The Impact of Game-Based Learning on Listening and Speaking Anxiety in Young EFL Learners

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Article Info	Abstract
Date submitted: 29/08/2025 Date accepted: 13/10/2025 Date published: 1/12/2025 *Research Article*	This study explores the impact of Game-Based Learning (GBL) on young learners' listening and speaking anxiety in English lessons. The study was carried out in a private primary school in Istanbul with forty-six third-grade students using a mixed-method, quasi experimental design. The control group got non-game-based instruction, whereas the experimental group participated in a five-week intervention that incorporated game-based activities into regular classes. Data were collected using pre- and post-tests for listening and speaking anxiety, as well as focus group interviews and teacher diaries. The quantitative analyses reported no statistically significant differences in anxiety levels across the groups. However, the qualitative data revealed that the experimental group was more engaged, confident, and willing to participate in classroom speaking and listening tasks. These findings revealed that game-based learning can promote active participation and emotional readiness in young learners, even without noticeable anxiety reductions. **Keywords:** Game-Based Learning (GBL), Foreign Language Anxiety, Listening Anxiety, Speaking Anxiety, Young Learners

1. Introduction

Listening and speaking are the most challenging of the four major language skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, particularly for young learners. Language anxiety which is described as the tension and nervousness associated with using a second language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), has long been recognized as a barrier to participation and achieve (Horwitz et al., 1986). Young learners are especially sensitive because their developing cognitive and language abilities increase the impact of foreign language anxiety in English classrooms (Chan & Wu, 2004; Nilsson, 2019). This anxiety often results in reduced motivation and limited classroom engagement, highlighting the importance of adopting effective strategies to create supportive learning environments (Tercan & Dikilitaş, 2015).

One conceivable way to addressing this issue is Game-Based Learning (GBL) which is defined as the use of games to achieve educational goals (Michael & Chen, 2006). By integrating play and educational aims, GBL produces engaging and supportive classroom environments that may reduce affective barriers and increase participation. According to research, GBL increases learners' engagement, encourages

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communicative practice, and improves the enjoyment of language acquisition. (Adipat et al., 2021; Zhang, 2018; Ningsih, 2023). Additionally, in the context of English language teaching, GBL has been shown to support the development of listening and speaking skills by addressing challenges in listening comprehension (Rabbianty, 2011), and creating competitive yet engaging environments that encourage active language use (Kaur and Aziz, 2020).

Despite the findings, there has been little empirical study on how GBL affects listening and speaking anxiety in young EFL learners. Much of the previous study has focused on gamification or motivational outcomes, leaving a gap in our understanding of the affective advantages of structured, classroom based GBL activities According to Tavil (2010), young learners frequently consider listening and speaking abilities as particularly difficult, resulting in unwillingness to participate in associated tasks. As a result, the current study investigates the impact of game-based learning on the listening and speaking anxiety of third-grade students at a private primary school in Istanbul, with the aim to find whether incorporating games into classroom practice can create a more engaging, supportive, and anxiety-reducing environment for young learners.

2. Literature Review

Games are something defined as entertaining, goal-oriented, rule-based activities that keep students' interests and give practice purpose (Suits, 1967; Hadfield, 1999). They encourage collaboration, provide structured opportunities for involvement, and establish a supportive learning environment in the classroom (Castle, 1998; Rakoczy et al., 2009; Özkiraz, 2015). Games that are properly chosen can promote skill development while also relaxing the environment (Ersoz, 2000; Demirtaş et al., 2021).

GBL connects fun activities with learning goals, expanding beyond simple entertainment. According to Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (2006), games support learners' motivation and enable them to utilize language in context. Similar to this Zhu (2012) clarified that GBL is about planning tasks toward particular objectives rather than just having fun. Zhang (2018) additionally presented the argument that GBL is an excellent teaching tool that increases student interest and efficacy. GBL uses complete games as its primary learning medium, whereas gamification adds game-like aspects like points or badges (Prince, 2013; Caponetto et al., 2014). In practice, both may perform well together, but GBL is especially effectively suited for developing dynamic and engaging learning environments.

According to studies conducted on young students, GBL improves active engagement, motivation, and memory (Shamir et al., 2019; Cojocariu & Boghian, 2014; Liu, Shaikh, & Gazizova, 2020; Saputra et al., 2021). It increases enjoyment and decreases anxiety while enhancing problem-solving and flexibility (Lamrani & Abdelwahed, 2020). GBL improves learners' willingness to use the target language, promotes peer-friendly environments, and increases vocabulary retention in English classrooms (Wang, Shang, & Briody, 2011; Hainey et al., 2016; Ismaizam et al., 2022; Griva, Semoglou, & Geladari, 2010; Huyen & Nga, 2003; Pogrebnyi et al., 2016).

Finally, GBL is essential for speaking and listening. Games provide immediate feedback, less emotional barriers, and environments for active practice. According to studies, learners are encouraged to interact more freely in competitive yet encouraging game situations, which improves their confidence and fluency (Kaur & Aziz, 2020; Hwang et al., 2015; Ngiwline & Haruansong, 2020; Valipour & Assadi Aidinlou, 2014; Liu & Chu, 2010).

Emotional variables are especially important in language learning environments because psychological emotions have a direct impact on involvement, attention, and information processing. Anxiety itself is a complex construct with no single agreed definition (Scovel, 1978). According to Spielberger (1983), it is

defined by higher levels of tension, anxiety, worry, and apprehension. In educational settings, researchers distinguish among trait anxiety (a stable disposition), state anxiety (a momentary condition), and situation-specific anxiety that recurs in particular contexts such as classrooms or tests (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b). Each learner experiences anxiety differently, and it may appear as a short-term problem or a persistent trait (Oxford, 1998). A high level of anxiety can negatively impact both academic achievement and quality of life (Gürsu, 2011; Yavuzer, 2003).

Language anxiety is a particular type that appears when students are required to use or acquire the target language. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), it consists of beliefs, self-perceptions, and classroom-bound behaviors that contribute to the anxiety associated with language tasks. This concept indicates specific goals for classroom help, but it is also frequently associated with decreased involvement and lower success (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2011). Perceived language difficulties, public speaking, classroom dynamics, peer behavior, assessments, and interactions with fluent speakers are some of the sources mentioned in studies (Male, 2018). Additional contributors include learners' self-perception and self-belief, challenges specific to the L2, cultural and social status differences, and even fears of losing personal identity (Hashemi, 2011). According to research conducted with Turkish primary school pupils, exam anxiety, communication anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade are the main factors influencing attendance in class and self-esteem (Sertçetin, 2006). In a similar vein, studies conducted during distance learning reveal ongoing anxiety caused by worries about assessments, communication challenges, and a diminished sense of personal connection (Günel, 2022).

Within English classrooms, language anxiety and achievement show consistent negative relationships. Exam-related anxiety, communication issues, and the anxiety of getting poor scores are common among high school students, and they have a noticeable negative influence on performance (Cui, 2011). The requirement for active classroom management of anxiety is further supported by broader investigations that once more show a negative relationship between anxiety and academic achievement (Halder, 2018). Since language acquisition is both cognitive and affective, anxiety has a particular impact on oral communication: students experience greater stress during teacher-led and whole-class conversation, but pair work and extracurricular activities may reduce anxiety (Jing & Junying, 2016).

Younger students need extra attention. Learners' ability to acquire and use language is significantly influenced by emotional features such anxiety, frustration, anger, and low self-confidence (Getie, 2020). According to research on elementary school students, anxiety and proficiency in foreign languages are negatively correlated, and anxiety tends to increase with grade level as academic demands increase (Hu, Zhang, & McGeown, 2021). According to detailed classroom research, YLs may experience difficulty expressing themselves when anxiety arises, and severe assessment and treatment are necessary because the consequences are more negative than positive (Chan & Wu, 2004). The significance of self-perceived exposure and proficiency is also highlighted by models of YL anxiety: more frequent exposure to English is associated with lower anxiety, while lower self-perception estimates higher anxiety; other factors include gender, foreign experience, and private lessons (Yim, 2014).

Speaking and listening are the abilities that are most closely connected with anxiety. According to traditional classroom observations, nervous students typically struggle to speak in front of the class, and role-playing may increase anxiety even when drills or prepared speeches feel easier. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) captures the triad of test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension that underlies these reactions; anxious learners also report difficulty tracking sounds, structures, and long stretches of teacher talk (Horwitz et al., 1986). According to recent research published with elementary school students, gaming techniques can improve comfort, concentration, and readiness to participate while also dramatically reducing listening anxiety (with less of an impact on

speaking) (Yağcıoğlu & Çalışkan, 2024). Golchi (2012) highlighted that foreign language listening can become anxiety-provoking because learners frequently struggle with rapid speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, and limited contextual cues. Similarly, in recent research, a variety of situations during the listening process might make students anxious and tense, which can lead to poor listening performance (Nurhalisa et al., 2023). According to Kimura (2008), listening can cause both task-specific and general discomfort responses, despite being receptive. According to Alibec and Sîrbu (2017), speaking anxiety increases during role-playing, presentations, and spontaneous questions and answers. Cognitive (task demands, genre, interlocutors, topic familiarity), affective (perceptions of the topic and peers, self-consciousness, and fear of being judged), and performance aspects are its main causes (Hanifa, 2018). Students frequently rate speaking as the most anxiety-provoking classroom activity, and teacher stance which are gentle error treatment, and a relaxed manner can lower anxiety noticeably (Young, 1990).

The results from Turkey provide context-specific insights while similar to the findings from the global literature. Speaking tasks, teacher involvement, and engaged participation are when Turkish EFL learners most frequently show communication anxiety, exam anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade (Aydın, 2008). According to Aydın et al. (2018), games and communicative activities are frequently suggested as ways to cope for higher levels of anxiety in students, while tests, communication difficulties, and fear of receiving poor grades are among the causes of anxiety. Rapid speech, incorrect pronunciation, and the fear of missing key phrases may all lead to a cycle of misunderstanding when it comes to listening; warm-ups, clear audio, and encouraging environments help reduce the problem, while low self-esteem and unsupportive environments make it worse (Halat & Özbay, 2018). According to research, the main reasons of speaking anxiety are cognitive issues (fear of failure, low self-esteem) and linguistic barriers (limited vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation); low-stress environments and supportive pedagogy are therefore essential (Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013). Studies carried out in classrooms also identify similar causes, including poor preparation, quick questioning, and difficulties with pronunciation. Higher-proficiency learners may experience more anxiety as a result of these higher expectations (Debreli & Demirkan, 2015). There are differences among genders as well; female students tend to report higher levels of speaking anxiety; different assessment methods and the establishment of anxiety-free environments can help (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013).

According to numerous research, anxiety is a complex barrier that mostly impacts speaking and listening. Due to limited options for coping and an immediate decrease in participation, its consequences are more noticeable in younger students. At the same time, research indicates that purposeful, game-based learning gives useful relief by reducing affective obstacles, maintaining focus, and offering planned, motivating oral communication practice. Therefore, it makes sense to incorporate GBL into elementary EFL classes in order to promote skill development and decrease the detrimental effects of language anxiety.

However, there aren't much research that particularly look at how game-based learning (GBL) affects young learners' speaking and listening anxiety in EFL contexts. It is still necessary to look at how games directly affect primary school children' anxiety related to speaking, even if previous study has shown that games can be motivating. In order to close this gap, this study investigates how GBL can lower anxiety and aid language acquisition through speaking and listening activities. Accordingly, the following research questions are posed:

- Does using of GBL activities affect the listening and speaking anxiety levels among YLs (3rd grade, 9 years old) in English classes?
- Does GBL instruction make any changes in YL's anxiety level during listening and speaking activities?

- How do the English young learners perceive the use of GBL activities in listening and speaking classes?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Model/Design

This study implemented a mixed-methods research design to investigate how game-based learning (GBL) impacts the speaking and listening anxiety of young students. The quantitative part of the research was conducted using a quasi-experimental method, in which one experimental group received GBL instructions while the control group received non-GBL instruction. The English Speaking Anxiety Scale (Orakçı, 2018b) (see Appendix A) and the English Listening Anxiety Scale (Orakçı, 2018a) (see Appendix B) were used to measure changes in anxiety levels before and after the implementation. Deeper understanding of learners' experiences with GBL and measurable results were both produced by the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

3.2. Participants/Sampling

The participants of this study consisted of 46 third-grade students (26 female, 20 male) aged between 8 and 9 years old. They were chosen by convenience sampling from the researcher's own classes at a private elementary school in Istanbul, Turkey. Convenience sampling was chosen because it was accessible and useful, enabling the researcher to interact with a whole sample of students who had similar educational backgrounds. The bilingual curriculum of the school had exposed the participants to English at an early age, and they had been systematically taught the target language since kindergarten. Their proficiency levels were broadly consistent with A1–A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), ensuring that the group represented young learners at beginner to elementary levels of English.

3.3. Instruments/Materials

The data were collected through both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Both the English Speaking Anxiety Scale (Orakçı, 2018b) and the English Listening Anxiety Scale (Orakçı, 2018a) were used for the quantitative phase. The Listening Anxiety Scale consisted of 14 items measured on a five-point Likert scale and showed strong internal reliability (Cronbach's α = .987). The Speaking Anxiety Scale included 16 items across two factors, also on a five-point Likert scale, with a Cronbach's α of .897.

For the qualitative phase, two tools were used. Initially, the researcher recorded observations and reflections from each GBL session in the teacher's logbook. Contributing to the contextual interpretation of the results, these observations concentrated on the speaking and listening abilities of the students, their participation levels, and any obvious symptoms of anxiety. In the second, ten students from the experimental group participated in semi-structured interviews. For the purposes of comfort and understanding, the homeroom teacher assisted in conducting the interviews in Turkish. Each session lasted around fifteen minutes. The purpose of the questions was to get ideas on how students felt about GBL activities, how they felt throughout the intervention, and how they thought it affected their motivation and anxiety.

The study ensured methodological triangulation by integrating standardized scales with qualitative instruments, which improved the findings' validity and reliability and gave an extensive understanding of how GBL affected young learners' speaking and listening anxiety.

3.4. Procedure

Before implementation, parental consent papers were gathered and formal approval from the school administration was obtained to ensure students' voluntary participation. After these approvals, the English Speaking Anxiety Scale and the English Listening Anxiety Scale (Orakçı, 2018a; 2018b) were completed as pre-tests by the experimental and control groups. These tests, which evaluated students' initial levels of speaking and listening anxiety, were administered online through Google Forms.

The intervention was conducted during regular English lessons and lasted for five weeks. The researcher carefully designed the games that were utilized in the experimental group according to the students' skill levels, the official curriculum, and the unit topics. The games' embedded tasks and questions were designed to focus on the vocabulary, structures, and communication functions that are taught in the curriculum. They were also modified to create an engaging, casual environment for learning.

During the first week, students played relatively simple speaking and listening games to get a feel for the procedures and to encourage participation. During the second and third weeks, the games become increasingly cognitively challenging, incorporating speaking exercises intended to encourage fluency, teamwork, and spontaneous responses with listening exercises that required auditory attention and recall. During the fourth week, students were encouraged to practice the target language in longer and more significant conversations by participating in more communicative and extended speaking exercises. During the last week, games were used to help students apply vocabulary and structures in a variety of situations and integrate previously acquired skills.

At the end of the intervention, the same listening and speaking anxiety scales were administered as post-tests to both the experimental and control groups. Furthermore, with parental permission, a subset of the experimental group's pupils participated in semi-structured focus group interviews to learn more about their experiences with the games and how they felt they impacted their language and anxiety.

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to examine the impact of game-based learning (GBL) on students' listening and speaking anxiety. The experimental and control groups were given the English Speaking Anxiety Scale and the English Listening Anxiety Scale, which were used to gather quantitative data from pre-test and post-test scores. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and further statistical analyses were carried out through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to identify changes in students' anxiety levels before and after the intervention.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews conducted with students from the experimental group and from weekly teacher diaries kept during the five-week implementation. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted by identifying recurrent codes and patterns, which were then categorized into more general groups that represented the attitudes, feelings, and experiences of the students in the GBL classroom.

In summary, the analysis integrated qualitative and quantitative data to provide a complete picture of how GBL affects young learners' speaking and listening anxiety. By combining both methods, the study was able to record both students' subjective experiences and measurable outcomes, guaranteeing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Findings about Listening Anxiety

The quantitative findings of the study were examined to determine whether the implementation of game-based learning activities influenced the participants' listening and speaking anxiety levels, with statistical analyses conducted through both parametric and non-parametric tests depending on data distribution.

Firstly, The Shapiro–Wilk test results demonstrated that the listening anxiety scores met the assumption of normality for the control group but not for the experimental group. Specifically, for the control group, the pre-test result was $W = .961, df = 23, p = .489$ and the post-test result was $W = .918, df = 23, p = .061$. These p-values were above .05, indicating normal distribution. In contrast, the experimental group's pre-test result was $W = .912, df = 23, p = .046$ and the post-test result was $W = .825, df = 23, p < .001$, both of

which violated the assumption of normality. Since the experimental group's scores were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests were employed for subsequent analyses.

Table 1.

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results of the Experimental Group for the English Listening Anxiety Scale

	W	z	df	p
Experimental Group	90.000	-.886	23	.385

As shown in Table 1, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was used to compare the experimental group's pre- and post-test listening anxiety scores. The results revealed no statistically significant difference between the two time points (W = 90.000, z = −.886, p = .385), indicating that the intervention did not lead to a measurable reduction in listening anxiety for the experimental group.

Table 2.

Paired Samples T-Test Results of the Control Group for the English Listening Anxiety Scale

	t	df	p
Control Group	.742	23	.466

Table 2 presents the results of the paired samples t-test for the control group. Since the data met the assumption of normality, a parametric test was applied. The findings showed no significant difference between pre- and post-test scores (t(23) = .742, p = .466), suggesting that the control group's listening anxiety levels remained stable throughout the study.

Table 3.

Mann–Whitney U Test Results of the English Listening Anxiety Scale

		U	df	p
Pre-Test	Experimental	320.500	46	.222
	Control			
Post-Test	Experimental	306.000	46	.367
	Control			

Table 3 shows the results of the Mann–Whitney U test, which was conducted to compare the experimental and control groups' listening anxiety scores before and after the intervention. The findings indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test scores (U = 320.500, p = .222) or in the post-test scores (U = 306.000, p = .367). These results suggest that the GBL intervention did not produce a measurable difference in listening anxiety levels when the experimental group was compared to the control group.

4.2. Findings about Speaking Anxiety

For speaking anxiety test, the Shapiro–Wilk test results indicated that the speaking anxiety scores did not meet the assumption of normality in either group. For the control group, the pre-test result was *W = .877, df = 23, p = .009* and the post-test result was *W = .890, df = 23, p = .016*. Similarly, for the experimental group, the pre-test result was *W = .900, df = 23, p = .026* and the post-test result was *W = .878, df = 23, p = .009*. Since all p-values were below the .05 significance threshold, the data were considered non-normally distributed, and non-parametric tests were employed for further analysis.

Table 4.

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Results of the English Speaking Anxiety Scale

	W	z	df	p
Experimental Group	90.000	-.886	23	.385
Control Group	154.000	.487	23	.637

Following the normality tests in the table 4, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was conducted to compare the experimental group's pre- and post-test speaking anxiety scores, as the data did not meet the assumption of normality. The results showed no statistically significant difference between the two measurements (W = 90.000, z = –.886, p = .385), indicating that the GBL intervention did not produce a measurable reduction in speaking anxiety. Similarly, the control group's pre- and post-test scores were analyzed using the same test, and the results also revealed no significant change (W = 154.000, z = .487, p = .637). These findings suggest that students' speaking anxiety levels remained stable in both groups throughout the study.

Table 5.

Mann–Whitney U Test Results of the English Speaking Anxiety Scale

		U	df	p
Pre-Test	Experimental	259.500	46	.921
	Control			
Post-Test	Experimental	275.500	46	.817
	Control			

In the table 5, to further compare the groups, Mann–Whitney U tests were employed to examine differences between the experimental and control groups' speaking anxiety scores. The results indicated no statistically significant differences either at the pre-test stage (U = 259.500, p = .921) or at the post-test stage (U = 275.500, p = .817). This demonstrates that the GBL intervention did not yield significant effects on speaking anxiety when compared to traditional instruction.

4.3. Results from Teacher Diary Notes

The qualitative data provided further insights into the students' experiences with the GBL intervention. Teacher diary entries and focus group interviews revealed recurring themes related to students' speaking and listening anxiety, engagement, and emotional responses. While the quantitative results did not demonstrate significant reductions in anxiety, the qualitative findings suggested that students were

generally more willing to participate, interacted actively with peers, and expressed enjoyment during the GBL sessions. These observations helped to contextualize the statistical results by highlighting the affective and behavioral dimensions of students' learning experiences.

Table 6.

Emerging Themes and Sub-Themes from Teacher Diary Notes

Theme	Sub-Themes	Example Codes/ Behaviors
Initial Hesitation and Anxiety	Reluctance, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence	Quietness, hesitation, quietness, waiting for others to start, silence while listening
Increased Engagement Through GBL	Eagerness to participate, fun and excitement, motivation	Active involvement, game excitement, high participation
Peer Support and Collaboration Interaction	Helping each other, shared tasks, emotional safety	Students supporting peers, confidence-building dialogue
Development of Listening and Speaking skills	Willingness to speak, emotional comfort, comfortable production	Speaking up, enjoying role-play, reduced fear of mistakes, attentive listening
Impact of Game Structure and Motivation	Influence of time pressure, point system	Stress under time pressure, excitement from point-earning systems

At the beginning of the intervention, several students displayed anxiety-related behaviors such as avoiding eye contact, speaking with low volume, or hesitating to participate. However, as they grew accustomed to the playful nature of the activities, these signs gradually diminished. As one diary note reflected, *"Some students were hesitant to participate in the first games, but they gradually joined and became more comfortable after watching their classmates"* (TD, Week 1).

Over time, GBL activities fostered enthusiasm and active participation, with students increasingly eager to join games and contribute. The competitive and playful structure encouraged motivation and reduced performance pressure. As noted in the teacher diary, *"Students were clearly more engaged and energized after using the point system and stars. Even the students who were more reserved started to participate more"* (TD, Week 2).

Collaboration and peer scaffolding also played a significant role in reducing anxiety and building confidence. Students supported each other during pair and group games, creating a safe learning environment. For example, *"In the Gadget Story Chain, all group members contributed a sentence and assisted one another while listening"* (TD, Week 2).

Throughout the five weeks, students demonstrated gradual improvement in both listening comprehension and speaking fluency. Many shifted from hesitant responses to producing full sentences and engaging in short dialogues. One entry highlighted, *"In the last week, many students expressed themselves in full sentences during role play games. Their responses were more fluent, and even lower-level students contributed often"* (TD, Week 5).

Although time-limited activities occasionally triggered stress in a few learners, most students found competitive features like points and leaderboards motivating. This balance of challenge and playfulness

supported engagement and reduced anxiety. As observed, *"When they saw their names on the scoreboard, the majority of students became excited by the competitive environment"* (TD, Week 3).

4.4. Results from Student Interview

The focus group interviews provided further insights into students' perceptions of GBL and its effect on their speaking and listening anxiety. Overall, students reported feeling more comfortable and confident as the activities progressed, emphasizing that the playful and interactive design reduced their fear of making mistakes. Many highlighted that working with peers and engaging in games helped them concentrate better and use English more actively. Direct quotations from the interviews supporting these themes are presented in the following table.

Table 7.

Themes Emerging from Student Interview Responses

Theme	Sub-Themes
Reduced anxiety and increased comfort	Fun atmosphere, less fear, freedom to make mistakes
Enhanced engagement and enjoyment	Game preference, excitement, group dynamics
Listening and speaking confidence	Better communication, clearer expression
Motivation and classroom participation	More effort in games, less stress than non-GBL instruction lessons

Many students reported feeling less anxious during GBL activities compared to traditional lessons. They emphasized that making mistakes in a game context felt less stressful, and the playful atmosphere helped them feel more comfortable. One student explained, *"I wasn't worried to make a mistake because it was a game"* (Student 2, Interview Data, 19 March 2025).

Students also expressed high levels of enjoyment and engagement with the games. They found the activities more dynamic and motivating than textbook tasks, often mentioning that games kept them focused and excited. For example, one student shared, *"The games were better than using the book and they were more fun and helped me think better"* (Student 5, Interview Data, 19 March 2025).

Another recurring theme was the development of speaking and listening confidence. Students highlighted that the interactive and group-oriented nature of games reduced the pressure of classroom performance and made communication feel easier. As one student stated, *"In normal lessons, I sometimes get anxious when the teacher asks me a question, but not during games"* (Student 9, Interview Data, 19 March 2025).

Finally, students noted that GBL enhanced their motivation and encouraged more active participation. They mentioned being more eager to contribute when activities were presented as games. One student remarked, *"Sometimes I don't want to answer questions in the book, but in games, I want to join"* (Student 9, Interview Data, 19 March 2025).

Overall, following the GBL intervention, there was not a significant reduction in speaking or listening anxiety, according to the quantitative results. However, students eventually overcame their initial hesitancy, became more interested, encouraged one another, and felt more confident during speaking and listening exercises, according to qualitative data from teacher diary notes and student interviews. They highlighted how games are engaging and inspiring, which lowers stress and increases participation.

5. Discussion

This study explored how game-based learning (GBL) affected the speaking and listening anxiety of young EFL learners in a third-grade classroom. Accordingly, in order to address the research questions, the study collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative results provide significant evidence that GBL activities provided enhanced emotional and behavioral learning experiences, even though the quantitative results did not reveal any noticeable changes in anxiety levels. Combining these two viewpoints provides an increased understanding of how GBL impacts students in the present context.

The first study question examined whether GBL decreased the speaking and listening anxiety of young students. A five-week intervention might not be enough to reduce anxiety, according to the quantitative data, which did not reveal any statistically significant differences. Nonetheless, the qualitative data showed evidence of more comfort and less anxiety during GBL. This supports the Affective Filter Hypothesis of Krashen (1982), which states that language use is facilitated in low-anxiety environments. Similarly, Tevetoğlu and Korkmaz (2024) concluded that interactive listening games increased learners' confidence with listening input and According to the teacher's journal, even less proficient students who typically seemed anxious when speaking started to participate more confidently. This gradual improvement is in line with studies by Shamir et al. (2019) and Cojocariu and Boghian (2014), which discovered that game-based learning methods improve learners' sense of security and autonomy, particularly for younger students. When playing cooperative activities, students were shown supporting one another, particularly during the role-playing activities. Griva and Semoglou (2012) found that in a playful and supportive classroom setting, young students were more inclined to collaborate and engage in group activities, which improved their emotional comfort and verbal participation. Collectively, these findings provide support to the idea that GBL promotes a more emotionally safe environment even in situations when test scores show no significant change.

The second research topic examined whether anxiety levels changed during GBL. Speaking and listening anxiety did not significantly decrease, according to the quantitative analysis; this could be because standardized instruments have trouble measuring affective change. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), anxiety related to learning a foreign language is complicated and not always measurable using general measures. Conversely, qualitative results showed increases in students' comfort and engagement. Similarly, Ruziyeva (2024) emphasized that game-based activities provided interactive speaking practice spaces, while Kazemnia (2022) pointed out that games enhanced listening skills by encouraging enjoyable participation. Gönen (2009) also emphasized that listening anxiety is reduced in supportive environments, while Yağcıoğlu and Çalışkan (2024) highlighted that while GBL did not significantly reduce speaking anxiety, it improved focus and classroom participation. According to Tercan and Dikilitaş (2015), oral participation is encouraged by interaction and a decrease in evaluation pressure. These perspectives support the findings of the present study, which show that GBL encourages confident behaviors even in lack of statistical change.

The final research question investigated into how teachers and students perceived GBL. Both stated that games were more motivating and enjoyable than non-GBL activities, which encouraged engagement. In group work, peer support makes young learners feel emotionally safe and more comfortable speaking (Nguyen et al., 2022). Additionally, Saputra et al. (2021) demonstrated how GBL improved creativity, motivation, and active engagement. Likewise, Cojocariu and Boghian (2014) highlighted that when play is related to language development needs, game-based instruction increases engagement. Students in this study changed their engagement from passive to active because they connected GBL to enjoyment, teamwork, and less anxiety. These results show that GBL fosters a good emotional environment that encourages language use in addition to motivating learners.

In conclusion, the results of this study shows that although GBL did not result in statistically significant decreases in speaking and listening anxiety, it supported an enjoyable and encouraging environment that gave young students more comfort, motivation, and engagement. In according to earlier studies on the advantages of interactive and collaborative learning, the incorporation of games promoted more active participation, reduced affective barriers, and increased confidence. Together, these findings imply that GBL can be a useful teaching strategy for creating a more positive emotional environment in EFL classes, which is important for the growth of students' communication abilities.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of game-based learning (GBL) on young learners' listening and speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms through a mixed-methods design. The qualitative results showed noticeable behavioral and emotional improvements, even though the quantitative results did not show statistically significant decreases in anxiety. During game-based tasks, students reported feeling more relaxed, anxious less about making mistakes, and being more eager to engage in oral activities. These impressions were supported by teacher diary entries, which demonstrated that even less self-assured students became more involved and communicative in a relaxed environment.

These results align with studies showing that entertaining and encouraging environments can reduce affective barriers and enhance language use. Overall, the study shows that while GBL may not immediately reduce measurable anxiety levels, it provides a psychologically secure and inspiring learning environment that encourages engagement, confidence, and positive attitudes toward language acquisition.

7. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The present study highlights several areas for future research. First, larger and more diverse samples, particularly from public and regional schools, should be included to enhance the generalizability of the findings, as this study was limited to a private primary school in Istanbul. Furthermore, because the present study only looked at short-term results, longitudinal studies are required to investigate if the affective and behavioral effects of GBL are maintained over time and support long-term language development. Lastly, by including more teacher diaries, classroom observations, and even parent feedback, future research may broaden the variety of data sources. Such information may offer a more complete view of students' anxiety and emotional engagement with the idea of game-based learning.

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Appendices

A. ENGLISH SPEAKING ANXIETY SCALE
İngilizce Konuşma Kaygısı Ölçeği

Sevgili Öğrenciler, bu çalışma, İngilizce konuşma kaygınızı belirlemeye yönelik bir ölçme aracıdır. Aşağıda belirtilen beşli derecelendirme ölçeği üzerinde uygun gelen seçeneği (ölçek noktasını) işaretleyerek (X) belirtmeniz beklenmektedir. Çalışmaya göstermiş olduğunuz ilgiden dolayı teşekkür ederim.

Sıra	İfadeler	Hiç Katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılıyorum	Tamamen Katılıyorum
1	İngilizce bir şeyler konuşmayı seviyorum.					
2	İngilizce dersinde, hazırlık yapmadan konuşmak zorunda olduğumda çok kaygılanırım.					
3	İngilizce dersinde konuşurken kendime güvenirim.					
4	İngilizce konuşurken diğer öğrencilerin beni anlamayacağından endişe duyarım.					
5	İngilizce konuşurken tedirgin olurum.					
6	İngilizce dersinde herhangi bir konu hakkında konuşmam gerektiğinde kendimden emin olamam.					
7	İngilizce konuşurken diğer öğrencilerin bana güleceklerinden kaygı duyarım.					
8	Diğer öğrencilerin İngilizceyi benden daha iyi konuştuğunu düşünürüm.					

9	Diğer öğrencilerin önünde İngilizce konuşma konusunda kendime güvenirim.					
10	İngilizce konuşurken, ana dilden İngilizce diline kelimeleri tek tek tercüme ettiğimde kendimi tedirgin hissederim.					
11	İngilizce dersinde sorulan sorulara gönüllü olarak cevap vermek beni utandırır.					
12	İngilizce dersinde konuşurken hata yapmaktan korkarım.					
13	Öğretmenin İngilizce olarak ne dediğini anlamadığım zaman kendimi tedirgin hissederim.					
14	İngilizce öğretmeni bana sorular sorduğunda, kendimi gergin hissederim.					
15	İngilizce konuşma yaparken korku içinde olurum.					
16	İngilizce konuşurken kelimeleri yanlış telaffuz edeceğim diye kaygı duyarım.					

B. ENGLISH LISTENING ANXIETY SCALE
İngilizce Dinleme Kaygısı Ölçeği

Sevgili Öğrenciler, bu çalışma, İngilizce dinleme kaygınızı belirlemeye yönelik bir ölçme aracıdır. Aşağıda belirtilen beşli derecelendirme ölçeği üzerinde uygun gelen seçeneği (ölçek noktasını) işaretleyerek (X) belirtmeniz beklenmektedir. Çalışmaya göstermiş olduğunuz ilgiden dolayı teşekkür ederim.

Sıra	İfadeler	Hiç Katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılıyorum	Tamamen Katılıyorum
1	İngilizce dinleme metinlerini ilk defa dinlediğimde anlayamıyorum.					
2	Kitle iletişim araçlarını (radyo, televizyon, cd vb.) İngilizce olarak dinlemekte zorluk çekiyorum.					
3	İngilizce dinlediklerimle ilgili soru sormak beni kaygılandırır.					
4	Birisi İngilizceyi çok hızlı konuştuğunda, tüm konuşulanları					

	anlayamayacağımdan endişelenirim.					
5	İngilizce bir şeyler dinlerken genellikle kendimi güveniyorum.					
6	İngilizce dinlemeye alıştığınızda, İngilizce dinlemek zor gelmiyor.					
7	İngilizce konuşan birisini dinlerken bilinmeyen kelimelere takılıp kalırım.					
8	İngilizce dinlerken, konuya aşina değilsem kaygılanırım.					
9	İngilizce dinlerken dikkatim dağılırsa, konuşulanları kaçıracağımdan endişelenirim.					
10	Karşımdakinin anlamakta zorluk çekeceğim bir hızda ve akıcı bir biçimde İngilizce konuşması beni endişelendirir.					
11	Telefonla İngilizce olarak görüşürken dinlediğimde kaygılanırım.					
12	İngilizce bir şeyler dinlemeyi seviyorum.					
13	İngilizce dinlerken kelimeleri genellikle tek tek çeviririm.					
14	İngilizce dinlerken ne duyduğumu hatırlayamama durumu beni kaygılandırır.					