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# Integrating Game-Based And Dramatic Exercises In Phonetics Lessons For Young EFL Learners

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the integration of game-based and dramatic exercises into phonetics lessons for young learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). While traditional pronunciation teaching often focuses on repetition and mechanical drills, this study explores how playful, story-based, and performative activities can improve phonetic accuracy, intonation, and learner engagement. A mixed-method classroom study was conducted involving two experimental groups taught with integrated methods over three weeks. Results showed that learners exposed to game and drama activities exhibited higher motivation, better intonation control, and improved pronunciation accuracy compared to a control group. The findings support a multimodal, affective approach to phonetics instruction in early education.

**Keywords:** phonetic instruction, drama in education, game-based learning, EFL, young learners, pronunciation, intonation, learner motivation.

**Introduction:** Effective phonetics instruction is essential for developing clear, intelligible speech in learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). For young learners, in particular, phonetic competence includes not only accurate articulation of individual sounds but also the use of natural intonation, rhythm, and stress patterns. However, traditional phonetics instruction often relies on repetitive, mechanical drills that may disengage young students and fail to foster meaningful pronunciation development (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Levis, 2020).

Recent pedagogical research emphasizes the importance of interactive and affective approaches in language education. In this context, game-based

learning and drama-based exercises have emerged as powerful tools for integrating cognitive, emotional, and kinesthetic engagement in pronunciation instruction. Games—such as phoneme bingo, sound matching races, and intonation board games—provide repetitive exposure in an enjoyable and low-anxiety setting (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Meanwhile, dramatic techniques—such as role play, storytelling, choral reading, and mini-dialogue performance—allow learners to embody sound patterns and practice suprasegmental features in communicative contexts (Maley & Duff, 2005; Miccoli, 2003).

These methods are especially suited for young learners, whose natural inclination toward play and imagination makes them more receptive to expressive, story-driven instruction (Pinter, 2017). Furthermore, drama and games promote memory retention, peer interaction, and multi-sensory processing, all of which are central to effective phonetic acquisition (Nation & Newton, 2020).

Despite their potential, such methods are still underutilized in phonetics lessons in many EFL settings, including Uzbekistan, where traditional rote methods dominate. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how integrating game-based and dramatic exercises into phonetics lessons affects learners' pronunciation, intonation, and engagement in the primary EFL classroom.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-method design to explore the impact of integrating game-based and dramatic exercises into phonetics instruction for primary EFL learners. Two experimental groups received the integrated instruction, while one control group continued with traditional drill-based pronunciation practice. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to assess changes in pronunciation accuracy, intonation control, and learner engagement.

### 2.2 Participants

The participants were 48 second-grade learners (ages 7–8) from three public schools in Namangan, Uzbekistan. Learners were divided into three groups of 16 students each:

- Group A (Game-Based Instruction)
- Group B (Drama-Based Instruction)
- Group C (Control Group – Traditional Instruction)

All learners had been receiving English lessons for at least one academic year. Their regular English teachers

implemented the instructional methods over a three-week period, using a standardized lesson plan with variations according to the group.

### 2.3 Instructional Interventions

Each group focused on the same target phonetic features (e.g., /θ/ vs. /s/, stress patterns in multisyllabic words, rising and falling intonation in questions and statements), but through different instructional methods.

- Group A (Game-Based Exercises):
  - o Phoneme Bingo
  - o Intonation Card Games
  - o Pronunciation Maze (matching words with sounds)
  - o Sound Discrimination Races

These games were designed to repeat target sounds in low-stress, competitive formats that encouraged repetition and listening focus.

- Group B (Drama-Based Exercises):
  - o Choral reading of dialogues
  - o Mini-skits with exaggerated pronunciation
  - o Emotion-based intonation practice (e.g., angry, surprised, excited)
  - o Storytelling with voice modulation

These activities allowed learners to physically embody sounds and practice intonation and stress in context.

- Group C (Control Group):
  - o Traditional listen-and-repeat drills
  - o IPA-based pronunciation exercises from the textbook
  - o Individual recitation without contextual or interactive practice

### 2.4 Data Collection Tools

To assess the effects of the interventions, the following instruments were used:

- Pronunciation Pre- and Post-Test:

Each learner completed a phoneme reading and minimal pair test at the beginning and end of the study. These tests were scored on articulation accuracy and intonation control.
- Observation Protocols:

Engagement and participation during lessons were rated on a 5-point scale by independent observers using a standardized rubric.
- Teacher Feedback Interviews:

Post-intervention interviews were conducted with the three participating teachers to gather insights on

learner responsiveness, classroom management, and observed gains.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data (test scores and engagement ratings) were analyzed using descriptive statistics and percentage gain analysis. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were thematically coded to extract insights related to learner affect, motivation, and teacher perspectives on practicality.

## 3. RESULTS

The study revealed clear improvements in learners' pronunciation accuracy and classroom engagement among the groups that received game-based and dramatic phonetics instruction. These outcomes were supported by both quantitative test results and qualitative teacher and observer feedback.

### 3.1 Pronunciation Test Outcomes

As illustrated in Figure 1, both the Game-Based (Group A) and Drama-Based (Group B) instruction groups showed significant gains in pronunciation test scores compared to the Control Group (Group C).

- Group A (Game-Based): improved from an average of 56% to 82%
- Group B (Drama-Based): improved from 54% to 80%
- Group C (Control): improved modestly from 55% to 63%

The data show that the integrated instructional groups outperformed the control group by over 17 percentage points on average in post-test pronunciation accuracy, confirming the effectiveness of contextual and interactive methods.

### 3.2 Engagement and Participation

Lesson observations revealed that learners in both Group A and B demonstrated consistently higher levels of active participation, enthusiasm, and spontaneous repetition of target sounds. On a 5-point engagement scale:

- Group A (Game-Based) averaged 4.7, with learners eagerly volunteering to participate in pronunciation games
- Group B (Drama-Based) averaged 4.5, with high involvement in role-plays and expressive reading
- Group C (Control) averaged 3.1, with frequent disengagement during drills

Teachers noted that even shy or passive learners became more involved when pronunciation practice was embedded in games or stories, supporting the idea that affective engagement enhances phonetic

outcomes.

### 3.3 Teacher Feedback

All three participating teachers highlighted the following outcomes during post-study interviews:

- Learners in Group A responded well to competition and repetition embedded in games, especially for difficult consonants and minimal pair contrasts.
- Group B learners showed greater control over intonation and stress due to their repeated dramatic reading and role-play.
- Control group learners struggled with fluency and natural rhythm, despite minor gains in sound accuracy.

One teacher summarized:

"With games and performance, they weren't just repeating sounds—they were owning them. They remembered better, spoke more, and enjoyed the lessons far more."

## 4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study support the hypothesis that game-based and drama-based exercises significantly enhance the effectiveness of phonetics instruction in primary EFL contexts. The marked improvement in both pronunciation accuracy and learner engagement among the experimental groups aligns with previous research advocating for affective, multimodal approaches to teaching pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Shin & Crandall, 2014; Nation & Newton, 2020).

### 4.1 Multisensory and Emotional Engagement

Learners in the Game-Based and Drama-Based groups not only improved more rapidly than their peers in the control group, but they also engaged more deeply with phonetic content. These findings reflect the key advantage of such methods: they allow students to embody language—to hear, see, say, and feel it in context.

Games provide repetition in disguise, offering multiple exposures to target phonemes without monotony (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006). For example, the "Intonation Race" game used in Group A encouraged learners to mimic rising and falling question patterns through fast-paced listening and echoing, leading to high engagement and improved accuracy.

Drama-based activities, on the other hand, allowed learners to connect intonation and rhythm with emotion and intention, facilitating more natural speech production. As Miccoli (2003) notes, "drama brings the sound system to life", and learners in Group B visibly benefited from this dynamic.

## 4.2 Suprasegmental Gains Through Performance

While segmental pronunciation (i.e., individual sounds) improved across both experimental groups, it was in the domain of suprasegmentals—intonation, stress, and rhythm—that the Drama-Based group demonstrated particular strength. By rehearsing and performing dialogues, learners developed greater sensitivity to prosodic features that are typically overlooked in mechanical drills (Levis, 2020).

This supports the growing pedagogical consensus that prosody must be taught actively, not incidentally, and that performance-based instruction is one of the most effective ways to do so (Burke & O'Sullivan, 2002).

## 4.3 Affective Filter and Learner Confidence

Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that learners acquire language more successfully when they are relaxed, motivated, and confident. Both game-based and dramatic phonetic activities create low-anxiety, playful environments where students are more willing to take risks and experiment with difficult sounds.

Teachers in the study observed that shy or passive learners often became more expressive and spontaneous during games and performance tasks. This affective impact likely contributed to the overall improvement in pronunciation accuracy.

## 4.4 Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that:

- Phonetic instruction should go beyond isolated drilling and be integrated into game formats and drama routines;
- Teacher training programs should include modules on creative pronunciation techniques, including drama and gamification strategies;
- Curriculum designers should incorporate interactive pronunciation tasks with meaningful context and purpose.

While traditional pronunciation methods may still have value, they should be augmented with engaging, learner-centered strategies that connect form with function.

## CONCLUSION

This study has shown that integrating game-based and dramatic exercises into phonetics lessons significantly enhances young EFL learners' pronunciation skills, intonation awareness, and classroom engagement. The learners exposed to these interactive approaches demonstrated greater phonetic accuracy, stronger command of suprasegmental features, and more confident oral performance compared to those taught with traditional drill-based methods.

Game-based learning offered a playful, repetitive environment that encouraged active participation, while drama-based instruction provided meaningful contexts for expressive and natural language use. Together, these methods created a rich, multisensory learning experience that aligns with the developmental and emotional needs of young learners.

The study reinforces the importance of affective and communicative engagement in pronunciation instruction and supports the integration of such strategies into phonetic curricula and teacher training. Future research could explore the long-term retention effects of these methods or investigate their impact in multilingual and digital learning environments.

In sum, games and drama are not merely supplements to phonetic instruction—they are vital tools for making sounds stick, voices confident, and language come alive.

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