.
3. Examined exclusively digital gaming without a relevant connection to analog interaction.
4. Did not investigate oral communication or speaking-related variables.
5. Were published outside the established period.
6. Were duplicate publications.
7. Were non-academic documents.



8. Presented insufficient methodological information.

Evidence Classification and Synthesis

The 16 included publications were classified into two complementary evidence groups according to their methodological design and contribution to EFL speaking development. Nine empirical and applied studies constituted the primary evidence because they directly examined speaking-related outcomes, classroom implementation, learner experiences, or oral interaction associated with board games and role-play. The remaining seven publications, including systematic reviews, theoretical studies, and pedagogical or practice-oriented articles, were classified as secondary or contextual evidence. These publications were retained within the review corpus because they contributed to the theoretical interpretation and pedagogical contextualization of the findings; however, they were not treated as independent evidence of intervention effectiveness. During the thematic synthesis, greater interpretive weight was therefore given to primary empirical evidence, while secondary and theoretical publications were used to contextualize, compare, and explain the empirical findings. This distinction also reduced the risk of counting evidence synthesized in previous reviews as additional independent evidence.

The evidence was analyzed through thematic categorization according to the principles of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). This approach enabled recurrent patterns and relationships across the selected literature to be identified and organized.

Four main analytical categories were established:

1. Speaking proficiency, fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary.
2. Interaction, turn-taking, and meaningful oral communication.
3. Confidence, motivation, participation, and willingness to communicate.
4. Pedagogical applications, limitations, and conditions for implementing analog games.

A statistical meta-analysis was not conducted because the studies differed substantially in participants, educational levels, research designs, types of interventions, duration, assessment instruments, and speaking-related variables. Consequently, the evidence was synthesized descriptively and thematically.

Publication Selection Process

The publication-selection process followed the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages established by PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021).



Two reviewers independently screened the titles and abstracts of the identified records and subsequently assessed the full-text publications according to the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Disagreements regarding study eligibility were resolved through discussion and consensus between the reviewers.

A total of 104 potentially relevant records were identified through the six academic information sources. Before screening, 21 duplicate records were removed. An additional 5 records were removed because they were non-academic materials or did not fall within the established publication period. Consequently, 78 records remained for title and abstract screening.

During title and abstract screening, 38 records were excluded because they did not sufficiently address analog games, role-play, EFL learning, or oral communication. Therefore, 40 reports were sought for retrieval.

Two reports could not be retrieved in full text, leaving 38 publications for eligibility assessment.

During full-text evaluation, 22 publications were excluded for the following reasons:

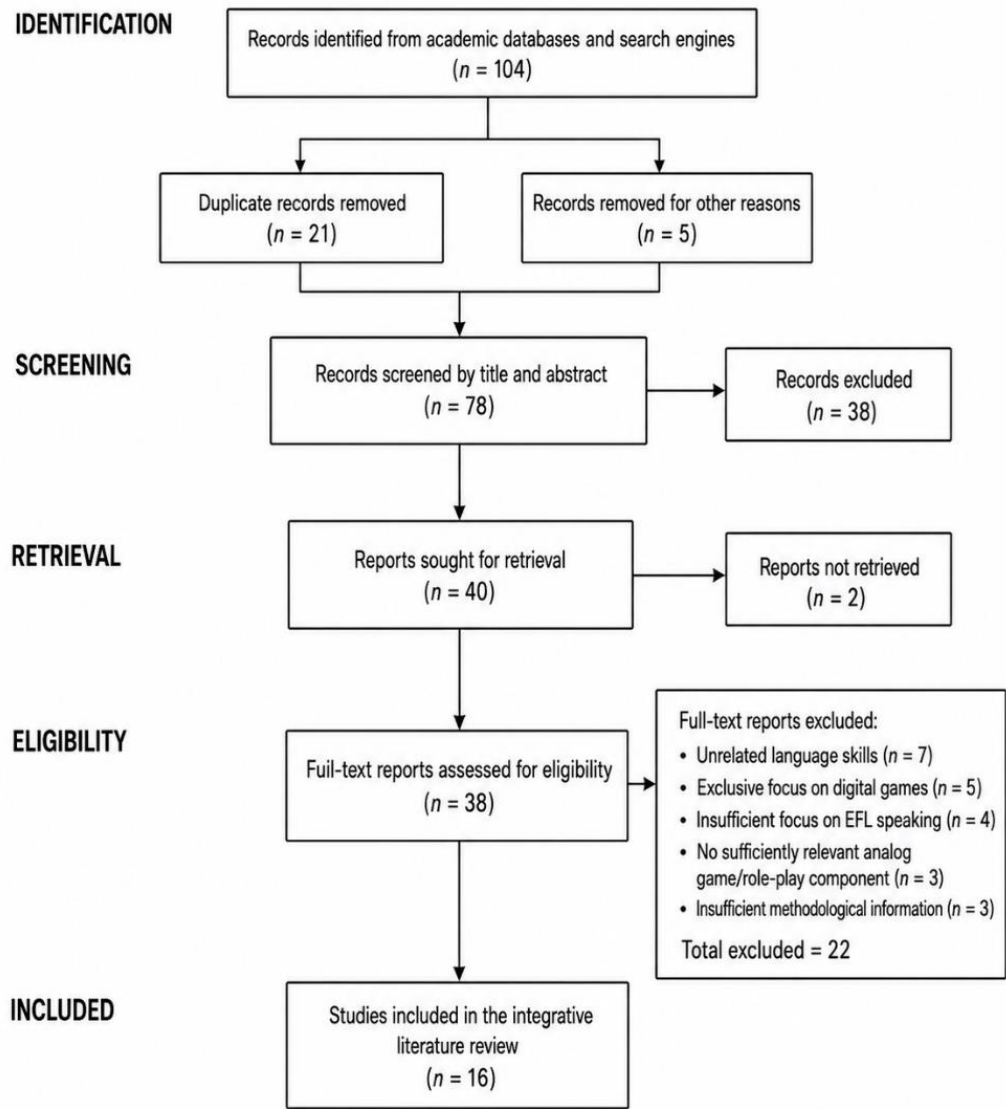
- Predominant focus on language skills unrelated to speaking ($n = 7$).
- Exclusive focus on digital games without relevant analog interaction ($n = 5$).
- Insufficient focus on EFL speaking or oral communication ($n = 4$).
- Game-based intervention not sufficiently related to analog role-play or board games ($n = 3$).
- Insufficient methodological information ($n = 3$).

Consequently, 16 unique publications fulfilled all eligibility criteria and were included in the final integrative review.

Figure 1

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of the Publication-Selection Process





Note. The publication-selection process followed the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages established by PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021). A total of 104 records were initially identified. After removing 21 duplicates and five records for other reasons, 78 records were screened by title and abstract. Thirty-eight records were excluded, and 40 reports were sought for full-text retrieval. Two reports could not be retrieved. Therefore, 38 publications were assessed for eligibility. Twenty-two publications were excluded after full-text evaluation, resulting in a final corpus of 16 studies.

Data Extraction



A standardized Microsoft Excel matrix was used to extract and organize relevant information from each publication.

Data extraction was conducted independently by two reviewers using the standardized Microsoft Excel matrix. The extracted information was compared after completion of the process, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

Data extraction was performed independently by [NUMBER] reviewers using the standardized Microsoft Excel matrix. The extracted information was subsequently compared to identify inconsistencies. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus among the reviewers.

The following information was recorded:

- Author and publication year.
- Country or educational context.
- Type of publication.
- Participants or sample.
- Educational level.
- Type of board game or role-play activity.
- Research design.
- Duration of intervention.
- Speaking variable analyzed.
- Main findings.
- Reported limitations.
- DOI or academic identifier.
- Contribution to EFL speaking development.

The extracted information was compared across publications to identify common findings, methodological differences, research tendencies, and pedagogical implications.

Methodological Quality Assessment

Methodological quality was assessed using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools. Because the included publications represented different methodological designs, the appraisal instrument was selected according to the characteristics of each study. Appropriate JBI tools were applied to qualitative research, quasi-experimental studies, systematic reviews, observational studies, and textual or narrative evidence, as



applicable. JBI provides specific critical appraisal instruments for different study designs, including qualitative research, quasi-experimental studies, systematic reviews, analytical cross-sectional studies, and textual evidence.

The methodological quality assessment was conducted independently by two reviewers. Each reviewer evaluated the included publications using the JBI appraisal tool corresponding to the methodological design of each study. After completing the assessments, the reviewers compared their judgments. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved by consensus. The assessment was reported according to the criteria of the corresponding JBI tool, without applying the previous 16-point scoring system or the high, moderate, and low cut-off classifications.

Table 2
Critical Appraisal of the Included Publications Using JBI Tools

Study	Study design / publication type	JBI critical appraisal tool	Main appraisal findings
Chan & Lo (2024)	Systematic review / rapid evidence assessment	JBI Checklist for Systematic Reviews	The review presented a clear objective, eligibility criteria, search terms, PRISMA-based selection process, and structured synthesis. However, the search was restricted mainly to Web of Science/SSCI, and a formal risk-of-bias assessment of the primary studies was not clearly reported. The findings were retained but interpreted cautiously.
Dwiyanti & Lolita (2023)	Quasi-experimental study	JBI Checklist for Quasi-Experimental Studies	The study clearly described the intervention, experimental and control groups, pre- and post-tests, speaking assessment, and statistical analysis. Both groups included 34 students. The absence of random allocation represents a limitation typical of quasi-experimental designs. The study was retained.
Friatin et al. (2026)	Qualitative case study	JBI Checklist for Qualitative Research	The qualitative approach was congruent with the research questions. Participants, interview procedures, thematic analysis, reflexivity, ethical procedures, and interpretation were described.



Study	Study design / publication type	JBI critical appraisal tool	Main appraisal findings
			Limitations included reliance mainly on self-reported interview data, a context-specific sample, and limited methodological triangulation. The study was retained.
Hwang et al. (2023)	Systematic review and bibliometric analysis	JBI Checklist for Systematic Reviews	The study employed a structured systematic review combined with bibliometric analysis and provided a defined analytical framework for game-based language learning. The combination of systematic and bibliometric approaches increased the breadth of the synthesis, although methodological heterogeneity among included studies required cautious interpretation. The publication was retained. The publication presented a clearly identifiable pedagogical focus and practical recommendations for board-game-supported language practice. As a practice-oriented article rather than an empirical intervention study, it does not provide direct evidence of treatment effectiveness and was therefore used primarily as contextual and pedagogical evidence.
McCaughey & Rosenberg (2024)	Pedagogical/practice publication	JBI Checklist for Textual Evidence: Narrative	The intervention, speaking assessment, pre- and post-test procedures, and speaking-related outcomes were adequately described. The study provided empirical evidence concerning vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. Limitations related to the restricted educational context and sampling should be considered when generalizing the findings. The study was retained.
Ng et al. (2021)	Quasi-experimental study	JBI Checklist for Quasi-Experimental Studies	The study included experimental and control groups, pre- and post-testing, six intervention sessions, defined speaking outcomes, and
Qalbina et al. (2025)	Quasi-experimental study	JBI Checklist for Quasi-	



Study	Study design / publication type	JBI critical appraisal tool	Main appraisal findings
		Experimental Studies	statistical analysis. Purposive rather than random sampling represents a limitation. Nevertheless, the design and outcome assessment were sufficiently described for inclusion.
Reinhardt & Bain (2026)	Narrative review / review of recent scholarship	JBI Checklist for Textual Evidence: Narrative	The publication provided a structured synthesis of recent scholarship and a clear conceptual discussion of digital games in language learning. Because it is a narrative review rather than a systematic effectiveness review, it was used primarily for theoretical and contextual interpretation rather than as direct evidence of intervention effects. The study used a qualitative meta-analytic approach and reported a PRISMA 2020-guided review process. The methodological approach was appropriate for synthesizing qualitative evidence concerning role-play and English-speaking development. Heterogeneity among the primary studies was considered when interpreting the conclusions. The study was retained.
Sa'adah & Abid (2026)	Qualitative meta-analysis	JBI Checklist for Systematic Reviews	The publication synthesized 17 articles and theses concerning board games and speaking instruction. It provided relevant pedagogical arguments, but the search, selection, and critical appraisal procedures were not reported with the detail expected of a systematic review. Therefore, it was retained primarily as contextual supporting evidence rather than direct intervention evidence.
Syakur (2020)	Literature review	JBI Checklist for Textual Evidence: Narrative	The publication synthesized 17 articles and theses concerning board games and speaking instruction. It provided relevant pedagogical arguments, but the search, selection, and critical appraisal procedures were not reported with the detail expected of a systematic review. Therefore, it was retained primarily as contextual supporting evidence rather than direct intervention evidence.
Torres-Rodriguez & Martínez-	Action research / qualitative study	JBI Checklist for Qualitative Research	The action-research design was aligned with the classroom problem investigated. Multiple sources of evidence, including video recordings,



Study	Study design / publication type	JBI critical appraisal tool	Main appraisal findings
Granada (2022)			narratives, artifacts, and semi-structured interviews, strengthened the analysis. The teacher-researcher role and context-specific nature of the study represent potential limitations. The study was retained.
Tran et al. (2025)	Mixed-method intervention study	JBI Checklist for Quasi-Experimental Studies and JBI Checklist for Qualitative Research	The study combined quantitative pre- and post-tests with qualitative interviews and included experimental and control conditions. The mixed-method approach provided complementary evidence concerning speaking performance and learner perceptions. Lack of clear random allocation limits causal inference, but the study was retained.
Winardy & Septiana (2023)	Conceptual/narrative review	JBI Checklist for Textual Evidence: Narrative	The publication clearly compared educational role-play and role-playing games and provided a theoretically supported conceptual distinction between the two approaches. Because it did not constitute an empirical intervention study, it was used mainly for theoretical interpretation and contextual support.
Wong & Yunus (2021)	Systematic review	JBI Checklist for Systematic Reviews	The review presented a defined objective, PRISMA-guided selection process, database searching, and synthesis of 35 publications. Its findings provided relevant secondary evidence on board games and speaking development. Differences among the designs and outcomes of the included studies limit direct comparison, so conclusions were interpreted cautiously.
Wong & Yunus (2023)	Quasi-experimental mixed-method study	JBI Checklist for Quasi-Experimental Studies and JBI Checklist for	The study combined speaking pre- and post-tests, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with 30 pupils. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence strengthened interpretation; however, the small,



Study	Study design / publication type	JBI critical appraisal tool	Main appraisal findings
Yan et al. (2024)	Convergent mixed-method study	Qualitative Research	context-specific sample limits generalizability. The study was retained.
		JBI Checklist for Quasi-Experimental Studies and JBI Checklist for Qualitative Research	The study clearly described its mixed-method design, participants, pre- and post-assessments, statistical analysis, interviews, and thematic analysis. The main limitations were the small sample of 16 participants, self-selection, and the absence of a comparison group. The study was retained with these limitations considered during interpretation.

Note. Methodological quality was assessed using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools. The appraisal instrument was selected according to the methodological design of each publication. Assessments were conducted independently by two reviewers, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

Interpretation of the Quality Assessment

The descriptive reporting-quality assessment showed that 15 of the 16 publications were classified as having high reporting quality, while one publication was classified as moderate. The majority of the selected studies clearly presented their research objectives, theoretical foundations, methodological procedures, analytical approaches, and principal findings. Empirical studies involving board games and role-play generally provided sufficient descriptions of the intervention and the speaking-related outcomes examined.

Studies such as Ng et al. (2021), DwiYanti and Lolita (2023), Qalbina et al. (2025), Tran et al. (2025), and Wong and Yunus (2023) provided empirical evidence concerning the implementation of game- or role-play-based activities and their relationship with speaking development.

Systematic and integrative publications, including Wong and Yunus (2021), Hwang et al. (2023), Chan and Lo (2024), and Sa’adah and Abid (2026), contributed broader evidence concerning game-based language learning, oral communication, motivation, interaction, and pedagogical implementation.



McCaughey and Rosenberg (2024) obtained a moderate descriptive reporting score because their publication has a stronger pedagogical and classroom-practice orientation than a conventional empirical research design. This does not imply that the publication lacks educational value; rather, some methodological criteria, such as participant description and formal analytical procedures, are less applicable to this type of contribution.

The quality scores should be interpreted cautiously. A score of 16/16 does not indicate that a publication is free from methodological bias. It indicates only that the information corresponding to the descriptive criteria used in this review was clearly reported.

Connection Between Methodology and the Research Objective

The methodological procedure was directly aligned with the purpose of the study. The systematic search enabled recent evidence concerning analog role-play, board games, and EFL speaking development to be identified, while the inclusion criteria ensured that the selected studies maintained a direct relationship with oral communication.

The thematic synthesis organized the evidence according to linguistic development, interactional processes, affective variables, and pedagogical implications. Therefore, the methodology provides a structured framework for examining how analog role-play and board games contribute to EFL speaking development and the conditions under which these strategies may be effectively integrated into English-language instruction.

4. RESULTS

The thematic synthesis identified four main categories related to the use of analog role-play and board games for enhancing EFL speaking skills: speaking proficiency, fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary; interaction and meaningful oral communication; confidence, motivation, and participation; and pedagogical conditions for effective implementation.

Overall, the reviewed studies showed favorable results regarding the incorporation of board games and role-play into English-language instruction. These strategies provided learners with structured opportunities to speak, interact with peers, respond spontaneously, negotiate meaning, and use vocabulary within meaningful situations. Nevertheless, the results varied according to the type of game, educational level, duration of the intervention, group organization, task design, and teacher guidance.



For interpretation purposes, the 16 publications included in the review were not considered methodologically equivalent sources of evidence. Primary empirical and applied studies provided the principal evidence concerning speaking outcomes and classroom implementation, whereas systematic reviews, theoretical publications, and pedagogical articles were used as secondary evidence to contextualize and interpret those findings. Consequently, findings from secondary sources were not counted as additional independent demonstrations of effectiveness. Tables 2 and 3 present these two evidence groups separately.

Table 3
Primary Empirical and Applied Studies on Analog Games, Role-Play, and EFL Speaking

Study	Context / strategy	Speaking-related outcome	Main contribution
Syakur (2020)	Board-game activities with young EFL learners	Speaking participation and oral practice	Board games created an enjoyable environment that encouraged learners to participate orally and use English during classroom interaction.
Ng et al. (2021)	<i>Pick and Speak</i> board game	Speaking skills, vocabulary, pronunciation	The board game provided repeated speaking opportunities and supported improvement in pupils’ oral-language performance.
Torres-Rodriguez & Martínez-Granada (2022)	Tabletop role-playing games in EFL instruction	Spontaneous communication, interaction, narrative production	Tabletop role-playing encouraged collaborative communication, decision-making, and meaningful oral language use.
Dwiyanti & Lolita (2023)	Role-play activities with EFL students	Speaking performance	Role-play contributed positively to students’ speaking development by requiring learners to communicate within simulated situations.
Wong & Yunus (2023)	Board-game-based speaking activities	Speaking practice and learner participation	Game-based speaking tasks promoted interaction and encouraged learners to participate actively in oral English activities.



Study	Context / strategy	Speaking-related outcome	Main contribution
Yan et al. (2024)	Situated role-based communicative activities	Fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar	Contextualized activities supported several dimensions of oral-language performance by requiring learners to use English meaningfully.
Qalbina et al. (2025)	Dixit board game	Speaking performance, motivation, confidence	The game encouraged description, interpretation, vocabulary use, creativity, and oral interaction among EFL learners.
Tran et al. (2025)	Authentic role-play formats	Pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency	Role-play produced favorable outcomes across several components of speaking performance and encouraged collaborative preparation.
Friatin et al. (2026)	Drama and role-play activities	Speaking experiences, participation, confidence	Learners perceived dramatic and role-based activities as opportunities for meaningful communication, although participation depended on classroom conditions.

Note. Primary empirical and applied studies constituted the main evidence for interpreting speaking-related outcomes and classroom implementation. These publications were given greater interpretive weight because they provided direct evidence concerning learners, interventions, speaking performance, oral interaction, or classroom experiences.

Table 4

Secondary and Theoretical Publications Used to Interpret the Findings

Study	Type of publication	Main focus	Contribution to the review
Wong & Yunus (2021)	Systematic review	Board games and speaking development	Reported positive relationships between board-game activities, speaking practice, motivation, confidence, and classroom interaction.
Hwang et al. (2023)	Systematic review / bibliometric analysis	Game-based language learning	Supported the role of interaction, game mechanics, challenges, and learning objectives in language-learning environments.



Study	Type of publication	Main focus	Contribution to the review
Winardy & Septiana (2023)	Conceptual comparative study	Role-play and role-playing games	Clarified the distinction between educational role-play and role-playing games and their different instructional possibilities.
Chan & Lo (2024)	Comprehensive review	Gamification and EFL/ESL instruction	Highlighted the importance of pedagogical design, engagement, motivation, and alignment between game elements and educational objectives.
McCaughey & Rosenberg (2024)	Pedagogical/practice publication	Board games for language practice	Emphasized turn-taking and structured participation as mechanisms for increasing speaking opportunities.
Reinhardt & Bain (2026)	Research review	Games and language learning	Highlighted the continuing relevance of game-based language pedagogy and the comparatively limited exploration of non-digital games.
Sa’adah & Abid (2026)	Qualitative meta-analysis	Role-play and English-speaking development	Synthesized evidence indicating contributions to vocabulary, fluency, confidence, motivation, and student participation.

Note. Secondary, theoretical, and pedagogical publications were included to contextualize, compare, and interpret the primary findings. They were not considered independent evidence of intervention effectiveness and were not used to increase the number or weight of empirical findings.

Table 5
Thematic Synthesis of the Main Findings

Thematic category	Studies supporting the category	Main findings
Speaking proficiency, fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary	Syakur (2020); Ng et al. (2021); Dwiyanti & Lolita (2023); Yan et al. (2024); Qalbina et al. (2025); Tran et al. (2025); Sa’adah & Abid (2026)	Repeated participation in game-based and role-play activities provided opportunities to produce spoken English and practice vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and grammatical structures within meaningful contexts.



Interaction and meaningful oral communication	Wong & Yunus (2021); Torres-Rodriguez & Martínez-Granada (2022); McCaughey & Rosenberg (2024); Qalbina et al. (2025); Friatin et al. (2026)	Analog activities encouraged turn-taking, peer interaction, negotiation of meaning, description, questioning, decision-making, and spontaneous responses.
Confidence, motivation, and participation	Wong & Yunus (2021); DwiYanti & Lolita (2023); Chan & Lo (2024); Qalbina et al. (2025); Friatin et al. (2026); Sa’adah & Abid (2026)	Games and simulated communicative situations generally promoted engagement and willingness to participate. Several studies also associated these strategies with greater confidence and motivation.
Pedagogical design and implementation conditions	Hwang et al. (2023); Winardy & Septiana (2023); Chan & Lo (2024); McCaughey & Rosenberg (2024); Reinhardt & Bain (2026); Friatin et al. (2026)	Positive outcomes depended on clear objectives, appropriate game rules, suitable task difficulty, teacher guidance, balanced participation, and alignment between game mechanics and communicative objectives.

Note. The thematic categories were not mutually exclusive because several studies addressed more than one linguistic, affective, interactional, or pedagogical dimension.

Speaking Proficiency, Fluency, Pronunciation, and Vocabulary

Analog board games and role-play support EFL speaking development by providing opportunities to practice vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. Studies using *Pick and Speak*, *Dixit*, and role-play activities reported favorable outcomes in oral production and speaking performance (Ng et al., 2021; DwiYanti & Lolita, 2023; Qalbina et al., 2025; Tran et al., 2025).

Interaction and Meaningful Oral Communication

Analog activities encourage collaboration, turn-taking, decision-making, and spontaneous communication. Tabletop role-playing games promote meaningful interaction, while board games help distribute speaking opportunities among learners (Torres-Rodriguez & Martínez-Granada, 2022; McCaughey & Rosenberg, 2024).

Confidence, Motivation, and Participation

Board games and role-play can also increase learners’ motivation, confidence, and participation. These activities create supportive environments in which students may feel more comfortable communicating and experimenting with English (Wong & Yunus, 2021; Qalbina et al., 2025; Friatin et al., 2026).



Pedagogical Design and Implementation Conditions

The effectiveness of these strategies depends on appropriate pedagogical planning, clear objectives, suitable difficulty, teacher guidance, and balanced participation. Teachers should select the type of game according to the speaking skills they intend to develop (Hwang et al., 2023; Winardy & Septiana, 2023; Chan & Lo, 2024).

Summary of the Results

Overall, analog role-play and board games have strong potential to enhance EFL speaking by promoting oral production, interaction, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, confidence, and motivation. However, their effectiveness depends on appropriate task design, teacher mediation, learner proficiency, and alignment with communicative objectives.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this integrative review indicate that analog role-play and board games can support the development of EFL speaking skills, although the strength and type of evidence vary across the reviewed studies. The most direct evidence comes from empirical and intervention-based research examining speaking performance, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, participation, and oral interaction. Studies such as Ng et al. (2021), Dwiyantri and Lolita (2023), Qalbina et al. (2025), Tran et al. (2025), and Friatin et al. (2026) provide relevant support for the use of analog activities as communicative strategies in EFL instruction.

The findings suggest that one of the principal advantages of board games and role-play is their capacity to generate repeated and purposeful speaking opportunities. Board games can structure participation through rules, prompts, and turn-taking, while role-play places learners in simulated situations that require them to respond, negotiate meaning, and use language according to a communicative purpose. McCaughey and Rosenberg (2024) emphasize the importance of turn-taking in distributing speaking opportunities, whereas Torres-Rodriguez and Martínez-Granada (2022) show that tabletop role-playing activities can promote collaboration, spontaneous interaction, and narrative communication.

However, not all positive outcomes should be interpreted as direct evidence of improved speaking proficiency. Some publications focused more strongly on motivation, confidence, engagement, or learner participation. Wong and Yunus (2021), Chan and Lo (2024), and



Sa'adah and Abid (2026), for example, highlight favorable affective and motivational outcomes associated with game-based learning and role-play. These variables can facilitate oral participation, but improvements in confidence or motivation do not necessarily represent immediate gains in fluency, pronunciation, or grammatical accuracy.

Another important finding concerns the difference between board games and role-play. Although both strategies encourage interaction, they generate different communicative demands. Board games generally provide more structured participation through rules and turns, while role-play allows learners to assume identities and respond to contextualized situations. Winardy and Septiana (2023) also distinguish role-play from broader role-playing games, which may involve characters, narratives, rules, and extended decision-making. Therefore, the selection of a specific analog strategy should depend on the speaking objective to be developed.

The reviewed evidence also suggests that face-to-face interaction represents an important pedagogical contribution of analog activities. Unlike individual digital tasks, physical board games and role-play require learners to attend to peers, interpret responses, take conversational turns, and adapt their language during interaction. These conditions can promote meaningful communication and allow speaking to function as a social activity rather than only as an individual language exercise.

Nevertheless, analog games do not automatically improve speaking skills. Their effectiveness depends on pedagogical design. Hwang et al. (2023) and Chan and Lo (2024) emphasize that game-based learning requires clear objectives and appropriate alignment between game mechanics and learning outcomes. Similarly, Friatin et al. (2026) indicate that learner participation can be influenced by classroom conditions, psychological factors, and instructional support. Teachers therefore remain essential for selecting suitable activities, providing vocabulary support, explaining rules, organizing groups, and ensuring balanced participation.

The heterogeneity of the reviewed publications also limits direct comparison. The studies differed in participants, educational levels, intervention duration, research design, type of game, speaking variables, and assessment procedures. Some studies directly measured speaking performance, whereas others examined perceptions, motivation, classroom interaction, or broader game-based learning principles. Consequently, the findings



should not be interpreted as demonstrating a single uniform effect of analog games on EFL speaking.

The distinction between primary and secondary evidence is also important. Empirical studies such as Ng et al. (2021), Dwiyanti and Lolita (2023), Qalbina et al. (2025), and Tran et al. (2025) provide more direct evidence concerning learner performance and classroom implementation. In contrast, systematic, theoretical, and pedagogical publications such as Wong and Yunus (2021), Hwang et al. (2023), Chan and Lo (2024), and Reinhardt and Bain (2026) provide broader interpretive and contextual support. Both types of evidence are useful, but they should not be considered equivalent when evaluating direct speaking outcomes.

This review also presents several limitations. The final corpus consisted of 16 publications, and the studies were methodologically heterogeneous. In addition, several publications addressed broader game-based learning or related communicative strategies rather than exclusively physical board games and analog role-play. The diversity of educational contexts and learner populations may also limit the generalizability of the findings.

Overall, analog role-play and board games show considerable potential for enhancing EFL speaking skills, particularly by increasing opportunities for oral production, interaction, turn-taking, vocabulary use, fluency practice, confidence, motivation, and participation. However, their effectiveness depends on task design, learner proficiency, teacher mediation, group organization, and the specific speaking objective being addressed. Future research should include longer interventions, larger and more diverse samples, and more direct assessment of speaking performance.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The review indicates that analog role-play and board games represent valuable pedagogical strategies for enhancing EFL speaking skills.

The findings show that these activities can provide learners with repeated opportunities to practice oral English through interaction, turn-taking, description, negotiation, decision-making, and contextualized communication. They may contribute to speaking proficiency, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and meaningful oral interaction.



The reviewed evidence also identified favorable outcomes related to confidence, motivation, participation, and willingness to communicate. These affective factors can facilitate greater involvement in speaking activities and create more supportive conditions for oral practice.

Board games and role-play offer different but complementary communicative opportunities. Board games tend to structure participation through rules and turns, whereas role-play allows learners to practice language within simulated communicative contexts and assume different roles.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on clear communicative objectives, appropriate task difficulty, teacher guidance, balanced participation, and alignment between gameplay and language-learning goals. Analog games should therefore be integrated as structured teaching strategies rather than used only as recreational activities. In conclusion, analog role-play and board games have significant potential to strengthen EFL speaking development through direct, face-to-face, and meaningful interaction. However, further empirical research is needed to determine their long-term effectiveness across different educational levels, learner populations, and instructional contexts.

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CONTRIBUCIÓN DE AUTORÍA:

Conceptualización: Flor Katy Toscano Caisalitin, Jeremin Adrian Toscano Caisalitin, Evelyn Amanda Pérez Sigcha, Johanna Isabel Barriga Fray, Milton Eduardo Vargas Salazar.

Metodología: Flor Katy Toscano Caisalitin, Jeremin Adrian Toscano Caisalitin, Evelyn Amanda Pérez Sigcha, Johanna Isabel Barriga Fray, Milton Eduardo Vargas Salazar.

Investigación: Flor Katy Toscano Caisalitin, Jeremin Adrian Toscano Caisalitin, Evelyn Amanda Pérez Sigcha, Johanna Isabel Barriga Fray, Milton Eduardo Vargas Salazar.

Redacción – borrador original: Flor Katy Toscano Caisalitin, Jeremin Adrian Toscano Caisalitin, Evelyn Amanda Pérez Sigcha, Johanna Isabel Barriga Fray, Milton Eduardo Vargas Salazar.



Redacción – revisión y edición: Flor Katy Toscano Caisalitin, Jeremin Adrian Toscano Caisalitin, Evelyn Amanda Pérez Sigcha, Johanna Isabel Barriga Fray, Milton Eduardo Vargas Salazar.

