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Evaluating OutLoud!: A CEFR-Based Digital Game for EFL Speaking Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a CEFR-based situational dialogue game, OutLoud!, in improving EFL learners' speaking competence. The research was conducted at Goolin Indonesia, a non-formal English education institution in Palembang, over several instructional sessions. The population consisted of EFL learners enrolled in the institution, with a sample of 20 participants ranging from A2 to C1 proficiency levels. The study employed a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test–post-test design. Data were collected using three instruments: a speaking test, a questionnaire, and classroom observation. The speaking test, administered before and after the intervention, assessed learners' performance based on CEFR-aligned criteria, including fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale to measure learners' engagement, motivation, and confidence, while observations were conducted to document participation and interaction during the learning process. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentage improvement, supported by qualitative observations. The results showed that learners' speaking performance improved from a mean score of 62.40 in the pre-test to 75.50 in the post-test, indicating a 21% increase. In addition, questionnaire results revealed high levels of engagement (M = 4.32), motivation (M = 4.45), and confidence (M = 4.28). These findings suggest that the integration of CEFR, gamification, and situational dialogue in a digital game environment can effectively enhance speaking competence and create a positive learning experience in non-formal EFL contexts.

Keywords: CEFR, digital game, EFL, speaking instruction

Evaluasi OutLoud!: Permainan Digital Berbasis CEFR untuk Pembelajaran Berbicara EFL

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas permainan dialog situasional berbasis CEFR, *OutLoud!*, dalam meningkatkan kompetensi berbicara pembelajar EFL. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di Goolin Indonesia, sebuah lembaga pendidikan bahasa Inggris nonformal di Palembang, selama beberapa sesi pembelajaran. Populasi penelitian terdiri atas pembelajar EFL yang terdaftar di lembaga tersebut, dengan sampel sebanyak 20 peserta yang berada pada tingkat kemahiran A2 hingga C1. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuasi-eksperimental dengan model one-group pre-test–post-test. Data dikumpulkan melalui tiga instrumen, yaitu tes berbicara, kuesioner, dan observasi kelas. Tes berbicara yang diberikan sebelum dan sesudah intervensi digunakan untuk menilai performa peserta berdasarkan kriteria yang selaras dengan CEFR, meliputi kefasihan, ketepatan gramatikal, kosakata, pelafalan, dan kemampuan interaksi. Kuesioner menggunakan skala Likert 5 poin untuk mengukur keterlibatan, motivasi, dan kepercayaan diri peserta, sedangkan observasi dilakukan untuk mendokumentasikan partisipasi dan interaksi selama proses pembelajaran. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan statistik deskriptif, termasuk nilai rata-rata dan persentase peningkatan, yang didukung oleh data observasi kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa performa berbicara peserta meningkat dari nilai rata-rata 62,40 pada pre-test menjadi 75,50 pada post-test, yang menunjukkan peningkatan sebesar 21%. Selain itu, hasil kuesioner menunjukkan tingkat keterlibatan (M = 4,32), motivasi (M = 4,45), dan kepercayaan diri (M = 4,28) yang tinggi. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa integrasi CEFR, gamifikasi, dan dialog situasional dalam lingkungan permainan digital dapat secara efektif meningkatkan kompetensi berbicara serta menciptakan pengalaman belajar yang positif dalam konteks EFL non-formal.

Keywords: permainan digital, CEFR,pembelajaran berbicara, EFL

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INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively in English, particularly through speaking, has become increasingly important in global academic, professional, and social contexts (Crystal, 2019). As English continues to function as a lingua franca across international domains, individuals are expected not only to comprehend the language but also to actively participate in communicative exchanges that require fluency, clarity, and contextual appropriateness. Within the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is widely acknowledged as one of the most complex skills to acquire because it involves the simultaneous use of multiple competencies, including grammatical accuracy, lexical range, pronunciation, discourse management, and sociolinguistic awareness. In addition, speaking requires real-time processing and interaction, which often places significant cognitive and affective demands on learners (Godwin-Jones, 2023; Hung et al., 2018). Unlike reading or listening, which allow more time for comprehension, speaking requires immediate production and negotiation of meaning, making it particularly challenging for learners who lack sufficient exposure to authentic communication. Consequently, the development of speaking competence has become a central concern in language education, especially in contexts where English is not used as a daily means of communication.

Despite its recognized importance, many EFL learners continue to encounter persistent difficulties in developing effective speaking skills. These challenges stem from a combination of pedagogical, environmental, and psychological factors (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Derakhshan et al., 2016). In many instructional settings, teaching practices still prioritize grammatical correctness and rote memorization over communicative use, resulting in limited opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful interaction (Richards, 2017). As a result, learners may demonstrate knowledge of language forms but struggle to use them appropriately in real-life situations. Furthermore, affective factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence often hinder learners from actively participating in speaking activities (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). These issues are particularly pronounced in non-formal learning contexts, such as language courses, where instructional design may vary widely and may not always incorporate structured frameworks or interactive learning media. The absence of engaging and contextually relevant learning tools in such environments can further reduce learners' motivation and limit their opportunities to practice speaking in authentic and supportive settings (Hung et al., 2018).

In response to these challenges, recent research has increasingly focused on innovative pedagogical approaches that leverage technology and learner-centered strategies to enhance speaking instruction. Among these, gamification and digital game-based learning (DGBL) have gained considerable attention for their potential to create engaging and interactive learning environments (Sailer & Homner, 2020). Gamification involves the integration of game elements such as points, levels, rewards, and challenges into educational contexts, with the aim of increasing learner motivation and participation. Studies have shown that gamified learning environments can foster a sense of achievement, encourage active engagement, and reduce anxiety, thereby creating conditions that are conducive to language practice (Sailer & Homner, 2020). Empirical evidence also suggests that gamification can improve learners' communicative competence and willingness to speak by providing a low-pressure environment where mistakes are treated as part of the learning process (Safitri et al., 2024). Similarly, digital game-based language learning offers immersive and contextualized experiences in which learners can interact with simulated scenarios, practice language use, and receive immediate feedback (Hung et al., 2018). Recent studies further highlight the effectiveness of digital games in supporting various aspects of language learning, including

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vocabulary development, interactional skills, and learner autonomy (Chowdhury et al., 2024). These findings suggest that digital games can serve as powerful tools for facilitating meaningful language use and enhancing learners' overall engagement in the learning process.

Alongside these technological approaches, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has gained recognition as a comprehensive and internationally standardized framework for describing language proficiency (Council of Europe, 2020). CEFR provides detailed descriptors of language ability across different levels, enabling educators to design instruction and assessment that are structured, measurable, and aligned with learners' needs. In the context of speaking, CEFR emphasizes communicative competence, interactional ability, and functional language use, making it a valuable foundation for developing context-based speaking activities (Piccardo & North, 2019). However, despite its widespread adoption in formal education systems, the application of CEFR in non-formal learning environments remains limited. In many cases, CEFR is used primarily as an assessment tool rather than as a basis for designing interactive and engaging learning experiences. Moreover, the integration of CEFR with digital and gamified learning approaches is still relatively underdeveloped, indicating a gap between standardized frameworks and innovative instructional practices.

Despite the growing body of research on gamification, digital game-based learning, and CEFR, there is still a lack of studies that integrate these elements into a cohesive instructional approach and evaluate their effectiveness in real learning contexts (Sailer & Homner, 2020; Piccardo & North, 2019). Many existing studies tend to focus on a single approach, such as gamification or CEFR, without examining how these elements can complement each other to enhance speaking instruction (Hung et al., 2018; Chowdhury et al., 2024). In addition, while situational dialogue is widely recognized as an effective method for developing communicative competence by exposing learners to realistic language use, its integration into digital game-based environments has not been sufficiently explored (Richards, 2017). This limitation suggests that current research has yet to fully address the potential of combining structured proficiency frameworks, interactive learning technologies, and contextualized communication tasks (Godwin-Jones, 2023). Therefore, there is a clear need for empirical research that evaluates how such an integrated approach can be implemented and how they impact learners' speaking development in authentic learning settings.

This study addresses a critical gap in EFL speaking instruction by proposing and empirically examining an integrated approach that combines the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, gamified digital game-based learning, and situational dialogue. Theoretically, it advances current scholarship by demonstrating how standardized proficiency frameworks can be operationalized within interactive and technology-enhanced learning environments, thereby contributing to a more coherent model of speaking instruction. Practically, this study provides robust empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the OutLoud! game in improving learners' speaking competence, engagement, and confidence. The findings offer concrete pedagogical implications for educators and curriculum designers, particularly in non-formal EFL contexts, by presenting a scalable and contextually adaptable model for implementing structured, engaging, and learner-centered speaking activities.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a CEFR-based gamified situational dialogue game, OutLoud!, in improving learners' speaking competence in a non-formal EFL education course at Goolin Indonesia. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions: Does the use of OutLoud! effectively improve learners' speaking competence? Can this digital game enhance learners' speaking performance? Additionally, does the use of

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OutLoud! increase learners' engagement and confidence during speaking activities?

This study is expected to offer significant educational contributions, particularly in the context of non-formal EFL learning. It provides a pedagogical model that integrates the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages with gamified digital learning, thereby supporting more structured yet engaging speaking instruction. For educators, this study offers practical insights into designing interactive speaking activities that align with proficiency levels while maintaining learner motivation. For learners, the use of a gamified situational dialogue game is expected to create a supportive and low-anxiety environment that encourages active participation and confidence in speaking. Additionally, for language course providers, this study may serve as a reference for developing innovative, technology-enhanced curricula that respond to the evolving demands of 21st-century language education

METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design using a one-group pre-test–post-test approach to evaluate the effectiveness of a language learning game named OutLoud!. This game is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) with various situational dialogues in improving learners' speaking competence. This design was selected due to the practical constraints of working with intact classes in a non-formal educational setting, where random assignment was not feasible. The participants consisted of 20 EFL learners enrolled at Goolin Indonesia, a non-formal English language education institution located in Palembang. They were categorized at A2-C1 level of English proficiency according to the institution's placement procedures and had prior experience learning English.

Data were collected using three main instruments. A speaking test was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test to measure learners' speaking competence. The assessment was based on CEFR-aligned criteria, including fluency, accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and interactional ability. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to gather learners' perceptions of engagement, motivation, and confidence during the use of the game. To assess learners' speaking performance, this study employed an analytical scoring rubric adapted from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, as shown in Table 1. The rubric consists of five components, namely fluency, grammatical accuracy, lexical range, pronunciation, and interactional competence, each of which reflects key dimensions of communicative speaking ability. Each component was rated using a five-level scale ranging from 0 (Very Poor) to 20 (Excellent), resulting in a total maximum score of 100 points for each student.

Table-1
Speaking Scoring Rubric

Indicator	Scoring Description				
	0	5	10	15	20
Fluency	Unable to produce continuous speech	Frequent hesitation; speech is fragmented	Noticeable pauses; uneven flow	Generally fluent; occasional hesitation	Speaks smoothly with natural flow; minimal hesitation
Grammatical Accuracy	Persistent errors that block communication	Frequent errors that sometimes obscure meaning	Frequent grammatical errors but meaning is clear	Mostly accurate; some noticeable errors	Consistently accurate; only minor errors

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Lexical Range	Extremely limited vocabulary	Very limited vocabulary; frequent misuse	Limited vocabulary; repetition occurs	Adequate range of vocabulary with occasional misuse	Uses a wide range of vocabulary appropriately
Pronun-ciation	Frequent hesitation; speech is fragmented	Often unclear; difficult to understand at times	Understandable despite several errors	Mostly clear; minor pronunciation issues	Clear, natural pronunciation; easily understood
Interaction	Unable to maintain interaction	Minimal participation; struggles to respond	Participates but relies on support; limited initiative	Responds appropriately; maintains interaction with little support	Actively maintains interaction; responds and initiates effectively

The questionnaire used a Likert scale format to capture participants' responses. Lastly, classroom observations were also conducted throughout the intervention to document learners' participation, interaction, and overall engagement during speaking activities.

The procedure of the study was carried out over several instructional sessions. At the initial stage, participants completed a pre-test to establish their baseline speaking ability. This was followed by the implementation of the treatment using the OutLoud! digital game, which integrates CEFR-based descriptors, gamification elements, and situational dialogue scenarios. During the intervention, learners engaged in interactive speaking tasks designed to simulate real-life communication contexts, allowing them to practice language use in a structured yet engaging environment. At the end of the treatment period, a post-test was administered to assess improvements in speaking performance. Participants also completed the questionnaire, and observational data were recorded throughout the sessions. Figure 1 illustrates the research procedure employed in this study.

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and descriptive approaches. Pre-test and post-test scores were compared to determine the extent of improvement in learners' speaking competence. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentage gains, were used to summarize the results. Questionnaire data were analyzed to identify patterns in learners' engagement, motivation, and confidence. The observational data were used to support and triangulate the findings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the intervention.

RESULTS

1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Speaking Performance

To measure learners' speaking competence, a speaking test was administered in two stages: pre-test and post-test. The pre-test was conducted prior to the implementation of the *OutLoud!* game to establish participants' baseline speaking ability, while the post-test was administered after the completion of the instructional intervention. Both tests were designed based on CEFR-aligned criteria and required learners to perform structured speaking tasks involving situational dialogue.

The speaking tasks in both tests consisted of short role-play and guided dialogue activities that reflected real-life communication scenarios, such as introducing oneself, asking for information, and responding to everyday situations. Each participant was assessed individually. The assessment was

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conducted using a scoring rubric adapted from CEFR descriptors, which included five components: fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, pronunciation, and interactional ability. Each component was scored on a scale of 0 to 20, resulting in a maximum total score of 100 for each participant.

The data presented in this section were obtained from the scores assigned by two raters with experience in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). To ensure consistency, both raters used the same assessment rubric and scoring guidelines. The final score for each participant was calculated as the average of the two raters' scores. The pre-test and post-test scores were compiled and analyzed to obtain the mean score and standard deviation for each test.

Tables 2 and 3 present the frequency distribution of the pre-test and post-test scores obtained by the 20 participants. The pre-test scores ranged from 50 to 75, while the post-test scores ranged from 60 to 90. In the pre-test, most participants' scores were concentrated between 60 and 70, whereas the post-test distribution shifted toward higher score ranges between 75 and 85. The tables demonstrate an overall increase in learners' speaking performance after the implementation of the OutLoud! digital game across the two testing phases.

Table-2
Frequency Distribution of Pre-Test Scores

Score	Frequency	Percentage
50	2	10
55	1	5
60	5	25
65	4	20
70	5	25
75	3	15
Total	20	100

Table 3
Frequency Distribution of Post-Test Scores

Score	Frequency	Percentage
60	2	10
65	3	15
70	3	15
75	4	20
80	4	20
85	3	15
90	1	5
Total	20	100

Based on the output generated by IBM SPSS Statistics, as shown in Figure-1, the mean pre-test score was 64.50 with a standard deviation of 8.14, with 20 participants. The standard error mean for the pre-test was 1.82. Meanwhile, the post-test results showed an increased mean score of 75.00 with a standard deviation of 8.52 and a standard error mean of 1.91. The increase in the mean score indicates that learners demonstrated better speaking performance after participating in the instructional treatment using the OutLoud! digital game. In addition, the standard deviations indicate that the participants' scores were moderately distributed around the mean in both the pre-test and post-test phases.

Paired Samples Statistics

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	64,500	20	0,814	1,820
Post-test	75,000	20	0,852	1,910

Figure 1
SPSS Paired-Sample Statistics Screenshot

Figure-2 presents the results of the paired-samples t-test comparing pre-test and post-test scores. The analysis shows that the mean difference between the two tests was -10.00, indicating that the post-test scores were higher

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than the pre-test scores. The standard deviation of the differences was 2.29, with a standard error mean of 0.51. Furthermore, the 95% confidence interval of the difference ranged from -11.07 to -8.93. The obtained t-value was -19.49 with 19 degrees of freedom (df), and the significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) was .000, which was lower than the 0.05 significance level. These findings indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between learners' pre-test and post-test speaking scores after the implementation of the OutLoud! digital game.

Paired Samples Test

pretest - posttest

Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
-10,000	2,290	0,051	-19,490	19	0,000

Figure 2
SPSS Paired-Sample Test Screenshot

Collectively, the results demonstrate a clear difference between learners' pre-test and post-test speaking scores. The increase in mean scores, supported by the frequency distribution and individual raw data, indicates a consistent upward shift in learners' performance following the implementation of the OutLoud! game. The statistical findings further confirm that the difference between the two sets of scores is significant, as evidenced by the paired-sample t-test results. These findings suggest that the use of the OutLoud! game contributed to measurable improvements in learners' speaking competence.

2. The Implementation of OutLoud!

The implementation of the OutLoud! game was conducted during the treatment phase across several instructional sessions. The game functioned as an interactive speaking activity in which learners worked in pairs and engaged in structured dialogue tasks based on professional and workplace communication contexts, particularly in fields such as tourism, hospitality, and public service.

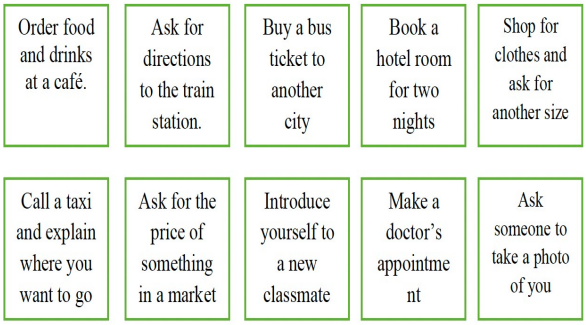

Figure-3
Examples of Situation Cards for the A2 Level of English Proficiency

At the beginning of each session, learners accessed the game platform and selected a CEFR level corresponding to their proficiency. They then entered the game environment, where each pair selected a Situation Card representing a workplace-related scenario, such as handling customer requests, making reservations, providing directions to tourists, or responding to service inquiries. After selecting a situation, the system automatically generated one Expression Card, one Challenge Card, and one Wildcard Card, which served as structured prompts to guide the speaking activity. An example of the Situation Cards for the A2 level of English proficiency is presented in Figure 2. The expressions used in the Expression Cards, along with the Challenge Card and Wildcard Card, are presented in Table 4.

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Table-4
Expression Cards, Challenge Cards, and Wildcards Cards for the A2 Level of English Proficiency

Expression Cards	Challenge Cards	
"Can I have…?" "How much does it cost?" "I'd like to…" "Excuse me, where is…?" "Could you help me, please?" "What time does it start?" "Do you have…?" "I don't understand." "Can you repeat that?" "It's too expensive." "I'm looking for…" "Just a moment, please." "How far is it?" "Thank you very much." "No problem."	· You must repeat everything twice. · You only have 15 seconds to respond. · Pretend you don't know one English word and find another way to explain. · Use your hands to show what you mean. · The other person keeps interrupting you. · You must ask two questions before finishing · Speak without using "yes" or "no." · Start your sentence with "Excuse me" · You must use one polite phrase. · Use at least three sentences.	· Say your favorite color in your answer. · Use an animal name in your answer. · Smile while speaking. · Pretend you are in a hurry. · Say one word in your native language (the partner must guess the meaning). · Add "please" twice. · Pretend you are talking on the phone. · Use body language dramatically. · Whisper one sentence. · Pretend you are angry, but stay polite

During the activity, learners took turns performing role-based dialogue tasks aligned with the selected professional scenario. The Expression Cards provided functional language commonly used in workplace communication, such as making polite requests, giving explanations, or responding to complaints. The Challenge Cards introduced specific constraints, such as limiting response time, requiring the use of certain expressions, or encouraging alternative communication strategies. The Wildcard Cards added spontaneous elements that required learners to adapt their responses creatively while maintaining the flow of interaction.

Each session required learners to sustain interaction, respond appropriately to their partner, and complete the assigned communicative tasks within the given constraints. The activities were structured to simulate workplace communication situations, enabling learners to practice language use in contexts relevant to professional environments. Throughout the implementation, learners' participation and interaction were continuously observed and documented.

3. Questionnaire Results on Learners' Engagement, Motivation, and Confidence

Learners' perceptions of the use of the OutLoud! game were collected through a questionnaire administered at the end of the intervention. The questionnaire used in this study employed a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure learners' perceptions of the use of OutLoud! game. The instrument was designed to capture three key aspects: engagement, motivation, and confidence in speaking. Each category consisted of several items that reflected learners' experiences during the intervention. For the engagement category, example items included statements such as "I

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actively participated in the speaking activities during the game" and "The game kept me involved throughout the session." The motivation category included items such as "The game made me more interested in learning English speaking" and "I was motivated to complete the speaking tasks." Meanwhile, the confidence category included statements such as "I felt more confident speaking English during the activities" and "The game helped me reduce my fear of making mistakes when speaking." Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement based on their experience using the game, and the responses were used to calculate mean scores for each category.

Table-5
Questionnaire Results on Learners' Engagement, Motivation, and Confidence (n = 20)

Category	Number of Items	Mean Score	Interpretation Level
Engagement	5	4.32	high
Motivation	5	4.45	high
Confidence	5	4.28	high
Overall	15	4.35	high

As shown in Table 8, the mean engagement score was 4.32, indicating that learners actively participated in the speaking activities and game-based tasks. The motivation category obtained a mean score of 4.45, reflecting learners' interest and willingness to engage in the learning process using the game. The confidence category showed a mean score of 4.28, indicating learners' perceived improvement in their ability to speak and respond during the activities. The overall mean score across all categories was 4.35, based on the aggregated responses of the 20 participants.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of a CEFR-based gamified situational dialogue game, OutLoud!, was associated with measurable improvement in learners' speaking performance, as reflected in the increase from pre-test to post-test scores. The statistical results showed that the mean score increased from 64.50 in the pre-test to 75.00 in the post-test, indicating an improvement of 10.50 points or approximately 16.28%. In addition, the paired samples t-test revealed that the difference between the two scores was statistically significant (t = -19.49, Sig. = .000). The frequency distribution data also demonstrated a clear upward shift in learners' performance. In the pre-test, most learners' scores were concentrated between 60 and 70, with the highest score being 75. However, in the post-test, the score distribution shifted toward higher ranges, particularly between 75 and 85, with the highest score increasing to 90. Furthermore, no learners remained in the lowest score range after the intervention.

This improvement suggests that structured speaking practice, when supported by interactive and contextually meaningful tasks, can facilitate the development of communicative competence. Such results are consistent with previous research highlighting that task-based and technology-enhanced language learning environments provide learners with increased opportunities for meaningful interaction, which is essential for speaking development (Mingyan et al., 2025; Asratie, 2023). The use of CEFR-aligned descriptors in designing the speaking tasks may have contributed to this improvement by ensuring that activities were appropriately matched to learners' proficiency levels, thereby supporting

gradual and measurable progress (Council of Europe, 2020; Piccardo & North, 2019).

The role of gamification in enhancing learners' engagement and motivation is also evident in the questionnaire findings. The high mean scores across engagement, motivation, and confidence indicate that learners responded positively to the game-based learning environment. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that gamification can increase learner participation and sustain interest by incorporating elements such as challenges, rewards, and interactive feedback (Sailer & Homner, 2020). In digital game-based language learning contexts, such elements have been shown to promote active involvement and reduce disengagement, particularly in speaking activities that are often perceived as demanding or anxiety-inducing (Hung et al., 2018; Chowdhury et al., 2024). The structured yet dynamic nature of the OutLoud! game appears to have created a learning environment that encouraged learners to participate more actively in speaking tasks.

In addition to gamification, the integration of CEFR as a guiding framework played a significant role in structuring the learning experience. CEFR provides clear descriptors of language proficiency, enabling the design of tasks that are aligned with learners' communicative abilities (Council of Europe, 2020). In this study, the use of CEFR-informed tasks ensured that learners engaged in speaking activities that were both level-appropriate and goal-oriented. This finding supports previous research emphasizing that structured frameworks contribute to more effective language instruction by providing clear learning objectives and assessment criteria (Little, 2017; North, 2014). The combination of CEFR with gamified elements represents a practical approach to bridging the gap between structured instruction and interactive learning environments.

Another important aspect of this study is the use of situational dialogue based on professional workplace contexts, such as tourism, hospitality, and public service. This approach reflects the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where language instruction is tailored to real-world communication needs. The findings suggest that contextualized speaking tasks can enhance learners' ability to use language functionally and appropriately in specific situations. This is consistent with communicative language teaching principles, which emphasize the importance of authentic and meaningful interaction in language learning (Richards, 2017). By simulating workplace communication scenarios, the OutLoud! game provided learners with opportunities to practice language use in contexts that are relevant to their future professional needs.

The questionnaire results also indicate that learners experienced increased confidence in speaking, which may be linked to the supportive and interactive nature of the game-based environment. Previous studies have shown that digital and gamified learning environments can reduce language anxiety and create a safe space for learners to practice speaking without fear of making mistakes (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). The use of structured prompts, such as Expression, Challenge, and Wildcard Cards, may have helped learners manage their responses and maintain interaction, thereby reducing cognitive and emotional barriers to speaking. This suggests that the integration of gamification and structured dialogue can contribute not only to cognitive development but also to positive affective outcomes in language learning.

Despite these positive findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved a relatively small sample size of 20 participants, which may limit the generalizability of the results. In addition, the use of a one-group quasi-experimental design without a control group makes it difficult to attribute the observed improvement solely to the intervention. The duration of the study was also limited to several instructional sessions, which may not fully capture long-term learning effects. Future research could address these limitations by employing a larger

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sample size, incorporating control groups, and examining the long-term impact of gamified CEFR-based learning interventions.

Therefore, this study contributes to the growing body of research on digital game-based language learning by demonstrating the potential of integrating CEFR, gamification, and situational dialogue in a single instructional approach. The findings provide empirical evidence that such integration can support speaking development, enhance learner engagement, and promote confidence in non-formal EFL learning contexts. This suggests that similar approaches may be effectively applied in vocational and professional language training settings.

CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the effectiveness of a CEFR-based gamified situational dialogue game, OutLoud!, in supporting the development of speaking competence among EFL learners in a non-formal educational context. The findings demonstrate that the integration of CEFR-aligned descriptors, gamification elements, and situational dialogue tasks within a digital game environment is associated with measurable improvement in learners' speaking performance. In addition, learners reported high levels of engagement, motivation, and confidence, indicating that the intervention was not only instructionally effective but also positively received by participants.

The results highlight the value of combining structured proficiency frameworks with interactive and contextually relevant learning approaches. The use of CEFR ensured that speaking activities were aligned with learners' proficiency levels and learning objectives, while gamification contributed to sustained participation and active involvement. Furthermore, the incorporation of professional workplace scenarios, particularly in tourism, hospitality, and public service contexts, provided learners with opportunities to practice language use in realistic and meaningful situations. This suggests that integrating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) principles into digital game-based learning can enhance the relevance and applicability of speaking instruction.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study offers practical implications for language educators, particularly in non-formal and vocational education settings. The findings support the use of gamified digital tools as a means to create engaging, structured, and learner-centered speaking environments. The OutLoud! game demonstrates how technology can be leveraged to bridge the gap between communicative language teaching and real-world application, making speaking practice more accessible and effective for learners.

However, this study is not without limitations. The relatively small sample size and the absence of a control group limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the short duration of the intervention may not fully capture long-term learning outcomes. Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups, employ more rigorous experimental designs, and examine the long-term impact of similar interventions. Further studies could also explore the integration of adaptive technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to enhance personalization and feedback in game-based speaking instruction.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence that the integration of CEFR, gamification, and situational dialogue within a digital game environment has strong potential to enhance EFL speaking instruction. The findings contribute to the growing field of digital game-based language learning and offer a practical model for implementing effective, engaging, and contextually grounded speaking activities in both non-formal and professional learning contexts.

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