RESEARCH ARTICLE

Play to learn: Exploring the impact of fun english classes on the literacy skills of elementary learners

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ABSTRACT

Developing literacy skills at an early age is essential for the overall cognitive, social, and emotional growth of children, as it forms the foundation for their academic success and lifelong learning. Early exposure to literature enhances language development by expanding vocabulary, improving comprehension, and promoting critical thinking. This qualitative exploratory paper described different strategies that elementary teachers implement in fun English classes. This study examined the impacts of fun-based teaching strategies in developing the literacy skills of elementary students, focusing on how these strategies contributed to the development of key language competencies, specifically writing and speaking skills. Elementary teachers (n=12) were purposively sampled to be interviewed. Elementary teachers observed that fun English lessons significantly increased student engagement in both writing and speaking activities. Students were interactive, less fearful of making mistakes, and demonstrated greater enthusiasm and participation. Activities such as storytelling, roleplaying, and creative writing encouraged students to express themselves more freely and confidently. Teachers observed improvements in sentence construction, use of vocabulary, and overall expressiveness, particularly among shy students who became more comfortable speaking in front of others. The study also identified three specific strategies—gamification, group work, and roleplaying—that were effective in enhancing literacy. Teachers used games to build vocabulary and grammar skills, group activities to encourage brainstorming and discussion, and role-playing to promote speaking and creative writing. These strategies created a dynamic learning environment that supported both language learning and personal development. Consequently, teachers are encouraged to embrace dynamic and student-centered approaches to create an engaging English learning environment. Fun-based learning strategies should be intentionally designed to support both receptive and productive language skills, providing students with opportunities to practice English in context.
Keywords: fun English classes; gamification; literacy skills; roleplaying

1. Introduction

Proficiency in the English language empowers individuals to competently interact with people from various linguistic origins and unlocks novel prospects for personal and professional advancement[1]. English is a widely spoken language worldwide and has achieved the position of a global language[2-4]. English is extensively used in many industries like engineering, research, business, education, information technology,

software, medicine, among others[5]. The modern media industry requires individuals to have an outstanding command of spoken English. Individuals who can communicate well in the English language are able to take part in international business, engage in cultural exchange, and have access to knowledge from a larger-scale sources[6.] As a result, English language instruction has been regarded as a critical component of modern educational institutions.

In the Philippines, English instruction becomes a major part of basic education system. The English curriculum has undergone comprehensive evaluation and improvement to establish a competitive edge in developing individuals with proficient mastery of the language[7]. However, Valderama[8] reported in *The Manila Times* that the English Proficiency Index (EPI) ranking of the Philippines declined from 14th place to 20th in 2019. As proven in the study of Palattao[9] among Grade 4 learners in Tapel Elementary School, findings indicated that the learners were at frustration level in English reading using the Individual Graded Passage Screening Test (IGPST) from the revised Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). Teachers are also unable to ignore the fact that students make mistakes when they write[10]. There is a clear manifestation on the extent of the problem in English literacy among second language students in the country, and that English teachers should take part in developing the long-term literacy skills of their students.

It is imperative to emphasize the importance of developing and enhancing English reading and writing abilities at an early age to establish a strong basis for future English language learning. The cultivation of an interest and love for the English language during the early stages of development enables children to acquire and refine crucial linguistic abilities at a young age[11-13]. Teachers have a crucial role in promoting early childhood literacy through effective learning activities[14]. Elementary teachers from Rizal Elementary School, Davao Del Sur, Philippines implemented reading strategies like engaging students in generating questions prior to reading, implementing strategies such as identifying the primary idea and evaluating comprehension while reading, and utilizing post-reading tasks[15].

Individuals who cultivate a passion for learning and maintain an optimistic perspective on the pursuit of new knowledge are more inclined to engage in lifelong learning[16]. Positive learning attitudes contribute to the development of a mindset that emphasizes ongoing learning and intellectual advancement. Students are urged to actively pursue new information, investigate various viewpoints, and maintain an engagement with their surrounding environment[17]. Through the cultivation of these attitudes, teachers establish an initial structure that enables students to evolve into lifelong learners, characterized by adaptability and responsiveness to emerging opportunities[18]. Students learning English as a second language have the potential to enhance their communication abilities, engage in intercultural exchanges, and promote connections with individuals from various cultural backgrounds[19].

For children to learn, there is a need to develop enjoyable and engaging activities in classrooms[12]. A student-centered classroom is believed to create an atmosphere that enhances student engagement by emphasizing their responsibility for their own learning and active participation in the learning process[20,21]. In a student-centered classroom, Carillo[22] found out that Elementary teachers from Mati, Davao Oriental implemented classroom engagement strategies like creating inclusive classrooms, rewards systems, ensuring collaborative learning, and considering learning as an active process. The Department of Education (DepEd) recognized the need for student-centered classrooms in the country explaining it is imperative for educators to focus on implementing initiatives designed to enhance learners' proficiency in English[23]. Although studies on student-centered strategies were evident, there is still limited understanding on how Filipino teachers implement them. From this perspective, this paper was conducted to determine different interactive strategies that can potentially influence the engagement of elementary students in learning the English

language. This paper wanted to explore the context of fun English classes as a form of engagement strategy in improving the literary skills of the elementary students. This paper did not only characterize student-centered pedagogical approach as a method, but particularly describe how classes take place in a fun and enjoyable manner with different engagement strategies implemented by elementary teachers.

2. Literature review

Literacy is commonly described as the ability of a person to comprehend and produce written language, including an extensive control of linguistic skills and a conscious understanding of both oral and written communication systems[24]. Literacy development in children covers acquiring proficiency in the standardized reading and writing structure of a language, together with understanding the morphological, syntactical, and lexical features that define written text in that language[25]. During the early stages of childhood, even before fully gaining the ability to read and write, children build foundational literacy skills that provide the framework for their reading and writing abilities in their initial years of schooling[26]. In fact, Pinto et al.[27] have asserted that early literacy skills serve as a reliable indicator of reading achievement in primary school. To enhance emergent literary skills in early life, it is key to promote child's understanding of syllables initially, followed by phrases.

The Philippines, along with other member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has been actively working towards the improvement of English proficiency among its workforce and student population. This effort is driven by the need to meet the challenges posed by globalization, which requires individuals to possess strong English language skills[28,29]. The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, commonly referred to as the K-12 program, was implemented to introduce significant changes in the Philippine education system that extends the basic education from 10 to 12 years. It also emphasized the importance of enhancing English language instruction, recognizing the significance of English proficiency in today's globalized world[30].

There is a growing interest in the Philippines to enhance the English proficiency of its population due to various economic factors. However, based on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), only 24% of Filipino students had basic reading proficiency or at the very least can identify the main ideas of a moderate length text[31]. In PISA 2022 results, Filipino students scored 347 points in reading performance, which is relatively lower compared to Southeast Asian countries like Thailand scoring 379 points, Malaysia with 388 points, and Singapore with 543 points[32]. Alexander Sucalit, an education program specialist at DepEd said that students' skills are lagging behind countries equivalent to an average of five to six years of schooling[31].

In the current English language instruction of the country, there is gap between the intentions of the curriculum to integrate different language skills as it fails to effectively outline how this integration should happen in practice. Although the curriculum mentioned the significance of receptive skills, grammar, vocabulary, and productive skills, the actual practice of these components in classrooms was not indicated nor supported[7]. The absence of specificity and clarity in the curriculum may potentially contribute to the misalignment between the instructional preferences of teachers and the learning needs and desires of students[33]. Teachers also mentioned the problems and challenges they encounter in implementing the curriculum. Magallanes, Chung and Le[34] pointed out that there is a need for educational organizations to prioritize the reformation of innovation because the current resources available to teachers are inadequate and require improvement.

There is a positive outlook on developing fun-based instruction to develop students' literacy skills. For example, kindergarten teacher can accomplish this by employing word games, identifying and generating rhymes, and comparing sounds[24]. Likewise, high-quality television could develop child's attention, understanding, open vocabulary, expressive language, and letter-sound knowledge contribute to an optimal linguistic development[35-37].

Fun-based instruction is essentially a student-centered approach that focuses on developing students' engagement in learning[12,38,39]. Nurdianingsih et al.[12] believed that "learning designed for children must be carried out in a fun and interesting way." *Having fun while learning* is a recent phenomenon in education that encourages teachers to focus on engaging students in the learning process[40,41]. Although fun-based instruction is a relatively recent development, its underlying concept draws heavily from the principles of constructivism, which have been in practice for decades. The Constructivist Learning Theory is rooted in studies led by Piaget[42], emphasizing that children engage actively in their learning processes, with knowledge being formed through their experiences. The fundamental aspect of Constructivism involves facilitating children's roles as "authors and creators of educational content", as opposed to merely serving as passive recipients[40]. The practice of recreational learning consists of different enjoyable activities, including playing games, singing, storytelling, acting, and composing poetry, among others. The integration of entertainment learning methods into the educational system is poised to enhance the participatory and student-centered nature of the process of learning and instruction[43].

Active learning, a concept that has been emphasized for numerous years, is founded on child-centered frameworks that encourage the child's active participation in the learning process[44]. Choosing effective instructional methods and approaches is crucial for promoting active learning. The activity strategy places a higher priority on children's activities compared to activities led by the teacher[45]. Consequently, effective early childhood learning strategies should possess the qualities of being engaging, social, and incorporating games and enjoyable activities, thus ensuring the preservation of the fundamental nature of childhood[13]. It is also important to develop and implement learning approaches that promote happiness, creativity, and active participation while maintaining that children are not subjected to excessive pressure or burden[46-48].

Several studies on fun-based instruction were conducted in the Philippines. Lasala Jr.[49] analyzed the effects of game-based activities (GBAs) on the intrinsic motivation of Grade 7 students in Sorsogon, Philippines, using a mixed-methods approach. The results showed that integrating GBAs into ecosystem lessons significantly improved students' intrinsic motivation, particularly by addressing their psychological needs such as interest, competence, and perceived value. The study recommends incorporating GBAs into science education to enhance student motivation and learning outcomes, while suggesting further research into the broader impact of GBAs on learning experiences. More broadly, Carillo[22] explored the engagement strategies used by public elementary school teachers in a student-centered classroom in Mati, Davao Oriental. Through interviews with ten teachers, it identified key strategies such as differentiated instruction, reward systems, and active learning, while highlighting the importance of understanding student diversity and promoting collaborative learning. The findings emphasized that effective engagement strategies can enhance student motivation, create inclusive classrooms, and foster an active learning environment for both teachers and students. Pitac[50] examined the experiences of public elementary school teachers in Tacloban City District Learning Center VI as they implemented intervention techniques to improve reading proficiency. The study found that strategies such as phonics teaching, literacy centers, reading aloud, and differentiated instruction were used.

Students are more likely to develop a strong interest in reading when teachers effectively instruct them on how to interpret academic texts within subjects that are closely related and offer opportunities for engagement throughout the duration of the term[51]. With that, teachers are assigned to develop innovative ways in teaching to improve the learning process in the classroom[52]. Farih[53] conducted a study on instructional material development, specifically focusing on the creation of an English textbook for early age learners that incorporates fun English games for elementary school students. The author developed a comprehensive handbook titled "Fun English Games for Young Learners" with collection of 30 distinct English games that can be utilized as effective tools for teaching the English language.

3. Objectives

The goal of this exploratory study was to determine the most prominent fun English instructional strategies of elementary teachers based on their experiences. This paper identified instructional strategies that teachers believed to have impacted the literary skills of their students. Below are the specific objectives established in this study.

(1) To investigate the impact of fun English lessons on the writing proficiency and speaking of elementary learners.

(2) To identify specific fun-based teaching strategies that effectively enhance literacy skills in elementary English learners

4. Methods

4.1. Research design

This paper was a qualitative exploratory study on how fun English classes can impact the literary skills of elementary learners. The narratives were taken from the experiences of elementary teachers who adapt fun English instructional strategies in their classrooms. Narrative data analysis was conducted to extract themes from responses of the study participants. Researchers engage in exploration when having limited or lacking scientific knowledge pertaining to the group, process, activity, or situation they intend to investigate which holds significant aspects worthy of further examination[54-56]. Social science exploration is a comprehensive and deliberate endeavor that follows a systematic and organized approach. Its primary objective is to maximize the identification of general patterns and principles that contribute to the description and understanding of various aspects of social or psychological phenomena[54]. Exploratory research uses inductive method to identify general principles explaining the data and observations from a phenomenon[57]. In conducting exploratory research, it is imperative for the researcher to maintain a willingness to adapt their direction in response to emerging data and newfound insights[58]. Exploratory studies are oftentimes preliminary studies that lay the groundwork for subsequent conclusive research[59].

4.2. Population and sampling

The exploratory research design is characterized by its evolutionary and historical nature, often dismissing the use of large sample sizes[60] mainly because its focus starts from broader to narrower concepts as the study progresses[58]. Hence, this study only used small sample size to accommodate large volume of narrative data from interview then later being broken down into codes and themes. Twelve elementary school teachers were purposively sampled to be interviewed. Purposive sampling is commonly used in research to ensure a quality, unbiased sample, enhancing the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings[2,61,62]. Specifically, criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was carried out to sample the participants. Criterion sampling is where participants are selected based on specific criteria or characteristics

relevant to the research question[62]. Herein, elementary school teachers were selected based on three characteristics—teaching experience, fun classroom interaction, and positive student engagement. Teachers must have at least three years of experience in elementary education, either public or private. Teachers must regularly incorporate fun, interactive learning exercises (e.g., games, hands-on activities) into their classroom routines. Teachers must demonstrate a record of high student engagement, as evidenced by student feedback or classroom observations. The schools' early education coordinators also had suggested potential school teachers who met these criteria. An online survey was distributed via secure links on platforms commonly used by local teachers, with a general description to maintain blindness in sampling. The survey embedded selection criteria, asking teachers about their experience, interactive teaching methods, and student engagement in a neutral way. Responses were automatically filtered to include only those with at least three years of elementary teaching experience, regular use of interactive activities, and strong student engagement. Early education coordinators suggested potential candidates, who received only the generic survey link, ensuring they remained unaware of specific study criteria.

4.3. Research instrument

Exploratory studies do not heavily rely on structured questionnaires[60]. The process is widely dynamic and adaptable[58]; hence requiring a semi-structured study instrument. Semi-structured interviews are often favored over standardized interviews due to their capacity to provide the interviewer with the opportunity to explore into the thoughts and perspectives of the interviewees[63]. This allows for exploration of their opinions and ideas, while also enabling the interviewer to probe further into their responses to obtain additional information and clarification[64,65].

Interview guide questions were developed to elicit the responses from one-on-one interviews with the elementary school teachers. The interview guide is a structured set of questions that serves as a valuable tool for researchers to collect data during interviews. Well-formulated questions are characterized by clear wording, and a focus on the participants' experiences and opinions[63]. A semi-structured interview guide consists of two types of questions: main theme questions and follow-up questions. The main theme questions are progressively and logically arranged allowing the interviewee to develop the contexts of the responses[66]. Follow-up questions are employed to clarify the main themes for participants and ensure that the conversation remains focused on the research topic[67].

Table 1 presents the interview guide questions asked in one-on-one interviews. Each objective had five questions about the experiences of elementary school teachers on adapting fun English classes instructional strategies.

Table 1. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview Questions
To investigate the impact of fun English lessons on the writing proficiency and speaking of elementary learners.	a. Can you describe how incorporating interactive and enjoyable activities in your English classes has influenced your students' writing skills? Have you noticed any specific improvements?
	b. How do you think fun-based English lessons impact students' confidence and ability in speaking English? Can you share any examples?
	c. In your experience, do students who engage more actively in fun and interactive lessons show greater progress in writing compared to traditional lessons? If so, how?
	d. What types of activities or lesson elements do you find most effective in improving both writing and speaking skills in your students? Why do you think they work well?
	e. Have you observed any differences in how students approach writing and

		speaking tasks after participating in more enjoyable and interactive English lessons? How do these differences manifest?
To identify specific fun-based teaching strategies that effectively enhance literacy skills in elementary English learners	a.	What fun-based teaching strategies have you implemented in your English classes that you believe significantly enhance your students' literacy skills? Can you describe how you use them?
	b.	Which specific activities or games do you find most effective in helping students improve their reading and writing skills? Why do you think these activities are successful?
	c.	How do you adapt traditional literacy exercises to make them more engaging and enjoyable for your students? What has been the impact of these adaptations?
	d.	Can you provide an example of a lesson or activity that your students found particularly enjoyable and that also led to noticeable improvements in their literacy skills?
	e.	In your opinion, how important is the element of fun in teaching literacy to young learners? How does it compare to more traditional teaching methods in terms of effectiveness?

Table 1. *(Continued).*

4.4. Data gathering procedure

Researchers in the field of social science have consistently emphasized the significance of interviews as a valuable method for gathering data in qualitative studies[68,69]. Qualitative interviews should be natural, more like informal conversations, to enable participants to freely discuss their perceptions and experiences[70]. Along with that, the interviewer should maintain a receptive stance towards new and unexpected phenomena, refraining from imposing preconceived frameworks or categories[71].

Similarly, Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte[72] suggested that the quality of an interview can be maintained by adhering to three principles:

1. preserving the flow of the interviewee's story

2. maintaining a positive relationship with the interviewee, and

3. avoiding interviewer bias.

An interviewer was assigned to conduct one-on-one interviews with the participants. The interview process began with introductory questions to assist individuals get to know each other and feel more at ease, where participants were allowed to speak to their native language and dialects. As the interview progressed, the interviewer asked significant theme questions in a logical order, allowing the subject to discuss their experiences and points of view. Follow-up questions were used on purpose to gather additional information, ensure that the discussion was on track with the study purpose. To create trust and allow the conversation to flow organically, the interviewer maintains a neutral tone, listens carefully, and answers with empathy. Finally, the interviewer summarized the important topics, thanks the participant for their time, and informs them of the next steps in the study. The entire interview process was recorded using phone audio recorder with the permission of the participant.

4.5. Data analysis

The primary data was the responses of participants in the one-on-one interview. Thematic analysis was carried out to analyze the responses and develop themes based on the established study objectives. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that seeks to uncover patterns and significance in data[73]. Thematic analysis can be conceptualized as a procedure that involves the identification and exploration of both explicit and implicit meanings derived from the data, then synthesizing these into cohesive and comprehensive view of the subject matter[74]. Thematic analysis, herein, was mainly based on inductive data-driven meaning

making approach to interpretation. An inductive approach, as described by Patton[75], involves identifying themes that are closely connected to the data itself. In inductive method, when data is gathered through interviews or focus group, the themes that emerge may not necessarily align closely with the specific questions that were posed to the participants; hence, their motivation should not be influenced by the researcher's theoretical curiosity[76].

Since this paper was not tied to theoretical contexts about fun English learning approach in classrooms, reflexive thematic analysis was the most applicable method as it helps in determining outcomes and only focus on the surface data gathered. Reflexive thematic analysis is an accessible and theoretically flexible method that enables researchers to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret patterns or themes within a data set[77]. Braun and Clarke[78] have proposed a set of guidelines for conducting reflexive thematic analysis, with the aim of balancing the promotion of flexibility in the approach while ensuring the method's integrity. These guidelines, as shown in **Figure 1**, outline six distinct phases that researchers can follow to effectively carry out reflexive thematic analysis.
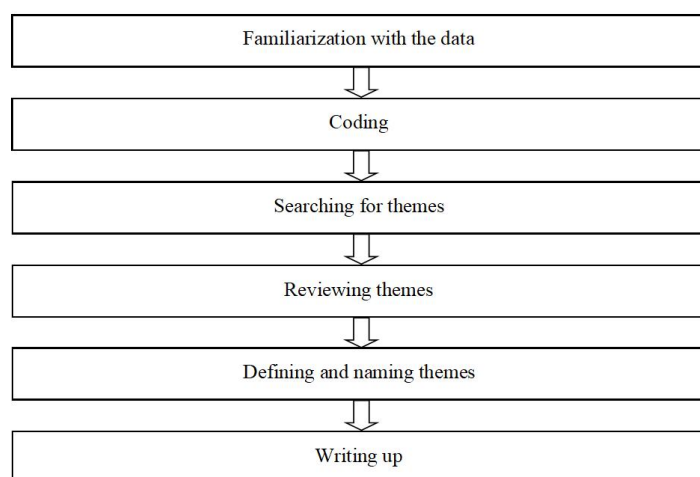

Figure 1. Six steps in conducting reflexive thematic analysis.

In analyzing the narrative data, the process began by carefully reviewing the statements provided by the participants. Each statement was then examined, and relevant codes were identified and highlighted based on the recurring themes and concepts present in the responses. These codes were assigned to specific parts of the data to capture the essence of each participant's narrative. After the coding process, the highlighted codes were grouped into categories or patterns that reflected the key topics and underlying meanings across the data. Finally, themes were reflexively interpreted. **Table 2** presents a sample of thematic analysis carried out in this study.

Table 2. Sample thematic analysis.

Theme	Code	Data Extracts	Interpretation
Engagement	Increased Participation	"With interactive classrooms, it encouraged deeper engagement with the writing process." "They were less hesitant to share their work with the class." "Students were positive and enthusiastic in answering questions."	Fun English lessons increased student engagement in both writing and speaking. Learners demonstrated a willingness to participate, were enthusiastic about classroom activities, and interacted actively in both group and individual tasks.
	Reduction in Fear of Mistakes	"Students were less hesitant to speak up and answer questions, even when they made mistakes."	Fun English lessons provided a safe learning space, reducing anxiety and fear of mistakes, which in turn encouraged learners to speak

"Fun-based learning helps them focus on learning without fear of errors."	and write more freely.

Table 2. *(Contiued).*

5. Results

Objective 1. To investigate the impact of fun English lessons on the writing proficiency and speaking of elementary learners.

There were three major themes that emerged on how fun English classes impact the English literacy of elementary learners. Teachers observed increased engagement, expression, and motivation of learners when they were exposed to highly interactive classrooms.

Theme 1: Engagement

Learners in fun English classes were highly engaged in the learning process. Engagement can be described as learners' interaction with their surroundings, how they behave with others, or even how they deal with somehow cognitively demanding environment.

Firstly, teachers implementing interactive English classes observed notable changes on how their students engage themselves in writing activities. Some of them manifested their willingness to write simple sentences. With fun English classes, the learners were highly encouraged to apply their ideas in writing and assess their outputs.

> "With interactive classrooms, it encouraged deeper engagement with the writing process."

Secondly, teachers observed that students were more engaged in the learning process displaying consistent participation and less fear of committing mistakes. For example, when teachers ask a question, students were positive and enthusiastic in answering that question. They were less hesitant in speaking up whenever they are called. In instances where they were not able to answer the question correctly, they still manifested that same aura of positivity and enthusiasm. It seems that fun English classes exert less pressure to students while encouraging them to participate whenever they need to.

> "I remember a student who, by regularly engaging in these activities, started to volunteer for class discussions, demonstrating clear progress in both fluency and confidence."

> "They also tend to be less hesitant to share their work with the class."

> "Fun-based English learning could help them focus more to love learning to the point that they won't look corrections as something to be ashamed of."

> "These activities offer a safe space to practice speaking, diminishing their fear of errors."

> "…they experience less pressure and become more willing to speak up."

> "Collaborative story writing, role-playing, and interactive games...allow students to practice both writing and speaking in a context that feels natural and enjoyable."

Lastly, engagement helped students to *assess the language structures* taught to them. Fun English classes is a form of *meaningful learning* where participation is encouraged and upheld. Teachers disregard

the strict purpose of academic tasks, *i.e.,* to force students to learn something, but only to use these as a gateway to long-term students' personal development. Teachers believed that learning should be less cognitively demanding.

> "Active engagement helps them internalize language structures and vocabulary in a more meaningful way."

> "Participation leads to better sentence structure, vocabulary use, and overall writing fluency because they see writing as a part of a fun activity rather than just an academic task."

Theme 2: Expression

Teachers were positive about how fun English classes encourage imagination and creativity. For example, storywriting/telling activates the imagination of students in making ideas, narratives, and characters for their stories. Some teachers observed changes on how students construct their sentences, how they organize the story, or even the use of uncommon words. Some also use figures of speech to describe a setting or situation.

> "I've seen improvements in their ability to express their thoughts more clearly and creatively."

> "Storytelling exercises encourage students to use their imagination."

> "…they can be more confident in expressing their ideas through writing."

> "I've noticed that students are more willing to write, and their sentences are more detailed and imaginative."

> "They learn how to use figures of speech and uncommon words."

In a more advanced way, fun English classes also influenced students' participation to roleplaying games and helped them speak comfortably and confidently. Notably, one teacher observed changes on the academic behaviors of their shy students as she became less anxious in speaking in front of her classmates. Students were given the chance to say something, to show something, and discuss the topics they want, the movies they recently watched, or the stories they read. One teacher described their students as outspoken and expressive because of this instructional strategy. Expressive in a way that students use creative words, simple figures of speech, and grammar.

> "Roleplaying games have helped students speak more comfortably and confidently in front of their classmates."

> "…role-play exercises have made shy students more at ease when speaking in front of others."

> "A basic game like 'Show and Tell' encourages students to talk about something they are interested in."

> "I have observed quiet students gradually become more outspoken and willing to express their ideas."

Theme 3: Motivation

Some teachers considered engagement as a form of motivation to learn. Students have that *'I love to learn'* attitude where they manifested interest in learning, like asking questions, sharing ideas, brainstorming. This kind of attitude might primarily drive them to feel positive in the learning process, which in turn, make

them participate in class discussion. Motivation is subtle at early ages because it is the time when enthusiasm takes into shape.

> "When students engage in activities that are both fun and educational, they tend to be more motivated to write."

> "By making learning engaging and fun, students are more motivated to participate actively, which can lead to improvements in their writing abilities."

> "…they have the 'I love to learn' attitude."

Objective 2. To identify specific fun-based teaching strategies that effectively enhance literacy skills in elementary English learners.

Three fun English instructional strategies were prominent in enhancing the literary skills of the elementary English learners. Teachers developed strategies like games, group works, and roleplay to encourage their students to participate during class discussions. These strategies were designed by the teachers themselves and they had the utmost control on how to implement them within their classrooms.

Theme 1: Gamification

Developing classrooms games were the most popular fun English instruction strategy among English elementary teachers. One simple strategy was the Wordle, an online word game where the guesser is given six trials to guess a five-letter word. One teacher used this game to let students guess a word then defining the word after a successful guess. Other teachers apply strategy like word puzzles having the similar purpose—to develop the vocabulary of their students.

> "I do Wordle with my learners. They are guessing a five-letter word. After guessing a word, I explain what the word means and explain how to use them in a sentence."

> "I use language games like word puzzles, which reinforce spelling and vocabulary in an enjoyable way."

Other teachers use visual activities like pictionary and four-pics-one-word to develop the vocabulary of a student. In these activities, students were given pictures that describe or define a word, and students should be able to guess what the word is.

> "Pictionary…to build vocabulary and spelling skills in a fun, competitive environment."

> "I do four-pics-one-word. I give my students four pics with the same ideas, and they need to guess the word."

Another popular approach was the spelling bee. Teachers group their students as teams. They give them topics to study with their team. For them, this approach is not only good in developing the skills of students but also fosters sense of teamwork and healthy competition.

> "Instead of a standard spelling test, I make Spelling Bee activities where students compete in teams. This not only motivates them to study the words but also fosters a sense of teamwork and healthy competition.

Teachers also took traditional directions in implementing fun English classes. One teacher makes story cubes, a learning material shaped as dice with pictures in each side. A student will roll the story cubes and whatever the picture it reveals, the student should make a story based on that picture.

> "Story Cubes is a particularly effective game for improving reading and writing skills. Students roll dice with images and use the resulting pictures to create a story. This activity is successful because it has visual cues with creative writing, making the task enjoyable."

Theme 2: Group works

Teachers give group works for students to *brainstorm* with others, *share* their ideas, and *discuss* their thoughts. They see this approach as an effective way in encouraging students to participate in the discussion and communicate with others. Teachers believed that when students brainstorm, they also learn other things that their classmates know. One teacher said that brainstorming allows students to *explore* other things on their own without the direct assistance of their teachers.

> "Brainstorming…because in having this activity, you allow and guide the students to look into and study the subject. Through this, they can discover and share what they know with others."

> "I usually allow them to brainstorm and just let their creativity flow as they explore other things."

> "In book club, students read a book together and then write and discuss their thoughts."

> "Group discussions give opportunities for them to share their ideas and listen to others."

Other teachers implement active storytelling in classes. They allow their students to make stories together, like giving them the opportunity to develop individual sentences then integrating these ideas into one story. Aside from it helps students to be creative, it also encourages them to listen to what their classmates say.

> "I make activities like storytelling, where students create stories together, one sentence at a time. This not only makes the writing process fun but also encourages students to listen, think quickly, and contribute creatively."

Theme 3: Roleplay

Roleplaying is also a popular strategy that teachers implement to develop the literary skills of their students. In roleplaying, the teachers give topics to students to work with. They are tasked to develop a story with setting, characters, narratives, conflict, and resolution. In most instances, teachers encourage their students to speak in English, even if they feel embarrassed or ashamed. Teachers are constantly reminding their students that speaking in English language is not necessarily be perfect—they only need to clearly relay their thoughts to their audiences. This allows them to learn how to construct sentences as they figure things out.

> "I ask them to make stories and share that story in the classroom through roleplay."

> "By allowing students to act out stories or create their own, they engage with the language in a more immersive way."

"In roleplaying, I assign students to guide the whole group, discuss their ideas, come up with a story, and present it to the class. It doesn't necessarily be perfect, but I want them to learn how to speak English."

"Roleplaying involves writing and performing scripts."

6. Discussion

Objective 1. To investigate the impact of fun English lessons on the writing proficiency and speaking of elementary learners.

Engagement

The importance of engaging students in their learning has been widely recognized across different environmental settings, learning stages, and school subjects[79,80]. Student engagement, the active participation of students in their own learning activities, is influenced by individual factors and classroom dynamics[81]. This is essentially true in the context of fun English instructional practices in classrooms. Teachers implementing interactive English classes noticed marked improvements in how students participated in literary activities. Many students displayed their willingness to construct simple sentences, demonstrating greater confidence and initiative. Through the integration of enjoyable activities, learners were more inclined to apply their ideas creatively and critically assess their work. As one teacher accounted for "…by regularly engaging in these activities, [a student] started to volunteer for class discussions, demonstrating clear progress in both fluency and confidence." More importantly, when students feel less pressure, they tend to perform well in class discussion. The classroom environment is a major barrier for English learners who experience anxiety, regardless of the specific skill where the problem arises[82]. Establishing effective classroom environments for reading and writing is both an art and science. Matching physical space with educational objectives necessitates flexible space utilization to suit the needs of students[55,83]. It was found that elementary teachers ensure that their classes uphold *meaningful learning* through positive interaction with students, answering their questions, and assisting them when things get complicated. With this approach, "…[students] experience less pressure and become more willing to speak up."

Expression

Effective language production abilities are extremely important in gaining linguistic proficiency in the fluid language education setting[84]. When it comes to optimizing students' expressive writing skills, teachers can take the lead in overseeing the educational process while encouraging students to write with their feelings[85]. Teachers must understand the value of helping children express their emotions in a healthy and constructive way through critical emotional development exercises for them[86]. In an observation of one teacher, there was a positive shift in student was of expression in English classes that integrate imaginative and enjoyable activities. The focus on creativity, such as through story writing and storytelling exercises, has been particularly effective in activating students' imagination. For example, a teacher explained that "roleplay exercises have made shy students more at ease when speaking in front of others." For example, teachers ask their students to develop their own stories, engage with their groupmates, delegate tasks, and do diligent practice for their in-class roleplay presentation. Teachers allow students to think on their own, consider their creativity, and empower them to take charge of their learning processes through roleplays. Fun activities allow students to craft their ideas, narratives, and characters, which has led to noticeable improvements in their sentence construction, story organization, and the use of diverse vocabulary. Innovative and unique teaching methods can be applied by teachers to instruct students on how to approach expressive writing

techniques[87]. Even basic activities such as "Show and Tell," an activity that encourage students to present and explain an idea in front of the class, cultivate dynamic and participatory classroom environment by encouraging students to share their interests and engage more deeply with the learning material. The students "…learn how to use figures of speech and uncommon words" when having interactive games and activities in the classroom.

Motivation

Tüzün et al.[88] discovered that primary school students were substantially more motivated by intrinsic factors and less motivated by extrinsic factors in a digital game-based learning environment than they were in a traditional school context. Similarly, there was a notable increase in students' motivation for mathematics when they were exposed to a learning environment that incorporated mathematical game-based activities[89]. The findings of this paper supported these studies revealing that the quality of interaction within the classroom and the tools/materials being used can support the motivation of the students. Evidently, when exposed to unusual teaching approaches i.e., game-based instruction, students tend to participate more and take part on their self-learning processes. Prior studies have provided evidence that engagement in digital game-based learning has the potential to enhance the attitudes of participants towards the specific subject matter[90,91]. Iten and Petko[92] found out that there is a positive correlation between children's enjoyment of playing digital game-based learning and their level of interest in the subject matter. However, this finding is not only exclusive to digital game-based learning but also within the traditional classes that use fun-based instructional designs. For example, when students experience positive interactions in their classroom because of fun and interactive games, they oftentimes develop that I love to learn attitude, and this "can lead to improvements in their writing abilities."

Objective 2. To identify specific fun-based teaching strategies that effectively enhance literacy skills in elementary English learners.

Gamification

This paper identified two types of gamification strategies in English classes—the traditional and digital approach. Traditional gamification approach is a game-based instructional strategy that does not require technology to be used, e.g., story cubes, four-pics-one-word presented in a visual aid. Elementary teachers design their games using the materials they have like cardboards, colored papers, printouts, paper cutouts, etc. This is essentially notable as the literatures published about game-based learning likely focused on the use of technology[93,94]. This study believed that traditional gamification approach could possibly be more effective than the digital ones. For example, as per the application of story cubes, "…it has visual cues with creative writing, making the task enjoyable." One main reason for this is how students being immersed in the activity (physiological aspect), i.e., they are the ones rolling a die or holding something, which might have a different impact than mere seeing things without touching them. This finding has a major relevance to poor and developing countries where digital gamification is less of an option for learning. In fact, with respect to the socio-economic disparities prevalent in many African nations, the significance of attitudes towards digital games is relatively low, and only a minority of individuals engage in this activity[95,96]. Further studies could work on the extent to which traditional gamification approach surpasses the benefit of digital gamification, especially in the context of students' motivation and class engagement.

Group Works

Elementary teachers were also particular in developing collaboration among their students. Collaborative Learning is a pedagogical approach that consists of various instructional strategies aimed at fostering cooperation among learners, prompting them to engage in collaborative activities within small

groups[97]. According to Ismail, Mahmood and Abdelmaboud[98], collaborative learning fundamentally involves individuals working together to achieve a common goal. There were several ways how elementary teachers develop collaborative learning with fun-based English classes. For example, they form students into small groups to brainstorm and share ideas with their classmates. This was the main characteristic of fun-based English classes in elementary education where students have the chance to speak and communicate with others. One teacher used interactive storytelling where students make an on-the-spot story making in the class and each of them should give one sentence to create a story with settings, characters, conflict, and resolution—basically, the class will be the collective author of a story. In a study conducted by Zheng, Johnson and Zhou[99], it was found that learners who engaged in collaborative group work experienced notable positive effects. This can be attributed to the opportunities they had to interact with each other and the time they had to provide mutual assistance during the learning activity[100]. One teacher supported that saying, "group discussions give opportunities for them to share their ideas and listen to others."

Roleplay

Educators are perpetually in pursuit of novel and effective approaches to facilitate the enhancement of students' oral communication skills[101]. Role-play has emerged as a prominent strategy that has garnered significant attention in recent years. Role-play is a pedagogical strategy that involves students imagining the identities of specific characters and participating in simulated scenarios, such as debates, negotiations, or conversations[6,102]. In the study of Murillo and Vaca-Cárdenas[6], roleplay is an effective strategy for students to engage in verbal communication without hesitation, providing them with valuable practice opportunities. Elementary teachers agreed to this saying, "by allowing students to act out stories or create their own, they engage with the language in a more immersive way." Elementary teachers assign students to lead the group, facilitate discussions, develop a storyline, and present it to the class. Some teachers assign fables and stories with moral lessons to the students to perform in class. The focus is not on perfection but rather on enhancing their ability to communicate in English. Roleplays facilitate the development of students' various skills and capacities, hence reducing the difficulty of applying the language in real-life situations[6,103].

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that different fun-based instructional strategies, such as gamification, role-play, and collaborative activities, contributed to enhancing elementary learners' engagement and literacy skills in English. Teachers observed that students became more enthusiastic and willing to participate in writing and speaking activities. Such strategies allowed students to creatively express themselves and engage deeply with learning materials. Role-playing and storytelling provided them with opportunities to improve their verbal communication skills and confidence in a supportive environment. These approaches to creating an engaging classroom atmosphere contributed to noticeable improvements in students' literacy development. Engaging in structured, fun-oriented activities, students could focus on developing literacy skills without the fear of judgment, which reduced anxiety and enabled more natural expression. Consequently, these interactive approaches not only developed students' learning motivation and enjoyment of learning but also encouraged them to apply critical thinking and creativity in language use.

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of engaging teaching strategies for school administrators and educators, emphasizing how a supportive and interactive learning environment can enhance language proficiency. Teachers who implement fund and student-centered activities not only boost literacy skills of their students but also develop a positive attitude towards learning English. School administrators should consider providing resources and training for teachers to integrate interactive methods into their classrooms. By encouraging teachers to include hands-on, gamified, and role-based activities,

administrators can help create a classroom culture that prioritizes student engagement and motivation. This has implications for school policies on professional development, as training sessions that focus on interactive, student-focused teaching strategies could empower teachers to drive student academic success. Moreover, establishing guidelines that support fun-based instructional methods should encourage an inclusive and positive learning environment, which could lead to higher levels of student achievement and well-being.

There were limitations that needed to be addressed. The limitation of this study lies in its reliance on qualitative feedback and observational data, which, while insightful, could be strengthened by quantitative measures to provide a comprehensive analysis. Future research could involve using standardized tests or assessments to quantitatively evaluate the impact of interactive teaching strategies on students' literacy skills. Similarly, a mixed-methods approach that includes pre- and post-assessments of writing and speaking proficiency might yield more measurable findings regarding the effectiveness of specific fun-based strategies. This quantitative data could help validate the observed improvements in student engagement and performance, providing a stronger basis for broader application of these instructional methods.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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