

# Board games as a pedagogical tool to lower the affective filter in second language acquisition

Los juegos de mesa como herramienta pedagógica para reducir el filtro afectivo en la adquisición de una segunda lengua


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## ABSTRACT

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a natural process that occurs through meaningful interaction and comprehension of the language. This process has always intrigued linguists and educators around the world due to the number of factors that hinder its effective implementation in the educational field. This article explores how board games can be used as a pedagogical strategy to foster motivation in the classroom, thereby reducing the affective filter and improving second language acquisition. As for the methodology, a systematic review was conducted using databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and Scielo Journals in order to understand how board games have been employed in second language acquisition. The review revealed that board games have a positive impact on students' oral performance. Furthermore, the methodological process consisted of a cross-sectional quasi-experimental design with a quantitative approach, applying techniques such as a survey based on the Likert scale and observation. Regarding the pre-test results, students initially showed insufficient communicative skills, not knowing how to describe some previously assigned images. However, after the intervention with board games, a remarkable improvement in oral performance was observed. In conclusion, board games not only reduce students' affective filter but also provide a dynamic and enjoyable way to promote second language acquisition.

**Keywords:** Process, Motivation, Improvement, Strategy, Communicative skills.

## RESUMEN

La adquisición de una segunda lengua (ASL) es un proceso natural que ocurre mediante la interacción y comprensión significativa del idioma. Dicho proceso siempre ha intrigado a lingüistas y educadores en todo el mundo debido a la cantidad de factores que dificultan su aplicación efectiva en el ámbito educativo. Este artículo explora cómo los juegos de mesa pueden utilizarse como una estrategia pedagógica para fomentar la motivación en el aula, reduciendo así el filtro afectivo y mejorando la adquisición de una segunda lengua. Como metodología, se realizó una revisión sistemática utilizando bases de datos como Google Scholar, ERIC y Scielo Journals, con el fin de comprender cómo se han empleado los juegos de mesa en la adquisición de segundas lenguas. La revisión reveló que los juegos de mesa tienen un impacto positivo en el rendimiento oral de los estudiantes. Además, el proceso metodológico consistió en un diseño cuasiexperimental transversal, con un enfoque cuantitativo, aplicando técnicas como la encuesta, basada en la escala de Likert y la observación. En referencia a los resultados del pretest, los estudiantes presentaban habilidades comunicativas insuficientes, sin saber cómo describir imágenes previamente asignadas. No obstante, después de la intervención con juegos de mesa, se observó una mejora notable en el rendimiento oral. En conclusión, los juegos de mesa no solo reducen el filtro afectivo en los estudiantes, sino que también ofrecen una forma dinámica y divertida de promover la adquisición de una segunda lengua.

**Palabras clave:** Proceso, Motivación, Mejora, Estrategia, Habilidades comunicativas.



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## Introduction

Throughout history, people have tried to achieve full mastery of languages, as they are our main source of communication, the means through which we share our ideas and thoughts (Ilyosovna, 2020). From this perspective, second language acquisition (SLA) has gained significant importance in recent years, not only for educational reasons but also due to the growing demand for multilingual skills in the global market. In simpler terms, the advantages of speaking more than one language are substantial in many contexts. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms behind this process can enable teachers to develop linguistic interdependence and foster a balanced bilingualism (Cummins, 2000).

According to Camara de Comercio de Quito (2022), the mastery of English has become an essential competence in the labor market. This language is particularly demanded in professions such as international business, tourism, medicine, and finance, since much of the information, tools, negotiations, and technological advancements conveyed in English. Companies seek bilingual profiles to face global challenges and remain competitive. Therefore, as professionals master a new language, they gain a clear advantage in accessing better job opportunities, participating in conferences, conducting research works, and accessing specialized documentation. Ultimately, English no longer represents a differentiating advantage but is now regarded as a crucial skill needed in most work settings. (British Council, 2015).

In 2019, the ninth edition of the EPI (English Proficiency Index) was conducted. Ecuador shared its results at a press conference to the Ministry of Education, Quito Secretariat of Education, principals of educational institutions, and embassy representatives. The ranking was based on scores obtained in the Standard English Test (EF), which is the world's first standardized English exam. In this test, Ecuador was placed 81st among

100 countries evaluated, getting a score of 46.57 points and considered to possess a 'very low' level of English proficiency (EF Education First, 2019).

By the year 2024, Ecuador ranked 82nd out of 116 countries assessed, with a score of 46.5, once again placing it in the "low level" category. Regionally, Ecuador ranks 19th out of 21 Latin American countries in terms of English language proficiency (EF Education First, 2024).

This international assessment served as a key reference for teachers to seek new strategies to improve English proficiency. However, finding ways to develop second language acquisition in Ecuadorian students appears to call for substantial effort. One effective approach, however, is to engage students through games. This is because incorporating games in English learning, somehow motivates children to become autonomous learners (Wafi, 2019). Although there is a wide variety of games that can be used to teach language skills, board games are among the most effective ones.

Through board games, students take turns expressing their ideas and thoughts according to the instructions given by the teacher. Furthermore, most research findings suggest that such activities foster collaboration within an inclusive and participatory classroom environment, in which each student is given the opportunity to contribute from their own experience and particular context (Maldonado et al., 2025).

Although researches on the impact of board games in second language teaching (L2) are not entirely absent, they remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute new insights to the theoretical body on the topic. Accordingly, the following questions were asked: What is the students' perspective on the use of board games in the classroom? What is the current level of students' oral expression? How beneficial are board games in second language acquisition?

The general objective of this research was to design a methodological strategy based on board games to foster language acquisition in fifth-grade students. To achieve this goal, several specific objectives were set: to determine students' perspectives regarding the use of board games as a tool for acquiring a second language; to identify the oral expression level of the experimental and control groups before and after applying the proposed strategy; to compare the results obtained between both groups regarding their performance in English oral expression; and finally, to design an educational guide to support the implementation of the designed board game.

In order to obtain a clearer understanding of how board games could help improve second language acquisition, the aforementioned objectives were achieved. Additionally, the study aimed to contribute to the discussion on effective language teaching methods by examining the relationship between board games and the reduction of the affective filter in second language acquisition.

This research adopted a quasi-experimental design to analyze the relationship between the independent variable (the use of board games to lower the affective filter) and the dependent variable (second language acquisition). In this study, one group of students received the intervention while another group did not. In addition to that, participants were not formed through random selection, but they were assigned based on pre-existing classes. The results were then analyzed to identify the effects produced by intervention.

## **Methodology**

The present research focused on examining the use of board games as a key factor in lowering the affective filter in second language acquisition among fifth-grade students at the private educational institution "Leonardo Da Vinci." It followed a quantitative research approach, which is a systematic process involving the collection, analysis, and inter-

pretation of statistical data to deal with specific research questions (Mohajan, 2020).

To gather the necessary information and achieve the objectives of this study, several instruments were employed, including a systematic literature review that helped collect findings on the impact of board game-based strategies in promoting second language acquisition. Databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and SAGE Journals were instrumental in providing essential academic resources that supported this article.

Furthermore, considering the importance of understanding students' perspectives on the use of board games to enhance language acquisition, a survey based on Likert scale was administered to analyze the group's overall opinion of this pedagogical tool. This survey revealed that most participants agreed on the positive impact of these games in the classroom. Finally, an observation checklist was used to collect data on the English proficiency levels of both the experimental and control groups before and after the board game intervention.

Since the independent variable was manipulated with pre-existing groups, the study design is considered quasi-experimental. As stated by Hernández et al. (2014), a quasi-experimental design with intact groups and pre-test and post-tests involves initially assessing both control and experimental groups, applying the intervention only to the experimental group, and then conducting a post-test for both groups to compare results and determine the effect of the independent variable, without random participant assignment.

The research was carried out at Leonardo Da Vinci, a private educational institution located in Manta, Ecuador. The total population consisted of approximately thirty-two (32) fifth-grade students divided in two classrooms, from which a sample of fifteen (15) participants was selected. Two groups were considered: Section "A" (experimental group), composed of eight girls and seven boys,

totaling fifteen students, and Section “B” (control group), made up of nine girls and six boys, also totaling fifteen students. Thus, the study included a total of thirty participants.

Since the participants were minors, their legal guardians signed informed consent forms authorizing their participation in the study. Two instruments were implemented during the research. In the first stage, participants completed a questionnaire with questions related to their point of view on using board games. In the second stage, the fifteen students from the sample were separated to take part in an individual test. Each student was assigned images to be described within a total time of two minutes. Additionally, they were allowed to ask for clarification regarding the evaluation criteria to ensure full understanding of the assigned activity.

After completing the test, a ten-minute break was provided before introducing the board game intervention, which incorporated the same linguistic content adapted to their level. A board game template was given to a group of students working in pairs where the rules of the game were explained previously. This dynamic created an interactive and communicative learning experience, allowing students to engage naturally while having fun.

Subsequently, a second test with similar characteristics to the first one was administered. The results from both evaluations were compared and analyzed to determine the extent to which the use of board games contributed to improving the students' second language acquisition.

## Results

### As theoretical support for the review of study results

Studies on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have differed in their focus—from the influence of interaction with the environment (behaviorist theories) to an emphasis on mental processes (cognitivist theories).

Furthermore, the focus has shifted toward affective factors, as it has been determined that cognitive competencies may be closely linked to emotions, and that unconscious tasks can influence conscious brain activity (Pizarro & Josephy, 2010).

Before making any assumptions, it is necessary to examine Krashen's theory of Second Language Acquisition, which forms the basis of the present study. This theory consists of five main hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis. Although all are important, this study focuses primarily on the affective filter hypothesis. According to Krashen (1982), emotional factors such as motivation, anxiety, and confidence can affect success in language acquisition. Specifically, when the affective filter is “high,” negative emotional factors such as anxiety or lack of confidence prevent linguistic input from reaching the “language acquisition device.” Conversely, when the filter is “low,” students are more relaxed and receptive, allowing for better acquisition.

In the process of language acquisition, speaking is undoubtedly one of the most important skills. However, it is also the most difficult and generally the last to develop. Thus, developing this skill in class has become a challenge for today's teachers (Shaukat, Arif & Mangi, 2020). Moreover, oral proficiency is not only about using grammar correctly; it also involves considering functions, pragmatics, and social interaction (Kürüm, 2016). From a natural approach perspective, the importance of speaking does not lie in the act itself, but in its potential to provide comprehensible input (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). In other words, what truly matters is understanding and being understood when using the target language.

Regarding the affective filter, Krashen describes it as a construct in second language acquisition that seeks to explain the different emotional variables associated with success

or failure in acquiring the language. In other words, this filter is responsible for either facilitating or hindering linguistic production. This theory asserts that when the filter is high, students tend to experience more stress, anxiety, and lack of confidence. On the other hand, when the affective filter is low, students feel secure and confident enough to engage in conversation with ease.

Considering the above, it is crucial for educators to be aware of these elements, as they significantly impact second language learning. Whenever positive feelings and emotions occur—affective factors—they can both enhance or hinder linguistic competence (Stander, 2022).

Games are a crucial part of every child's life. Therefore, implementing them in the classroom could be a good choice. In primary school, this happens naturally since younger learners are attracted to games; however, older students eventually discover that they too enjoy classroom games (Sympson, 2013). This occurs because some games create their own environments and immerse students in a new world, which can foster greater learning and increase knowledge of a second language (Jenisch & Nillas, 2015).

Similarly, Agaesse (2017) states that board games can help students overcome the obstacles that sometimes prevent them from speaking freely—barriers that depend on their emotions and affective filter. In line with this idea, Hadfield (1999) argues that games should be incorporated into language teaching programs not only because they are fun and promote authentic communication using the target language, but also because they serve as a bridge between the classroom and the real world (p.8). Since young learners are intrinsically motivated to learn, it is the teacher's duty to create a positive and stimulating environment that strengthens their confidence and supports their learning progress.

Although games play an important role in second language acquisition, most teachers

are unaware of their potential as a learning strategy (Gozcu, 2016). That is, they do not consider them a method for teaching a second language. Nevertheless, games have proven to be motivational tools in learning, since nearly all children love to play. Furthermore, gamification has emerged as an innovative and powerful tool in educational and professional contexts due to its potential to generate motivating learning experiences tailored to individual needs (Maldonado et al., 2024).

The contribution of board games to second language acquisition is supported by numerous authors such as Puchta and Elliott (2017), who assert that these games involve observing, listening, and expressing oneself; therefore, they facilitate language learning and make it more engaging. Additionally, they help students retain target words quickly, promoting more communicative use of the language. While playing, children unconsciously learn new words and phrases, meaning that acquisition occurs as an unconscious process—just as Krashen defines in his language acquisition theory. Similarly, Pinter (2017) suggests that these games offer excellent opportunities to repeatedly listen to the same language and learn to participate in simple conversations.

Doncel-Lara (2023) supports this claim, stating that board games can be used as a pedagogical strategy that enables English vocabulary acquisition. Several studies highlight the impact of board games in speaking classes. When using board games, students demonstrate improvement in all five aspects of speaking skills: grammar, pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and content (Rohdiana, 2017). For example, games like Monopoly and Snakes and Ladders act as facilitators and motivational tools to have students involved in conversation. This creates a natural environment where linguistic input aids language acquisition—that is, students do not even notice they are acquiring the skill because their focus is on the game.

From this perspective, board games also create a playful and relaxed atmosphere that reduces students' anxiety and increases their motivation. According to García (2024), the use of board games in educational contexts can create a more relaxed and motivating environment for students, distinguishing them from typical classroom activities. It is essential to create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere to reduce students' affective filters and improve their learning performance. Moreover, some board games connect with real-life situations, offering students the opportunity to freely share their thoughts and ideas in the target language (Annisa & Nst, 2020). This helps students become more adaptable in the real world and develop their social skills.

Researchers have conducted numerous studies in the past to examine the usefulness of communicative activities in developing speaking skills. However, very few resources have focused on students' perceptions

regarding the use of board games to enhance second language acquisition.

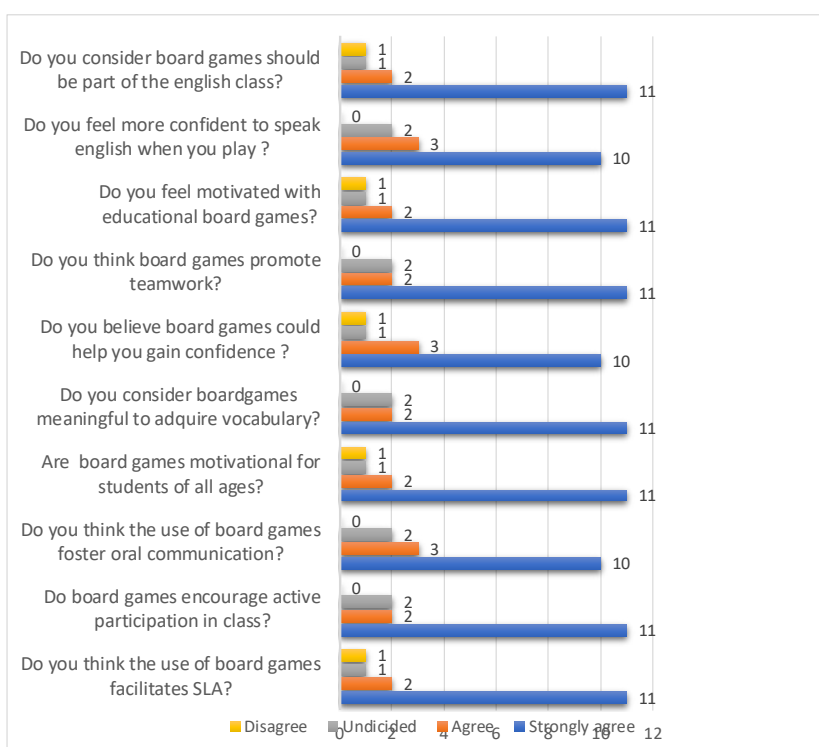
According to Yanamthong, (as cited in Lo-sada 2022), board games allow students to learn while having fun, without realizing they are working. By playing, a relaxed environment is created in which children participate with greater enthusiasm, increasing their motivation and interest in learning without worrying about possible difficulties.

### Quantitative Study Results

On one hand, figure 1 and 2 illustrate the survey results regarding students' personal and overall perspective on the use of board games, in which 70% of responses are favorable. This means that the vast majority strongly agree that these games can be used as a classroom methodology. Furthermore, Tables 1 and 2 detail the results obtained before and after the intervention, demonstrating that board games can have a positive impact on reducing the affective filter and, in turn, on second language acquisition.

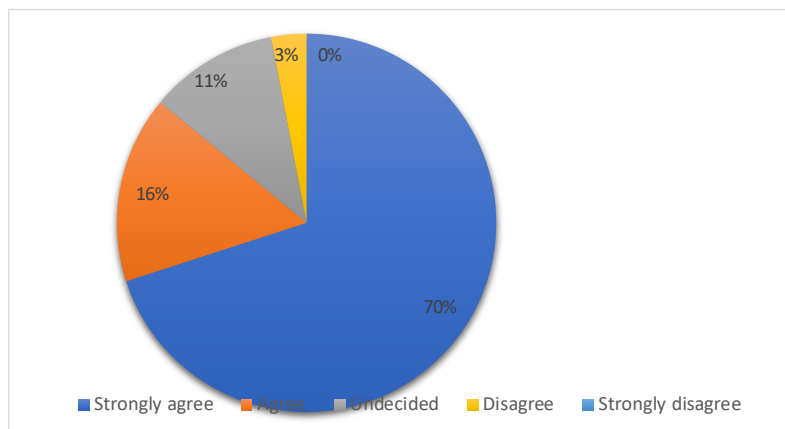
**Figure 1.**

*Personal perspective on boardgames*



**Figure 2.**

*Overall perspective on boardgames*



On one hand, according to the general results obtained from the survey conducted to evaluate students' perspective on using board games in the classroom, 70% of the responses reflected a clearly positive opinion, considering that this type of resource could be highly effective in improving second language acquisition. This suggests that most of the students recognize the potential of this pedagogical tool, which is not only enjoyable, but also effective in fostering students' interaction and teamwork.

On the other hand, 16% of the answers expressed a partially positive assessment, indicating that while they recognize some benefits, they may have certain reservations or consider that the effectiveness of board ga-

mes depends on factors such as the type of game, frequency of use, or class dynamics.

As for the remaining 11%, there is uncertainty regarding the real impact that such activities might have on their learning, suggesting that these students may lack sufficient prior experience or require more evidence to establish a clear standpoint.

These results show, for the most part, a favorable perception among participant, toward incorporating board games as a pedagogical strategy, highlighting their potential to positively influence educational processes—especially in the acquisition and strengthening of a second language—by promoting a more dynamic, participatory, and anxiety-free learning environment.

**Table 1.**

*Oral expression level in the experimental and control groups before using the board game*

Proficiency level	Exp. group	%	Ctrl. group	%
Deficient	8	53.4	6	40
Regular	4	26.6	4	26.6
Well	3	20	5	33.4
Excellent	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows the following results: as part of the deficient level, there were 8 students out of 15 in the experimental group, which represents 53.4% and the control group with 6 students reaching 40%. At the regular level, there were 4 students from the experimental group

and control group with 26.6%. At the good level, the experimental group has 20% and the control group has 26.6%. It can be concluded that the majority of students in the experimental group fall within the deficient and regular levels, with 53.4% and 26.6%, respectively.

**Table 2.**

*Oral expression level in the experimental and control groups after applying the board game*

Proficiency level	Exp. group	%	Ctrl. group	%
Deficient	0	0	3	20
Regular	0	0	5	33.4
Well	6	40	7	46.6
Excellent	9	60	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows the following results: at the deficient level, the experimental group scored 0% and the control group 20%; at the regular level, the experimental group got 0% and the control group 33.4%. At the good level, the experimental group showed an improvement with 40%, while the control group remained at 46.6%. At the excellent level, the experimental group reached 60%, whereas the control group scored 0%. It is concluded that more than half of the students advanced to the excellent level with 60% and to the good level with 40% of the students, indicating that the method had a significant impact on the development of second language acquisition.

**Discussion**

these findings indicate that incorporating board games significantly help reduce students' anxiety and improve in fifth-grade students' ability to acquire a second language. This is in line with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which states that a relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere, make the students more open to language acquisition. Prior to the intervention, the experimental

group mainly displayed deficient or average results, indicating that apprehension, low self-confidence, and limited knowledge may have hindered their communicative performance. However, after board games were introduced into the lessons, fifth grade students showed impressive level in oral skills.

The pre-test and post-test were conducted in both the experimental and control groups. Regarding the results of the experimental group in the pre-test, most of the students presented a concerning deficient level with 53.4%, regular level with 26.6%, and good level at 20%. That is to say, only 3 out of 15 students could barely use the second language to describe the assigned pictures. In the post-test, the results improved, with the majority of students reaching the excellent level with 60% and the good level with 40%, validating the effectiveness of the method in second language acquisition. In order to obtain these results, the observation technique was employed. The instrument, which was the observation checklist, facilitated the systematic collection of the previously mentioned data

This research was sustained by a range of studies highlighting boardgames as a dynamic method in second language acquisition. These results are consistent with Hartt et al. (2020), who demonstrated that fun and interactive teaching methods help students acquire and retain grammar more effectively. This also supports Krashen's theory as game-based instructional activities can be more effective than traditional approaches in second language acquisition.

One of the main purposes of this research was to contribute to the discussion on effective language teaching methods, analyzing the relationship between the use of boardgames and the reduction of the affective filter in second language acquisition. In addition, this work intends to give new insight to future researches, which may bring along further findings regarding this topic and thus keep on fostering the use of this strategy in the classroom.

Despite the promising results obtained, it is important to acknowledge that the research was constrained by a small sample and a single educational context. Future research could broaden the number of participants and employ longitudinal designs, or compare various types of board games to determine which features better facilitate SLA. Additionally, qualitative data such as interviews or classroom discourse analysis could provide deeper understanding into learners' emotions and interactions.

## Conclusions

This study aimed to examine the influence of board games on second language acquisition. During the intervention, students showed great enthusiasm for participating in an interactive game, collaborated in forming work groups, and paid attention to the board game instructions.

The findings provided strong evidence that board games are an effective tool for teaching vocabulary and grammar in a natural way. Through a quantitative design that incorporated open-ended questionnaires, observation

checklists, pre-tests, and post-tests, the study addressed three central research questions. Additionally, it offered valuable insights into how board games influence second language acquisition, as well as students' perceptions regarding their use in the classroom.

In addition, board games provided students with opportunities for genuine interaction, collaborating in pairs with a guided language structure, conditions that support natural and meaningful acquisition. The approving attitudes reported by the students also reveal the potential of these activities to enhance motivation and students' engagement. This research suggests that board games are a practical and effective method in language teaching, particularly in settings where students struggle with anxiety, low confidence, or limited speaking ability. Using these interactive and student-centered method can lead to make learning more motivating, successful.

Finally, the results revealed that students enjoy board games and acquire a second language faster in an environment that fosters motivation, participation, and inclusion. Therefore, teachers should pay particular attention to the role of emotions in the teaching process, ensuring that all students feel comfortable and confident when participating in classwork activities. Hence, board games are an essential part of education due to their benefits, allowing students to feel empowered and more active in class while reducing their affective filter.

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