

**The Impact Of Table-Top Roleplaying Games On Efl Speaking Skills: Research  
In Colombian Freshmen University Students**

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"Even the smallest person can change the course of history."

**-J.R.R. Tolkien**

"Hi uncle, I hope this paper was good enough for you. I miss you."

**-Darío Ortiz**

"Because the Earth is a place where we can be ourselves. We can live freely without having  
to hide who we are."

**- Steven**

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**Glossary:**

**AR:** Action Research

**ESL:** English as a Second Language

**ESOL:** English Speakers of Other Languages

**GBL:** Game Based Learning

**ICFES:** Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación

**TRPG:** table top role playing games

**UIS:** Universidad Industrial de Santander

**Abstract**

**Title: The Impact Of Table-Top Roleplaying Games On Efl Speaking Skills:  
Research In Colombian Freshmen University Students<sup>1</sup>**

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**Keywords:** TRPG, Game Based Learning, Action Research, Speaking Skills

**Description:** This action research paper had the objective to identify the effects that table-top roleplaying games (TRPGs) have on the speaking skills of freshmen students from the Foreign Languages program when they are used as a learning tool. This objective, in a similar way, served as the main question for this research. Consequently, it was hypothesized that the application of two-hour sessions of TRPGs during a period of eight weeks had a positive impact on the speaking skills of first-year foreign language students at Universidad Industrial de Santander. Interviews and a pre and posttest were used for the collection of data from an English class group of 10 first-year students. For this, seven English lessons with gaming were prepared using the TRPG “*Goblin Quest*” as a language development instrument. Finally, it was proven that TRPGs improved participants’ speaking skills. Participants in pre tests mostly had basic scores while in pretests had intermediate and advanced scores, as well as expressing their fascination and interest for methodologies with interaction and games.

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## Resumen

**Título:** El Impacto De Los Juegos De Rol De Mesa En Las Habilidades Orales  
**Efl:** Investigación En Estudiantes Universitarios Colombianos De Primer Año<sup>3</sup>

**Autor:** Andres Felipe Alvernia Ramos, Estefania Garcia Lopez, Dario Alberto Ortiz  
Mujica <sup>4</sup>

**Palabras Clave:** TRPG, Aprendizaje Basado En Juegos, Investigación-Acción,  
Habilidades De Expresión Oral

**Descripción:** Este trabajo de investigación-acción tuvo como objetivo identificar los efectos que los juegos de rol de mesa (TRPGs) tienen en las habilidades de expresión oral en estudiantes de primer año del programa de Lenguas Extranjeras cuando son utilizados como herramienta de aprendizaje. Este objetivo, igualmente, sirvió como pregunta principal para esta investigación. Consecuentemente, se planteó la hipótesis de que la aplicación de sesiones de dos horas de TRPGs durante un período de ocho semanas tenía un impacto positivo en las habilidades de expresión oral de los estudiantes de primer año de lenguas extranjeras de la Universidad Industrial de Santander. Para reunir los datos se utilizaron entrevistas y un pre y postest en un grupo de clase de inglés de 10 estudiantes de primer curso. Para esto, se prepararon siete clases de inglés con juego utilizando el TRPG "*Goblin Quest*" como instrumento de desarrollo del lenguaje. Finalmente, se comprobó que los TRPGs mejoraban la capacidad de expresión oral de los participantes. Los participantes en los pre tests obtuvieron mayoritariamente puntuaciones básicas, mientras que en los post tests obtuvieron puntuaciones intermedias y avanzadas, además de expresar su fascinación e interés por las metodologías con interacción y juegos.

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<sup>3</sup> Trabajo de grado.

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## Introduction

This research project focuses on the use of Table-top Roleplaying Games as a tool for learning English as a foreign language. The term “table-top role playing game”, or TRPGs from now on, refers to a specific type of game that demands the participation and engagement of all the players since interaction among them is crucial. Schalleger and Kapell’s definition is taken as the standard description of TRPGs; they state that “Pen and paper role playing games are communal and cooperative oral storytelling activities of at least two participants with no or only a limited degree of physical acting...” (2018). Some of the most popular TRPGs are: Dungeons and Dragons, The Call of Cthulhu, Fate, Pathfinder, among others. Thus, the aforementioned characteristic of these games being communal and cooperative create scenarios to interact in given contexts and improve speaking skills through the role playing process.

When learning a new language, many skills need to be developed such as writing, grammar, speaking and coherence. Even though all of them are important and necessary to learn a foreign language, this research deals exclusively with speaking skills since it is one of the most demanding skills to acquire. Speaking in real life situations takes more dedication for foreign speakers because it involves using grammar structures and vocabulary on the spur of the moment (Rao, 2019). In addition, speaking skills are not limited to the maturity of the articulating system but demands dual functions: individual and social. Even though self-talking exists, using exclusively individual speaking functions is not enough to fully develop students' speaking skills (Sangaji & Zainurrahman, 2019). These characteristics lead us to conclude that speaking skills is one of the most challenging abilities that need to be developed by foreign language learners.

Testing speaking skills can be a complex task as well, since it is hard to accomplish it without taking apart important aspects such as the communicative or social function. According to Ulker, objectively assessing speaking is difficult because it involves variables with little correlation among each other that must be measured separately in order to avoid or reduce speaking subjectivity (2017). For instance, a speaker may use the wrong grammar structure or pronunciation and still be able to convey the desired message. In order to assess oral skills in a more accurate way, this research measures them with similar principles as the Cambridge ESOL Test, which includes specific language knowledge such as pronunciation, grammar, lexical resource and discourse management and also “interactive communication” (Ulker, 2017) .

This assessment of speaking skills was carried out in Bucaramanga, Colombia at Universidad Industrial de Santander (UIS) with first-semester students from the Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages with emphasis in English. The data for this examination was gathered from young learners ranging from 17 to 20 years old who are in the process of improving their speaking skills, and according to their speaking pre-test, struggle mainly with pronunciation and grammar. In order to assess students' performance, this study measured them with a rubric taking into account the previously mentioned Cambridge ESOL test principals. This rubric was exclusively used to evaluate speaking performance due to its importance explained above.

## 1.Problematization

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

University freshmen at the Foreign Languages Program are prone to be poorly prepared to face the challenges of interaction and constant language use in their classes. This is due to their English level being lower than expected by government standards. Most of

these students have an A1 level (Ministerio de educación, 2022) instead of the B1 level contemplated by the Colombian Government (Velez, 2006). Bearing in mind the previous information, it is essential to assist students' on their first semester so they can cope with this aforementioned English level disparity issue.

In addition to this English proficiency gap, Universidad Industrial de Santander has no information about the speaking skills of freshmen students. This institution takes the national exam "Prueba Saber 11" as the only requirement to be accepted in the Foreign Languages Program. This standardized test is composed of multiple choice questions which are divided into the principal subjects reviewed at school, including the English language subject. According to the ICFES 2022, in "Prueba Saber 11", the English section is composed of seven parts, which evaluate writing and reading skills, however, listening and speaking skills are not included. Herrera (2018) points out how this test focuses on measuring students' reading comprehension and leaves behind oral communication skills. As a result, even though university students from this program must have a high entry level of proficiency in their "Prueba Saber 11", it is possible that their speaking skills are not good enough to interact in their classes which are taught entirely in English.

Due to the previous reasons, this research holds significance as it examines the development of oral communication skills of entry level students while using game-based learning in order to provide insight into a possible solution for the English proficiency gap regarding oral skills. Additionally, it supplies information to the university about students' speaking skills during the first semester of the program.

## **1.2 Research question**

This paper attempts to answer the following question: What effects do table-top role-playing games have on the speaking skills of freshmen students from the Foreign Languages Teaching program when they are used as a learning tool?

## **1.3 Justification**

This research project presents the effects of the use of Table-Top Role Playing Games (TRPGs) with a Game-Based Learning approach (GBL) when learning a foreign language, focusing specifically on the development of speaking skills. It is worth noting that a great part of research on GBL has been done outside Colombia. According to Busch (2014), the United States is the country with the biggest amount of game-based learning research papers, from 2013 to the present. In addition, research publications about GBL focused specifically on TRPGs as learning tools are both uncommon outside and inside the country. Colombian literature regarding this approach and materials tend to be scarce with only a few papers found addressing similar topics, such as the ones published by Pulgarín, 2022 and Rodríguez & Granada, 2022. Therefore, this paper will contribute to the national and international literature and research about Game-Based Learning, the development of speaking skills and the use of TRPGs as language learning tools.

This study aims to benefit first-year students since TRPGs provide great scenarios to practice their speaking skills and use the language in a meaningful way. As mentioned by Osorio and Rodríguez: “through oral skills, the individual projects his thoughts and ideas and develops his identity as an individual and as a social being. At the same time, through interaction, the speaker acquires competencies to negotiate meanings and create new ways of

seeing the world.” (p 179). Since TRPGs mostly provide these meaningful scenarios and interaction, students are able to create and negotiate meaning as required by the given context. Taking into account students struggling with speaking skills, especially when using grammar and pronunciation properly, this practice activity will be useful for them. Therefore, research on how to enhance the teaching of oral skills and the growth of students' narratives in the English language is appropriate and useful.

It is important to remark how the following research is aligned with oral skills aims proposed by the Colombian government and the Ministry of Education referring to English language acquisition. One of the first mentions of the value of developing speaking skills can be found in the set of rules established for educational training programs in Colombia, Law 115 of 1994. This law, in article 21, section G, proposes the development of communicative skills in students in order for them to express themselves effectively in a foreign language (Ley 115, 1994). Hence, the national government objective is to encourage institutions to reconstruct their English learning curriculum, changing the classic methodologies of teaching to efficiently develop the main set of English language skills, especially those that enhance communication. Foreign Languages guidelines, a document whose function is to guide institutions into the construction of English curriculums, was written based on these concerns and shows how to adapt curriculum according to the population's necessities. It makes emphasis on how important the development of communicative skills is in order to increase students' chances to broaden their intellectual horizons, assimilate new learning scenarios, raise students' confidence in their own learning abilities, motivate them to overcome obstacles and finally, capitalize their knowledge (MEN. P10). The development of oral skills is a primary objective for the government and any educational institution in the nation that includes English classes. Consequently, this research follows the governments' requirement



to increase students' communicative skills like speaking, using non-traditional learning tools such as TRPGs.

Furthermore, this paper fits Universidad Industrial de Santander learning and teaching philosophy about English language acquisition. According to the University Educational Project of the B.A. Program in Foreign Languages, it is necessary to enhance "The development of competencies in which the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values are demonstrated" (p. 57). These teaching strategies are mandatory to be followed in the program. Hence, applying Game-Based Learning with TRPGs allows students to develop their oral competence and demonstrate their proficiency in regards to communicative skills. To sum up, this research study is aligned with the government and university learning philosophies. Additionally, it complements the available information about TRPGs as a learning tool and benefits the English learning process of freshmen students.

## **1.4 Objectives**

### ***1.4.1 General Objective***

To identify the effects that table-top roleplaying games have on the speaking skills of freshmen students from the Foreign Languages Teaching program when they are used as a learning tool.

### ***1.4.2 Specific Objectives***

To diagnose freshmen students' current speaking skills.

To design a didactic sequence based on the GBL approach and the use of TRPGs.

To analyze the impact of these games on students' speaking skills.

## 1.5 Literature Review

### 1.5.1 *State of art*

Recent literature about Game-Based Learning (GBL) on education suggests that this learning technique can be used to boost students' motivation to learn, (Cuervo et al., 2021. Jääskä et al., 2022. Silva et al., 2021), increase students' perception about their classes' relevance (Cuervo et al., 2021.), reduce learners' anxiety (Crocco, et al., 2016) and foster engagement (Hamari, J., et al., 2016). Studies from 2017 to 2021 that are focused on speaking skills, proved that board games were impressive tools that improved pupils' speaking competence in terms of pronunciation, fluency and grammar (Wong, et al., 2021). After this examination of the benefits of the application of GBL in education and literature, it is important to focus now on the usage of TRPGs in education, respectively on language learning and acquisition.

Some studies have been done about Table-top role playing games and its effects on foreign language acquisition. Mark McCollum, R. (2021) discovered that university students who participated in classes with TRPGs were more likely to develop oral language skills at the intermediate (ACTFL) speaking guidelines. Similarly, Farkaš, J. (2018) noted in a similar study that students improved their speaking skills, however, this development was regarded as modest. More findings about TRPG have been published, nonetheless these papers focus on different perspectives such as soft skills, imagination and collaboration. Daniau, S. (2016) asserts that the transformative potential of TRPG boosts soft skills such as group development, distancing and empathizing abilities, shared feelings and the group's imagination and synchronicity. Additionally, students engage in meaningful and helpful collaboration when using TRPGs. (Campbell, H., Madsen, A. 2021). In conclusion, these

studies reinforce the idea that TRPGs can be used to foster a wide variety of skills and abilities in students.

TRPG studies conducted in Colombia also provide information about its benefits even though there are few studies carried out there. Torres-Rodríguez, et al (2022) contributed with their research focused on a public Colombian school. According to this study, TRPGs foster students' motivation, methodology, and learning environment. Following the same ideas Pulgarín, F.V. (2022) adapted TRPGs for public school students and provided useful material and recommendations for teachers who are about to use TRPGs as learning tools. Furthermore, these studies become crucial in order to have a glimpse into the research of these types of games in education in our national context as well as their impact on oral skills and language learning, as explained in the next paragraph.

In summary, research using GBL and TRPGs have yielded a variety of results in education regarding speaking skills on students as well as other meaningful skills used for communication. With this in mind, the previous studies become relevant since they prove that the usage of TRPGs and the GBL approach may benefit students as well as help answer the problem question of this current research.

## **1.6 Theoretical framework**

The conceptual foundations chosen to answer the research questions of this study were speaking skills, Game-based Learning and Table-top role playing games.

### ***1.6.1 Speaking skills***

To start this section it is necessary to explain in a general way the concept of speaking skills in order to understand the challenge that learning this skill poses to students. Firstly, according to Dash (2013) speaking skills are defined as “the way in which we express or exchange thoughts and feelings through using language.” (p. 1). Therefore, speaking skills

can be established to be a set of abilities that allow humans to express their ideas through a continuous exchange of thoughts. In the same way, this exchange of thoughts as explained by Arung (2016) "is done by producing the voice of words" (p. 71). Despite the differences in these perspectives, Dash and Arung agree on the fact that speaking skills are linked to verbal communication efficiency. These skills provide dynamic tools to communicate a message. In other words, speaking is the most efficient communication skill, without it, humans would be forced to reduce language to scripts (Qureshi, 2007). With this concept defined, it is important now to address the learning challenge of this skill.

To reiterate, speaking skills are directly connected to thought exchange, expression and verbal communication. Hence, this skill is expected to be taken into account in education regarding the English language in order to complete the main goal of the learning process: effective communication in the language (Inayah & Liswadati, 2017). Unfortunately, speaking tends to be the hardest skill to fully develop. According to Sangaji & Zainurrahman (2019) this is because speaking is not limited to the maturity of the individual's articulating system but demands social interaction as well. Other authors suggest that its complexity relies on the amount of information needed in the spur of the moment (Rao, 2019). Hence, English classes must pay close attention to students' speaking skills development due to their importance and intricacy. With this in mind, it is imperative to develop more research processes about the enhancement of speaking skills and language acquisition in order to close the current existing gap between ESL students and effective communication through this skill.

### ***1.6.2 Game-based learning (GBL)***

Game-based learning (GBL) is a convenient approach in education that provides several advantages in the students' learning process through the usage of playing activities. Thus, this teaching method incorporates games as part of a class or curriculum to enhance

the students' learning experience and to increase their understanding upon delivering learning contents (Fatta et al., 2019). Throughout the game design process, it is necessary to keep a balance between the need to cover the subject matter and game playing (Jan L. et al., 2015). Implementing GBL may be challenging since it is not just about creating games, but “designing learning activities that can incrementally introduce concepts, and guide users towards an end goal” (Pho & Discore, 2015). In conclusion, GBL is a great tool for teaching, however, it can be time consuming for the aforementioned game design characteristics.

GBL approach structure focuses on narrative abilities building through the construction of population adapted narratives which motivate students' learning intentions. For the goals of both formal and informal learning, game-based learning makes use of many of the intrinsic motivating and typical game elements (rules, narrative, challenge, and interaction) (Dickey, 2011, p.459). GBL relies on how the methodology designer manages narrative through the design of the activities. Players develop assumptions about overcoming difficulties and solving issues based on what is reasonable under these constraints, and learners appear challenged yet eager to solve game challenges. This process involves both discovery and trial and error, but the narrative offers a cognitive framework for problem solving by determining what is reasonable for building causal linkages (Dickey, 2011, p458). Games with enhanced students' ability to construct stories are specially useful for the application of GBL methods, making emphasis on games which allow collective-constructed narratives.

The use of GBL activities has demonstrated to help students with a considerable amount of issues when learning. For instance, this learning approach reduces students' anxiety (Crocco, et al., 2016), increases their motivation and learning desire (Cuervo et al., 2021; Jääskä, et al, 2022), improves engagement (Hamari, et al., 2016), and concentration levels (Silva, et al., 2021). Additionally, more specific abilities such as mindful math

problem solving have been studied and proven to improve with GBL activities (Dai, et al.,2022). Finally, it is important to mention that according to the literature cited, this type of approach can be applied on different educational levels, from high school to university, making GBL a very versatile and effective approach for the learning process of students.

### ***1.6.3 Table-top role playing games (TRPG)***

Table-top role playing games (TRPG) also called pen and paper role playing games are “communal and cooperative oral storytelling activities of at least two participants with no or only a limited degree of physical acting” (Schallegger and Kapell, 2018). TRPGs develop stories through collaborative narrative since each participant has to play a main role. Usually the game provides useful information about the world in which the action is set, tips on the general atmosphere, and ready-to-play scenarios (Daniau, S. 2016). In order to remember each character’s qualities, the players are provided with a character sheet where this information is registered. Player characters’ abilities are generally quantified, for example: strength is 8, Dexterity is 5, Intelligence is 4 and so on with additional ruling about number modifiers depending on the game. As well, for the sake of rules enforcement, order and narration, most games require a referee who is the arbiter and manager of the game. Players verbally describe what they want their characters to do, and the referee tells them the results of those actions (Zagal & Deterding, 2018). After exploring these basic concepts and characteristics that encompass popular and more standard TRPGs, it is imperative to discuss the enormous potential that TRPGs have in education and their vital role in cultivating the speaking skills of players.

Even though TRPGs were initially only intended to be played for leisure and had no educational value, academics currently believe that this genre of games can be utilized to investigate and promote speaking skills. It has been proven that TRPGs help foreign language

students produce and foster language use in a pragmatic and meaningful way (Torres, et al., 2022, McCollum, R., 2021). Speaking features such as pronunciation, fluency, and grammar were proven to improve as well (Wong, et al., 2021). Additionally, playing TRPGs in the classroom promotes natural language acquisition (Pulgarín, F.V. (2022). Besides language learning benefits, other studies have been made about how these games foster soft skills (Daniau, 2016), and are useful to study complex phenomena such as racial and gender identity (Garcia, 2017). Finally, these studies conducted recently (from 2015 to 2022) do portray the great potential of TRPGs as efficient teaching tools for language students.

### **1.7 Legal Reference**

In regards to legal referencing, it is worth mentioning that the Colombian General Law of Education does address the learning of foreign languages and describe some common goals for this process. For this reason, this research takes into account specifically Ley 115 de 1994 as relevant due to the postulations displayed about the goal of competence in foreign languages. This law states that students from both primary and secondary education cycles need to acquire elements of conversation and the ability to express themselves in a foreign language (Ley 115, 1994, art. 20, art. 22 [Law 115, 1994, art. 20, art. 22]). Hence, this law is relevant since it shares goals with this study about foreign languages and communicative competence.

Similarly, this research abides by Colombian laws of information protection. Specifically, the Ley estatutaria de disposiciones generales para la gestión de información de bases de datos (Ley 1266, 2008 [Law 1266, 2008]) and the law of protection of information and data (Ley 1273, 2009). Thus, recognizing the importance of these laws in this research permits a reliable usage of data and a way to protect any personal information provided by

the participants. In the same manner, the application of Las disposiciones generales para la protección de datos personales en Colombia (Ley 1581, 2015 [Law 1581, 2015]) were used and proved to be significant due to the quantity and the type of information gathered in this study. For this reason, the aforementioned Colombian laws are a pillar in this research study since these provide the guidelines for the proper management of the collected data.

Finally, this study gives importance to university ruling and guidelines related to research and the educational project of the program. It serves as a basis for designing plans as well as creating solutions to theoretical and practical problems via a monographic work (Consejo Académico de la Universidad Industrial de Santander, 2007). This research follows the university guidelines focusing on the students' expectations of communicative skills development in the program under Plan Nacional de Desarrollo de Colombia and Universidad Industrial de Santander (Salamanca Uribe , E. M. et al, 2016). To conclude, this research is designed and carried out according to all the previous laws about Colombian research, participants provided data and UIS guidelines.

## 2. The Methodology

### 2.1 Type of research

This study selected the mixed-method research approach since the data collected through the instruments designed is both quantitative and qualitative. Moreover, it follows the stages established by action research methodology.

#### 2.1.1 Action research

The research process employs the action research methodology due to its focus on problem-solving or improvement in a specific situation when it is applied to improve learning methods and resolve students' learning difficulties. According to Burns, (2010) “one of the main aims of AR is to identify a ‘problematic’ situation or issue that the participants (...)”



consider worth looking into more deeply and systematically.” It is also mentioned in her book *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching*, that a central idea in this research methodology is to intervene in that problematic situation previously identified. As expected, the present study is classified as action research since it meets all the mentioned characteristics. Finally, the identified problem that requires engagement is as follows: freshman students with inadequate English speaking abilities were predicted to require several interventions to address the situation, leading to the selection of action research for this project.

In the same manner, the main characteristic of Action Research is that it builds the implementation process following a spiral plan of repetitive cycles. According to Koshy, (2010) the action research spiral uses the following steps: planning a change, acting, observing, and reflecting. These steps usually need to be repeated and the plan is modified according to the observations and notes made in the first cycle. As an example, this study planned a whole series of learning games. At the end of three gaming sessions, interviews were applied to the participants and observations were done. Using the information collected, researchers reflected upon specific behaviors or outcomes and modified certain aspects of the game activity as needed. In this way, the process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting followed the AR cycle.

The use of this procedure in the research development benefited the precise adaptation of the methodologies designed by this study researchers and allowed an efficient and appropriate data collection process. Thus, the usefulness of AR proved to be of great importance for the conducting of this research endeavor since this approach provided us insight into active problem identification, the engagement with our participants, identification of practical solutions and adjustment through feedback cycles resulting in a comprehensive study that takes into account learning and adaptation.

### ***2.1.2 Mixed-method Research Approach***

The Mixed Method Research approach can be defined as the type of research that integrates qualitative and quantitative data in the same study where its key element comes from the feature of mixing, where quantitative and qualitative elements are interlinked (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). This mixture allows to complement the information obtained, granting a deep data analysis and not only one research perspective.

The value of this method relies on the production of a more comprehensive account of the research problem while giving this study a design that provides multiple understandings via various perspectives of this latter. Therefore, benefiting this research through the analysis of numerous viewpoints instead of one exclusively (2015, p.3-4). This, as well, taking into account the element of complementarity, where the results of one method are used to elaborate, clarify or enhance the results of the other (2015, p.5). As a result, this approach became crucial for the completion of the research since it gave us the tools needed in order to succeed in our task of analyzing the qualitative and quantitative data collected from participants in an efficient and effective way as well as helped us complement two perspectives (qualitative and quantitative) in order to support the research process of this study.

## **2.2. Hypothesis**

The following research process has established a principal hypothesis, which is that the application of two-hour sessions of table-top role-playing games during a period of eight weeks has a positive impact on the speaking skills of first-year foreign language students at UIS.

Additionally, a null hypothesis is proposed where the application of TRPGs during a period of eight weeks does not have a meaningful impact on the speaking skills of first-year foreign language students at UIS.

A complementary hypothesis states that Freshmen students acquire a better perception of their own speaking skills after participating in TRPG sessions in the classroom.

## **2.3 Sampling and sample**

### ***2.3.1 Sample***

For this research a sample of thirteen participants was taken and some of the background information collected is as follows: For the ages of the participants, most of them were from 16 to 18 years old (36.4%), a few of them were from nineteen to twenty-one years old (45.5%), one of them was from twenty to twenty-five years old (9.1%) and finally one of them reported to be older than 25 years old (9.1%). Regarding gender identity, most participants identified themselves as females (69.2%) and a few as males (30.8%). As for the economic strata information, most participants reported to be in strata 2 (38.5%), part of them reported to be in strata 1 (30.8%) and finally, some participants reported to be in strata 3 (30.8%). Furthermore, most participants currently live in the city of Bucaramanga (61.5%) while the other percentage live in cities outside Bucaramanga (38.5%). Also, a great percentage of the participants graduated from public institutions (76.9%) while a few graduated from private institutions (23.1%). In addition, the majority of participants came from urban area institutions (84.6%), while a small percentage came from rural area institutions (15.4%). Finally, for all the participants this is their first time studying a university program.

The sample population surveyed had better perspectives on their English language learning experiences during their time at UIS than they did at their school English classes. On

the other hand, a greater part participated in English courses prior to their enrollment to the university and per week, most of the population had from three to four hours of English practice in their schools (54%). Other participants indicated even more extensive periods of practice that ranged from five to six hours per week (23%) and between seven and eight hours weekly (8%). Only 15% of participants had less than two hours a week of English lessons at school. Finally, more than half of the participants consider that their English school classes were not influential in their college degree election.

Less than half of participants rated their speaking proficiency in good terms (46%), and most of them as below intermediate (54%). They considered that they can understand other people while they are communicating a message (69%) In addition, most of them can understand professors' commands in the target language. Bringing up students with English speaking skills practice, most of them prefer to do this in groups from one to two hours per week. Lastly, even when most of the students consider they had great learning experiences with their current English professors, they express their opinion about the most difficult aspects of acquiring English speaking skills are expressing ideas and opinions (30%), describing places or situations (40%), creating a narrative story (40%), and communicating plans (10%).

At the end, the population surveyed did not consider they had creative English lessons taught during the time at school, being only one participant the exception to the rule. Most of the population also did not have English language activities where role playing games or collective narrative activities were used to teach speaking skills. Considering the information, 100% of the students would like to have English language lessons with non-traditional methods such as roleplay or table-top games to learn speaking skills. In addition, most of the participants indicated they consider the aspect of connection with real context situations the most important to be taken into account on the design of learning activities, followed closely

by interactivity (63,6%), feedback (54,5%), and games (36,4%). As demonstrated above, the findings from the sample population closely align with this study's proposal of usage of TRPGs and GBL, supporting its feasibility and potential efficacy.

### ***2.3.2 Sampling***

The technique applied to choose the participants of this study was Purposive sampling. Lopez and Whitehead define this sampling methodology as "...a commonly used sampling strategy, in that participants are recruited according to pre-selected criteria relevant to a particular research question." (2013.P3). Therefore, purposive sampling works on populations that possess a specific background or characteristics that the researchers want to analyze. Thus, this technique proved to be an appropriate method to use in order to enhance the accuracy of the findings in this study since it is a non-randomized sampling technique that contributes to the development of the research question and objectives via the selection of individuals for the sample population.

The aforementioned accuracy and success of application was met through the researchers' criteria for selection of informants that followed the two assumptions for effective purposive sampling proposed by Lynn P.: First, successful identification of characteristics for variation and second, a correct reflection of the identified characteristics in the sample chosen (2016.P248). With this in mind, this method was chosen due to the focus it has on the selection of samples that places emphasis on population characteristics.

In addition to that, this method was selected due to its open option for the usage of questionnaire surveys to gather data. This, allowing the selective analysis of the sampling data in order to identify participants' difficulties during methodology implementation. Therefore, making the process flexible to participants' necessities and help to follow the action research cycle. All of these characteristic features of Purposive sampling met this

research needs and consequently it was used owing to its non randomized selection process, flexibility and open option for the usage of questionnaire surveys to gather data.

## **2.4. Instruments**

### ***2.4.1 Needs analysis***

As for the need analysis survey of this study, questionnaires were used in order to gather the corresponding data needed. Questionnaires are described by Rowley J. as “documents that include a series of open and closed questions to which the respondent is invited to provide answers” (2014.P2). This provision of answers through questions given by the respondents is the main reason why questionnaires were selected to gather participants’ information. Questionnaires are a common instrument applied on research processes and its application provides accessible data from the sample population for analysis as well as requiring less time for application.

Furthermore, this needs analysis had two main aims: To collect specific data about the sample’s characteristics and their self-perception of their oral communicative skills. The survey had a duration of twenty minutes and it was divided into four sections: sociodemographic characterization, English level and Learning Experience, English Speaking and Oral Skills and Teaching Approach. With this in mind, this needs analysis assisted as a tool to identify the different necessities and have a better understanding of the participants' context. This knowledge of needs served as a guide in order to tailor the interventions designed as well as it helped to formulate solutions that covered the identified needs.

In conclusion, the need analysis applied gave researchers insight into the current state of the population selected for the study, and aided in the addressing of identified gaps in their oral skills as well as in previous and current experiences in language learning and teaching approaches.

#### ***2.4.2 Pre and post speaking test***

The decision to use Pre-test and Post-test data collection methods was based on the necessity to analyze speaking production data in a systematic and efficient way. To accurately understand the impact of TRPGs on student speaking skills, two speaking exams were administered to the participants before and after the intervention. The pre-test provided information about current students' speaking skills, which is meant to be applied before the use of any GBL intervention. The second test results allowed us to compare students' abilities since this one was applied after the students had taken at least five TRPG gaming sessions. Both tests lasted from five to eight minutes and each researcher (three) interviewed one student at a time, the interaction was recorded and analyzed afterwards. These tests followed the same structure and rubric, but their questions and topics were slightly different so students did not have to answer the same question twice. The pre test included topics which were taught to the participants during senior year at school, and the post test evaluated those they learned throughout their university English classes. The topic changes were required to assess the appropriate English level that students have and, by doing so, students felt more confident since they were asked to talk about familiar topics.

The aforementioned tests applied a rubric that measured students abilities with the same components as in the Cambridge ESOL exam (grammatical resources, lexical resources, discourse management, pronunciation and interactive communication). This rubric was designed based on Syahidah and Umasugi (2021) rubric prototype and some ability descriptions adapted from Latifa's et al. (2015) rubric proposal. The scoring system worked using a rate from 1 to 5: scores from 1 to 2 denoted a basic level, scores of 3 indicated an intermediate level, and scores from 4 to 5 signified an advanced level (Syahidah & Umasugi, 2021). The previous implies that the higher the number, the better students' speaking skills

are. The rubric's final goal was to measure students' efficiency improvement between first and last game session application.

### ***2.4.3 Interviews***

In order to collect qualitative data that complements the quantitative results as well as provide more information about participants' perceptions, a semi-structured interview was designed. Semi-structured interviews had a set of questions that elicit answers from the participants while allowing discussion as well as providing enough flexibility to follow tangents, clarify answers and the further elaboration of the responses given (Lopez & Whitehead, 2012, p.128). For this reason, this type of interview was selected due to the opportunity it offers to explore the world of the participant and reflect on their experiences which, as a result, help to collect more extensive and detailed data needed (2012, p.130). In order to analyze and complement the quantitative basis of this study with more in-depth insights from students, the implementation of interviews seemed to be the most appropriate data collection tool.

The main objective of this interview was to provide a better understanding of students' perceptions of their own speaking skills and the development of this latter after the implemented game sessions. In addition, it aimed to collect reflective and critical comments from students regarding TRPGs as tools for learning and their impact on this process.

Furthermore, the interviews were carried out as follows: First, at the end of each game session, three students were selected at random. Afterwards, each student participated in the interview and answered four questions divided into three sections: English lesson perception, speaking skills perception and game application perception. All interviews were recorded and analyzed. This process was repeated at least three times during the seven game sessions.



## **2.5. Data analysis**

### ***2.5.1 Need analysis***

The need analysis was performed following the core aspects of parallel design. Parallel design was applied to perform the analysis because the quantitative and qualitative information collected could be accumulated in separate categories and reviewed and inspected together. Cohen affirms that: “In a parallel design, with quantitative and qualitative data kept separated until the point of convergence. (P47). Parallel design is applied when researchers want to compare data collected, even if it was separated by categories in the initial data collection process. This design allowed accurate result analysis since it provided information for all the categories selected and helped provide a general analytics overview for qualitative and quantitative data.

### ***2.5.2 Pre and post test***

The speaking test was applied using open questions and interacting with one student at a time. In order to register the information obtained, the researchers used recording devices and a special rubric to assess students' speaking skills. Students were evaluated using the same categories as the Cambridge ESOL speaking exam.

The qualitative information collected was analyzed from interviews scored with pre and post test rubric. The scoring system was from 1 to 5 in which the higher the score is, the better it is the students' performance (Syahidah & Umasugi, 2021). The results were presented using a graphic of frequency distributions since they are useful when it is necessary to examine the number/percentage of students across multiple levels of performance (Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness, 2022). This method permitted the reader to see the specific amount and percentage of students who performed with a basic, intermediate or advanced level. Additionally, this type of statistical representation allowed to identify changes in the pre and post test since both test results are summarized in one table. The

characteristics of Pre and Post-test during this research process granted efficacy into the collection of speaking production data following a systematic process which evaluated precisely the students' performance.

### **2.5.3 Interviews**

The qualitative data collected from interviews were analyzed through the process of qualitative thematic analysis. This technique was used in order to search recurring ideas or themes in the sets of data collected and capture the meaning of phenomena and the understandings constructed by each participant (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016).

This analysis was done following the stages presented previously by Riger and Sigurvinsdottir, (2016) where first, the identification of patterns was done through color-coding in the participants' answer transcriptions. Second, codes were interpreted and categorized. Third, themes were identified and classified. Fourth, Themes were reviewed. Fifth, refinement and naming of themes was done and finally a report on results was produced (2016). This method of analysis proved to be effective due to the opportunity it provided for the examination of the ways students made meaning of their experiences regarding their own speaking skills and learning process (Evans & Lewis, 2018). The method was applied and modified in this research process according to the needs analysis results, emphasized to analyze students' efficacy in the use of speaking skills in a communicative environment. Furthermore, it helped students have a tool for presenting important viewpoints concerning the aforementioned skills and processes.

## **2.6 Activities and Timetable**

The sessions were developed during seven weeks, with a length of approximately two hours per session. They followed this structure: 1. Introduction session, where the session topic was presented 2. Gaming session implementation and 3. Feedback session. The first

lesson included the pre-test section, where students were evaluated with the rubric created by investigators. At the beginning, at the middle and the end of the Action Research session design implementation, the students were interviewed to collect qualitative information. The objective of this game session planning organization was to create a clear action route to guide teachers during the planning application.

**Table 1***Session 1 planning*

Session 1	Date: 17/03/2023
Topic Vocabulary: Leisure activities Grammar focus: Present simple-Present continuous	
Story Context: Goblins have free time to watch T.V. but their T.V. is broken and they decide to find a new one. Objective:Goblins want to infiltrate the great wizard tower and steal a T.V. Number of goblins per participant: 1	
Participants Number of participants: 4-5 Game Master: Activity director.	
Activity development <i>Pre-game: (Approx 25 min)</i> Project proposal explanation (5 min) Pre test (15 min) Goblin character building (5 min) <i>Game: (Approx 45 min)</i> Game Master starts the story explaining the context of the story According to participants' dice rolls the narrative created develops. Each participant must express their actions in simple present and present continuous. The game ends when: All goblins die The objective is achieved <i>Post-game (approx 15 min)</i> The Activity Director will ask participants their opinions about the game and if they like it. Each Activity Director interviews one of the participants, collecting their proposals about how to improve the game experience.	
NOTES: Due to a variety of issues, only researcher Dario was able to complete this session, researcher Estefania and Andrés were not able to finish. They decided to finish the next session. <u>Issues:</u> Extension of time in the pre-game phase due to extra clarification of game rules and the application of the first test.	

**Table 2***Session 2 planning*

Session 2	Date: 24/03/2023
Topic Vocabulary: Leisure activities Grammar focus: Present simple-Present continuous	
Story Context: Goblins look for enjoying their free time after a war with the orks Objective: Goblins want to get tanned Number of goblins per participant: 2	
Participants Number of participants: 4-5 Game Master: Activity director.	
Activity development <i>Pre-game: (Approx 5 min)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Goblin character building (5 min)</li> </ul> <i>Game: (Approx 45 min)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Game Master starts the story explaining the context of the story and assigns the game turns</li> <li>- According to participants dice rolls the narrative created will evolve. Each participant must express their actions in a simple present and present continuous.</li> <li>- The game ends when:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. All goblins die</li> <li>b. The objective is achieved</li> </ol> </li> </ul> <i>Post-game (approx 15 min)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Activity Director will ask participants their opinions about the game and if they like it.</li> <li>- Each Activity Director interviews one of the participants, collecting their proposals about how to improve the game experience.</li> </ul>	
NOTES: Only researcher Dario was able to follow the story of the session. Researchers Estefania and Andrés finished this session using the story of the previous one.	

**Table 3***Session 3 planning*

Session 3	Date: 31/03/2023
Topic Vocabulary: Leisure activities Grammar focus: Present simple-Present continuous	
Story Context: goblins want to rest and have vacations so they get money. So they decide to find the most wanted deserter orc and get a reward. Objective: Goblins want to get money to go on vacation Number of goblins per participant: 2	
Participants	

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Number of participants: 4-5  
 Game Master: Activity director.

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Activity development

*Pre-game: (Approx 5 min)*

- Goblin character building (5 min)

*Game: (Approx 45 min)*

- Game Master starts the story explaining the context of the story and assigns the game turns
- According to participants dice rolls the narrative created will evolve. Each participant must express their actions in a simple present and present continuous.
- The game ends when:
  - c. All goblins die
  - d. The objective is achieved

*Post-game (approx 15 min)*

- The Activity Director will ask participants their opinions about the game and if they like it.
  - Each Activity Director interviews one of the participants, collecting their proposals about how to improve the game experience.
- 

NOTES: N/A

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**Table 4**

*Session 4 planning*

Session 4	Date: 24/04/2023
Topic Vocabulary: Plans and intentions Grammar focus: will and won't	
Story Context: Goblins desire to see a wizard that can see their future and predict it. Objective: Goblins want to know if their dreams will come true Number of goblins per participant: 3	
Participants Number of participants: 4-5 Game Master: Activity director. Students which lose all their goblins will be asked to propose Goblins endings.	
Activity development <i>Pre-game: (Approx 5 min)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Goblin character building (5 min)</li> </ul> <i>Game: (Approx 45 min)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Game Master starts the story explaining the context of the story and assigns the game turns</li> <li>- According to participants dice rolls the narrative created will evolve. Each participant must express their actions in a simple present and present continuous.</li> <li>- The game ends when:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. All goblins die</li> <li>f. The objective is achieved</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <i>Post-game (approx 15 min)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Activity Director will ask participants their opinions about the game and if they like it.</li> <li>- Each Activity Director interviews one of the participants, collecting their proposals about how to improve the game experience.</li> </ul>	
NOTES: N/A	

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**Table 5***Session 5 planning*

Session 5	Date: 05/05/2023
<p>Topic            Vocabulary: Desires and keys of success.            Grammar focus: Present simple-Present continuous-Past simple-Future Simple; can,can't.</p>	
<p>Story            Context: Goblins heard about a wizard which created three magic items which will give them what they most wanted.            Objective: Goblins have to overcome wizard challenges to get the three magic items.            Number of goblins per participant: 3</p>	
<p>Participants            Number of participants: 4-5            Game Master: Activity director. Students which lose all their goblins will be asked to propose Goblins endings.</p>	
<p>Activity development  <i>Pre-game: (Approx 5 min)</i>            - Goblin character building (5 min)  <i>Game: (Approx 45 min)</i>            - Game Master starts the story explaining the context of the story and assigns the game turns            - According to participants dice rolls the narrative created will evolve. Each participant must express their actions in present simple, Past simple, and Present continuous.            - The game ends when:                g. All goblins die.                h. The objective is achieved.  <i>Post-game (approx 15 min)</i>            - The Activity Director will ask participants their opinions about the game and if they like it.            - Each Activity Director interviews one of the participants, collecting their proposals about how to improve the game experience.</p>	
<p>NOTES: All researchers completed their game sessions without problems.</p>	

**Table 6***Session 6 planning*

Session 6	Date: 12/05/2023
<p>Topic            Vocabulary: Weather            Grammar focus: Present simple-Present continuous-Past simple-Future Simple-Present perfect</p>	
<p>Story            Context: Goblins' world is devastated by rogue magic and the weather has changed in an extreme way.            Objective: Goblins must find a magic wand which will change the weather.            Number of goblins per participant: 3</p>	
<p>Participants            Number of participants: 4-5</p>	

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Game Master: One student selected to play the role as Activity director. The researcher will guide the Activity director with simple instructions about how to perform the Activity director's role. Students which lose all their goblins will be asked to propose Goblins endings. Each student will propose an ending and all participants will vote to decide the fate of the goblin

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Activity development

*Pre-game: (Approx 5 min)*

- Goblin character building (5 min)

*Game: (Approx 45 min)*

- Game Master starts the story explaining the context of the story and assigns the game turns
- According to participants dice rolls the narrative created will evolve. Each participant must express their actions in present simple, Past simple, and Present continuous, Future simple, Present perfect.
- The game ends when:
  - i. All goblins die
  - j. The objective is achieved

*Post-game (approx 15 min)*

- The Activity Director will ask participants their opinions about the game and if they like it.
  - Each Activity Director interviews one of the participants, collecting their proposals about how to improve the game experience.
- 

NOTES: One of the researchers was not able to participate in the data collection process because of medical reasons.

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## Table 7

### *Session 7 planning*

Session 7	Date: 15/05/2023
<p>Topic Vocabulary: Diseases Grammar focus: Present simple-Present continuous-Past simple-Past perfect-future simple-should,shouldn't;can,can't.</p>	
<p>Story Context: Goblins world is completely destroyed and a deadly virus is killing all goblinkind. Objective: Goblins find the cure for de disease Number of goblins per participant: 1</p>	
<p>Participants Number of participants: 4-5 Game Master: Activity director. Students which lose all their goblins will be asked to propose Goblins endings. Each student will propose an ending and all participants will vote to decide the fate of the goblin.</p>	
<p>Activity development</p> <p><i>Game: (Approx 35 min)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Game Master starts the story explaining the context of the story and assigns the game turns</li> <li>- According to participants dice rolls the narrative created will evolve. Each participant must express their actions in present simple, Past simple,should,shouldn't,can,can't and Present continuous.</li> <li>- The game ends when:           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>k. All goblins die</li> <li>l. The objective is achieved</li> </ol> </li> </ul> <p><i>Post-test (approx 25 min)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Activity Director will perform the post-test, each student had 5 minutes to answer the questions orally. The post test was recorded by the Activity Director.</li> </ul>	
<p>NOTES: The game session was reduced to 35 minutes because the class professor only was able to give the researchers 1 hour of his class.</p>	

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The researcher Alberto was able to perform all the Post-tests on time, the other researcher performed the missing Post-tests through Zoom.

---

Each table was modified according to the activities development through the seven weeks of implementation. The seven weeks were not consecutive because of unexpected interruptions related to holidays and students' activities. The researchers added or modified original objectives and game proposals to adapt games information to the students' knowledge acquired on the English lessons of the week. Game sessions' most important adaptations were: Game sessions reduced to one hour; game maps modified according to students' creative suggestions; and creature figures used to represent students' goblins during the game session. These adaptations were necessary to attend to unexpected limitations which occurred during the research process.

### 3. Results

The results presented in the following sections were meant to portray the accomplishment of the specific goals set in this research study: To diagnose freshmen students' current speaking skills, to design a didactic sequence based on the GBL approach and the use of TRPGs, and to analyze the impact of these games on students' speaking skills. Since the design of the didactic sequence was already described in detail above (see Activities and time table 2.6), the results section will be focused on the second and third specific objectives.

#### **3.1 Speaking skills diagnosis: Pre-test results**

The pre-test and Post-test results were collected through a rubric designed for speaking skills and later analyzed through statistics. The scoring system worked with a rating from 1 to 5: scores from 1 to 2 denoted a basic level, scores of 3 indicated an intermediate

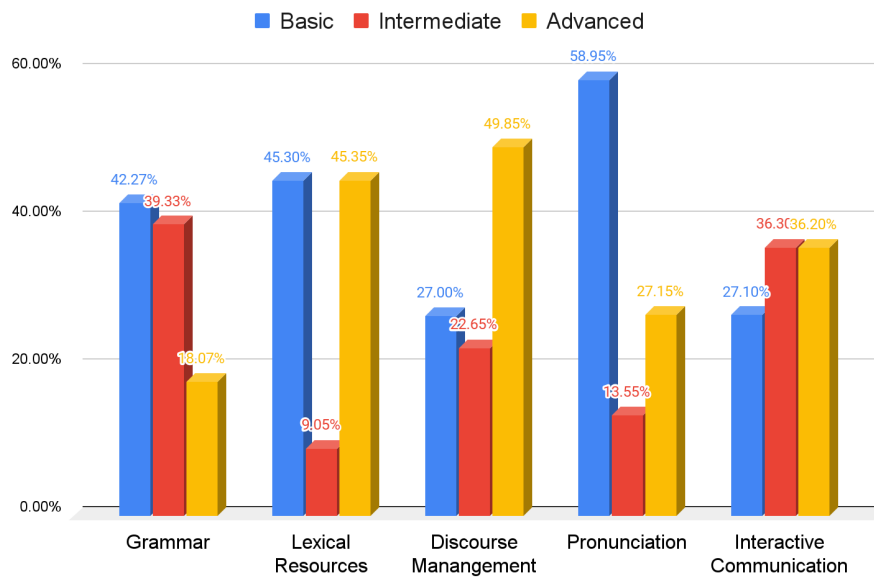


level, and scores from 4 to 5 signified an advanced level (Syahidah & Umasugi, 2021). In *Graphic 1* the results were summarized into those categories: basic, intermediate and advanced. This graphic was designed this way to allow a more intuitive results comprehension for the reader.

According to the results participants did not have similar results or patterns in all the sections evaluated. As shown in *Figure 1* among the five categories evaluated on the pre-test (grammar, lexicon, discourse, pronunciation, and interactive communication), students struggled the most with pronunciation. More than half of the population (58.95%) scored at a basic level in this category. Followed by the grammar section, in which 42.27% of students had a basic level, and none of them identified or self corrected all their grammar mistakes during their test. On the other hand a big part of the population scored an advanced level in their discourse management skills (49.85%) and lexical resources (45.35%). These statistics allowed a general diagnosis: students tend to have a basic level in their pronunciation and grammar skills when speaking, however their skills for discourse management and lexical resources is advanced for almost half of the population.

**Figure 1**

*Pre-test results graphic*



### 3.2 Impact on speaking skills: Pre and Post speaking tests results

In order to analyze the data gathered from both tests this paper used statistical analysis which elicited variables such as the mean, the standard deviation and improvement percentage. It is important to point out that the mean presented works with the same range of scores from the rubric. The minimum score possible is one (basic) and the maximum is five (advanced). According to *table 1* students improved their speaking performance in all the categories analyzed. The most prominent changes on students' performance were on pronunciation (26% improvement), grammatical resources (18% improvement) and interactive communication (18% improvement).

**Table 8**

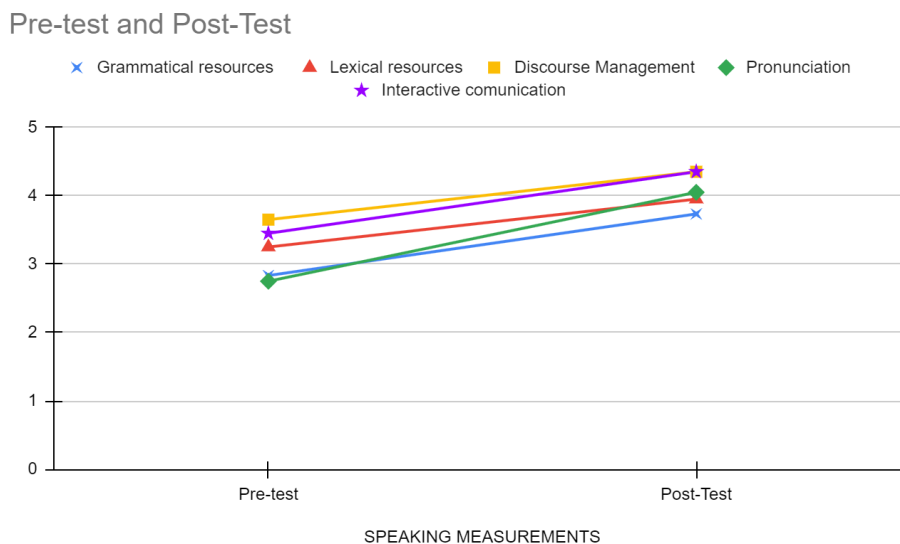
*Pre and post test speaking Measurements*

Pre and post test speaking Measurements					
Categories	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Percentage Improvement
	Mean	St.	Mean	St.	

	Deviation		Deviation		
<b>grammatical resources</b>	2.8333333	0.15275252	3.7333333	0.20816659	18%
<b>Lexical resources</b>	3.25	1.2020815	3.95	0.49497474	6%
<b>Discourse Management</b>	3.65	1.2020815	4.35	0.21213203	14%
<b>Pronunciation</b>	2.75	0.49497474	4.05	0.35355339	26%
<b>Interactive communication</b>	3.45	0.35355339	4.35	0.07071067	18%

**Figure 2**

*Pre and post test measurements comparison.*



Students' improvement was illustrated on *Figure 2*. The data included in this graphic are the means of all the categories previously mentioned taken from the pre and post test. Each line and color corresponds to a different rubric category. All lines are inclined upwards which implies that there was an improvement among all the categories.

In light of the previous statistics, it can be concluded that there was a noticeable improvement in the participants' speaking skills. Before any intervention students had low scores mainly in their pronunciation rubric section. However at the end of the gaming sessions, this aspect was the one with the biggest mean improvement (from 2.75 to 4.05). Similarly all the categories increased their mean after approximately two months using TPRG as a language learning tool. As a consequence, students improved their speaking skills and it can be affirmed that TPRG can be adapted to be a great learning tool.

### 3.3 Participants perspective: Interviews analysis

As for the interviews, the data was analyzed using thematic analysis with color coding. This color coding technique was applied to eight interview transcriptions taking into account four main themes that correspond to the main questions from the performed interview and are as follows: Experience, Benefits, Drawbacks and Suggestions. In order to find more specific patterns each theme was assigned more sub-categories. As it is shown in *chart 8*, each category had between 1 and 4 sub-categories. These subcategories were assigned after reviewing all the interviews and identifying key patterns in them. As a result, the design of this Overall Thematics Chart allowed us to see in a clear way several features reported by the participants about their experience and impact of the usage of TRPGs to enhance their speaking skills.

**Table 9**

*Interviews Overall Thematics Table*

Overall Thematics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Experience:</b> Positive and Interesting Lesson Experience</li> </ul>

---

- **Benefits:**

- Vocabulary Expansion and Revision
- Fluency Enhancement
- Creativity Fostering
- Oral Expression Motivation

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- **Drawbacks:**

- Limited Game Scenarios
- Vocabulary Limited to the Game Theme
- Too High English Level pre-requisite to play
- Overused Informal Register

---

- **Suggestions:**

- Constant group rotations
- Game variation
- Longer and Extended Game Sessions

---

Participants liked the implementation of TRPGs as a way of practicing their speaking skills and having fun. During the interview in the first question (related to their overall experience) most participants reported having a pleasant lesson experience during the sessions with identified coded responses such as “It was fun”, “It was entertaining” or “I like the dynamic of the game”. It seems that students enjoyed using TRPGs in the classroom since it was fun, entertaining and helpful to practice.

Moreover, under the theme of Benefits, a pattern was identified condensed into four main benefits for the speaking skills of participants: First, vocabulary expansion and revision, where participants reported learning new vocabulary as well as reviewing their own in order to communicate and play. Second, fluency enhancement, in which participants expressed that the game helped them improve their language fluency. Third, creativity fostering, where participants reported using their creativity in order to play and come up with ideas for their stories. Fourth, oral expression motivation, in which participants stated that the game environment in play gave them the opportunity for being more spontaneous in the usage of the language and therefore, being more motivated to speak. Participants noticed how this

game provided the perfect scenarios to improve all the previously mentioned aspects: vocabulary, revision, fluency, creativity and motivation boost.

By contrast, under the theme of Drawbacks, the difficulties reported were condensed into four sub-themes that summarize the pattern disadvantages: First, participants reported a limitation with game scenarios in which all centered around the game fantasy theme. Second, linked to previous participants reports about having the vocabulary learned being just limited to one type of thematic of the game hindered their oral skills. Third, participants recognized and expressed that these types of games may need a higher level of English proficiency to be played. Consequently, excluding other members or making the process difficult for students that may not be at the same language competence level as their peers; and fourth, since participants are part of an academic program that requires the appropriate use of a formal register, they reported that informal register is overused in-game.

Finally, for the suggestions theme, participants proposed multiple solutions to improve the application of TRPGs in sessions in order for these to aid in the improvement of their speaking skills. The reported suggestions are as follows: First, constant group rotations in order to receive different linguistic input from different referees and students. Second, Game variation in order to address the disadvantage of constrained vocabulary by game thematic and to maintain motivation through novelty. Third, participants expressed the desire to have longer and extended game sessions for them in order to practice their speaking skills without the constraints of short session time limits.

The final interview findings could be summarized by students placing statements about how effective the learning method was in motivating them to practice English language speaking skills, and how the activities encouraged them to participate more in group activities. However, researchers need to bear in mind students' English proficiency since participants affirmed that the linguistic level for playing might be too high for them, as well

as having limited vocabulary. The findings also revealed how student feedback is vital to transform teaching methods proposals according to students' necessities, and evolve the speaking practice into a significant English language training.

#### 4. Conclusions and limitations

##### **4.1 Conclusions**

Tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) used as a language learning tool that improves students' speaking performance showed benefits and improvements in speaking skills acquisition. Even though its original purpose had nothing to do with language learning, it can be adapted to boost speaking skills. It was noted that having TRPG gaming sessions once a week for two months helped 1st-semester university students to pronounce better, use better grammar structures and communicate more interactively. This phenomenon happened due to the nature of TRPGs since it is necessary to communicate interactively and speak constantly to play.

The research objective to identify the effects of Table-top role-playing games on the English speaking skills of freshmen university students guided the study to analyze how pronunciation, vocabulary, and discourse management were improved. Additionally, it was noted how participants boosted their creativity when speaking. The students' speaking skills were measured and identified through the qualitative and quantitative rubric of evaluation and game session planning was modified according to students' development through sessions or by students' suggestions. These suggestions, like the game map, changes during sessions helped to transform the game development and encouraged the students to participate more actively in the activities. The researchers' hypothesis was confirmed when post-test results highlighted improvements in students' answers in contrast with pre-test results. All the

objectives of the research were fulfilled, even taking into consideration the limitations the research process faced during its development.

Incorporating the methodologies and frameworks employed in these antecedent studies, we aim to expand the understanding of the research topic and contribute to future English language research. Furthermore, leveraging the outcomes and conclusions from these previous studies and the results obtained by this research, we can draw meaningful comparisons, identify trends, and state precedent about the TRPG's implementation on English language speaking skills practice sessions. Researchers from this study strongly believe that the study methodology proposal should be adopted to reinforce academic processes of acquiring English as a second language. TRPGs proved to be a transforming method which assists students with English language learning necessities about speaking language interactions and how they are applied in real life situations. Further research should focus on increasing research proposals to provide more game alternatives to vary students' interactions and challenge their language acquisition process.

#### **4.2 Limitations**

It is due to mention that the original lesson planning included ten lessons that were not able to be applied at the end of the data collection process because of unexpected circumstances. The advertising circumstances were but not limited to the unexpected student strikes that occurred during game sessions and university activities. It caused the necessity to modify the lesson plans according to the available time. At the end, the lessons were reduced from ten to seven lesson plans. These limitations modified the results obtained for the researchers and how the impact of the game sessions influences the students' English language acquisition process.



Another limitation found is the accuracy of the quantitative data from the pre and post speaking test. The researchers set specific criteria for grammar and pronunciation mistakes since these categories were easy to measure in terms of quantity. However other sections such as interactive communication and fluency were scored according to the own perception of the evaluator. Which led to a certain level of subjectivity during the scoring process. This subjectivity when evaluating speaking needs to be addressed in further research so a more specific scoring design can be developed.

Finally, the last limitation of this study was the small number of students. Some of them did not participate or even abandoned the research process. During the game sessions implementation, first stages, some students did not attend class for more than three weeks. Subsequently, the second situation involved a student who initially participated in the research process, but after some game sessions, decided to step away from it. The information collected from these students was not included in the data analysis process. At the end the study was carried out with the data of ten participants instead of the original amount of learners.

### **4.3 Discussion**

The study development process motivated researchers to bring into readers' attention two important recommendations and one aspiration for future researchers. The first recommendation for future researchers is to apply the TRPG research process with a larger number of game sessions. These research results illustrate how progressively speaking skills have developed with the continuous use of a language practice technique that applies TRPGs during the game sessions' limited time, displaying improvement in students' speaking abilities even with the time limitations faced during the research development. An increment in the

number of game sessions would possibly increase the already-identified improvement on the speaking skill.

The second recommendation comes from the importance of interviews' feedback about game sessions development and how important they are. The research process efficiently developed entirely from students' feedback about game methodologies. Students provide comments and desires about game strategies, how many characters are used on each round and how stories should progress. Students' feedback should be collected on each opportunity possible to allow researchers modify the planning process on a well-planned form.

A final aspiration born from researchers desire that more TRPG's lesson models are developed on further research. The researchers believe the development and creation of more lesson models which implement TRPG's to enhance basic English skills and promote conversational abilities will increase students' attachment and motivation in the language acquisition process. Further research regarding this topic could represent an opportunity to create more attractive and catching English learning experiences.

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