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SPEAK UP®: DEVELOPING INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS' VOCABULARY AND IMPROVING THEIR SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: Research indicates that incorporating educational games can significantly enhance second or foreign language learning. This study examines the effectiveness of the board game Speak Up® in improving English vocabulary and speaking skills among Indonesian EFL learners. Over eight weeks, the research involved 30 high-beginner EFL learners, employing vocabulary tests, speaking tests, and a survey for data collection. The analysis utilized paired t-tests for the test results and descriptive analysis for the survey findings. The results demonstrated notable improvements in both vocabulary and speaking skills, with a t-value of -13.772 for vocabulary and a z-value of -4.816 for speaking, confirming that Speak Up® effectively enhanced learners' abilities. Additionally, a positive correlation was identified between vocabulary acquisition and speaking fluency, with an effect size of 0.85, indicating a substantial impact. Survey results reflected favorable perceptions of Speak Up®, with mean scores of 4.56 for effectiveness, 4.59 for usability, and 4.62 for satisfaction. Based on these findings, it is recommended that EFL teachers incorporate Speak Up® into their teaching strategies to improve vocabulary and speaking skills. Future research could investigate the long-term effects of Speak Up® on vocabulary retention and explore its benefits for improving speaking skills with a larger, more diverse sample, while also considering external factors that may influence vocabulary development and speaking skills.

Keywords: *board game; EFL learners; vocabulary development; speaking skill.*

INTRODUCTION

Today, many English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in Indonesia aspire to learn English for communication purposes (Winnie et al., 2023). Supporting this notion, Alvares et al. (2024) stated that most language learners worldwide study English to develop speaking skills, as EFL learners are considered successful when they can communicate effectively. Therefore, one of the criteria for measuring the effectiveness of EFL teaching is the achievement of learners' speaking skills.

Notable problems arise from the limited allocation of speaking activities in EFL classes within Indonesian tertiary education, which is exacerbated by a lack of vocabulary (Hartini & Ardini, 2024; Winnie, et al., 2023) and psychological factors such as low self-confidence and fear of making mistakes (Daflizar, 2024; Mustamir, 2024; Ork et al., 2024; Robah & Anggrisia, 2023). Despite students dedicating at least six years to learning English prior to their university education, many continue to exhibit in adequate mastery of speaking skills, resulting in poor performance both in academic settings and beyond (Hartini & Ardini, 2024; Robah & Anggrisia, 2023; Winnie, et al., 2023). This situation calls for a multifaceted approach to EFL instruction to enhance speaking skills in a more supportive and engaging learning environment for students.

One of the crucial factors in developing speaking skills for EFL learners is effective vocabulary knowledge (Chung & Fung, 2023; Hartini & Ardini, 2024; Winnie, et al., 2023). While literature demonstrates a positive relationship between vocabulary acquisition and speaking skills in the EFL context (Alshumrani, 2024; Guo & East, 2024; Hartini & Ardini, 2024; Ork et al., 2024), Hartini and Ardini (2024) noted

that vocabulary teaching in tertiary education has received little attention, and EFL learners have few opportunities to use the vocabulary they have learned in a variety of situations (Alvarez et al., 2024; Al-Ruwaili & Al-Khresheh, 2023). In response to this, a myriad of communicative language activities aimed at improving EFL learners' vocabulary development has been promoted, including the use of educational games (Bakhtiari et al., 2025; Hsu et al., 2023; Hwang et al., 2024; Santos, 2023; Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Studies show that the inclusion of educational games in classroom settings has significant effects on improving language learning (e.g., Jia et al., 2023; Sandy et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Ultimately, enhancing vocabulary instruction and providing practical application opportunities through educational games are essential for fostering communication skills among EFL learners.

Although the focus of the modern and interdisciplinary field of game studies is primarily on digital games (Al-Aosail et al., 2024; Ariya et al., 2025; Jia et al., 2023; Kazu & Kuvvetli, 2023; Lai & Chen, 2023; Vnuko & Klimova, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023), physical board games attract many educators because they promote tactile engagement and facilitate face-to-face social presence, thereby enhancing the sense of connection among players. (Ariya et al., 2025; McCaughey & Rosenberg, 2024; Sousa et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). After the COVID-19 pandemic, physical board games have resurged in popularity due to online fatigue, and they are preferred for their affordability, accessibility, and simplicity in terms of game mechanics (Crist et al., 2024; Naghikhani, 2024). Since they are economically feasible (Ariya et al., 2025), the rise of board games is evident, opening opportunities for independent game designers and researchers to create and reproduce physical board games for educational purposes (Naghikhani, 2024).

There is a growing body of studies analyzing the effectiveness of physical board games in developing EFL students' vocabulary (e.g., Aufa & Zuhriyah, 2024; Coraizaca et al., 2023; Naderi & Moafian, 2023; Ningrum et al., 2023; Sitanggang et al., 2023), grammar (Sitanggang et al., 2023; Wazeer, 2023), improving their speaking skills (e.g., Maranatha, 2023; Martinez et al., 2023; Pittayanantakul & Phusawisot, 2024; Wang et al., 2023). Other studies have investigated the effects of board games on reducing EFL learners' speaking anxiety and increasing their motivation (Lailia et al., 2024), as well as enhancing students' interests in understanding complex concepts within the school environment (Luckner et al., 2024; Reisdorfer-da-Silva et al., 2025; Stav et al., 2024) and creativity (Kuo et al., 2023; Mercier & Lubart, 2025). Additionally, these studies highlight the role of board games in fostering peer collaboration and creating an engaging learning environment that allows students to learn at their own pace (Rodríguez-Ferrer et al., 2024). They also emphasize the importance of communication, negotiation, and cooperation among players (Gonçalves et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings show the potential of educational board games in language learning.

However, there is a lack of comprehensive research specifically targeting the effectiveness of using physical board games in enhancing both English vocabulary and speaking skills among Indonesian EFL university students. Wang et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of customizing board games to align with specific educational objectives to enhance student motivation, reinforce their language acquisition processes, and provide significant insights into the dynamic field of English language teaching (ELT). Addressing this gap could lead to more effective instructional strategies that leverage the benefits of board games in foreign language learning.

Building on this premise, a board game called Speak Up® was developed to assist EFL university students in enhancing their vocabulary and improving their speaking skills. In this research, the term "board game" refers to a non-digital educational tabletop game that consists of a fixed set of rules, objectives, and challenges related to the game pieces, their positions on the board, and the potential moves available to players, which facilitate interaction between or among players (Othman & Ching, 2024; Shaviv, 2023). The theme of Speak Up® is *Nusantara*, or the Indonesian Archipelago, featuring 30 target words to aid students in developing their speaking skills. This innovative approach aims to create an engaging learning environment that promotes opportunities for learners to actively participate in using the language.

The reason why Speak Up® was developed is to address the challenges by EFL university freshmen at a private university in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, particularly their difficulties in recalling the necessary words to answer questions effectively. Based on discussions with several English lecturers at the university, many students struggle with word retrieval, which can hinder their ability to express their thoughts clearly and

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confidently in English. Additionally, students often experience confusion regarding English word forms, such as the noun "culture" and the adjective "cultural", which can further complicate their communication. By providing a structured and engaging learning platform, Speak Up® aims to enhance vocabulary retention and improve learners' understanding of word forms, eventually fostering greater fluency and confidence in their speaking skills.

The existing physical board games aimed at enhancing both vocabulary and speaking such as Apple to Apple, Scattergories, and Balderdash, are primarily designed for English as a second language (ESL) learners and consist of words and phrases that may be less familiar to Indonesian EFL students. In terms of game design, compared to an EFL board game called Word Up™ created by Matthew Errey, an Australian ESL teacher, Speak Up® adopts the rules of classic board games like Monopoly and Ludo, facilitating interactive learning through token movements and interactions. While Word Up™ also utilizes game mechanics, it may not offer the same level of physical interaction as Speak Up®.

Furthermore, although both board games aim at vocabulary acquisition, Speak Up® emphasizes second language learning principles, enabling learners to practice using vocabulary in a fun and engaging way. While Word Up™ targets a broad range of English language learners with a structured approach to vocabulary and grammar learning, Speak Up® employs a game-based learning approach that promotes interaction among players and encourages the practical use of vocabulary in context, creating a more immersive learning experience.

Speak Up® adopts the concept of spaced repetition—involving a systematic approach to presenting and practicing vocabulary knowledge, designed to optimize learners' exposure to words contextually. Although some studies reveal that immediate repetitions may be more effective than spaced repetitions in multimedia word learning (e.g. Lo, 2024), spaced repetitions that place words in sentence contexts have a sustained benefit on later speaking production (Francis et al., 2025).

Using a constructivists approach, Speak Up® players engage in speaking situations in three ways: (1) when a player lands on a green square, he or she asks the opponent to guess a word being described using the provided clues; (2) when a player lands on a blue square, he or she responds to the question written on the card and then ask a question to the opponent; and (3) when a player lands on the square with "say your favorite…", he or she has the option to respond to the instruction or pass. These three situations allow players to use and reuse the targeted words in Speak Up®, enabling learners to experience a speaking flow that promotes enjoyment. This focus on positive emotions leads to an optimal learning experience, contributing to a reduction in language learning anxiety (Almukhalid & King, 2024).

With this background, this study investigated the effects of Speak Up® on improving EFL university students' English vocabulary knowledge and speaking skills guided by three research questions: (1) How effective is the use of Speak Up® in improving EFL university learners' English vocabulary development and speaking skills? (2) What is the relationship between the learners' English vocabulary development and their speaking skills after using Speak Up® in their learning process? (3) How do the learners perceive their overall learning experience using Speak Up®?

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-method approach to evaluate the effectiveness of Speak Up® in developing EFL university students' vocabulary and improving their speaking skills. To answer the first research question, the null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there is no significant difference between the vocabulary and speaking tests before and after the experimental treatment. The alternative hypothesis (H_1) posited that there is a significant difference between the vocabulary and speaking tests before and after the experimental treatment. Moreover, to address the second research question, the H_0 asserted there is no relationship between the results of the vocabulary tests and the speaking tests, while the H_1 suggested that the results of the vocabulary tests are associated with the results of the speaking tests. Additionally, this study surveyed the overall experience of the students using the board game.

The target population in this study was Indonesian high beginner English learners majoring in a non-English language program and enrolled in an English course during the academic year 2022/2023 at a private university in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), high beginner learners are capable of handling simple and straightforward information and are able to begin expressing themselves in familiar contexts (British Council, 2025).

Employing convenience sampling, students were invited to participate voluntarily for eight consecutive weeks, and 32 participants signed up within two weeks. This sample size allows for reliable estimates of effect sizes and increases the likelihood of detecting significant differences or relationships (Ravid, 2025). Additionally, this sample size aligns with established practices in educational research (Sugiyono, 2023), ensuring that the findings can be generalized to a broader population of high beginner English learners. All participants were provided with informed consent, ensuring they understood the research's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. During the study, two participants withdrew, leaving 30 participants who fully participated.

Vocabulary tests, speaking tests, and a questionnaire survey were used to collect data for this study. The vocabulary tests adopted Nation's and Beglar's (2007) vocabulary size test to measure learners' ability to identify the correct Indonesian words equivalent to the given English word. Meanwhile, the speaking tests were designed following the structure and format of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), developed by Cambridge English Language Assessment and the British Council. The survey was developed based on the questionnaire by Schrepp et al. (2014), focusing on three dimensions of user experience: effectiveness (11 items), usability (11 items), and satisfaction (9 items). Each dimension consists of questions using a five-point Likert scale, except for the three open-ended questions in the satisfaction dimension.

To assess the construct validity of the vocabulary test and the survey, this study employed Pearson's Moment Correlation. Referring to a validity coefficient of ≥ 0.30 and a significance level (α) = 0.05, the lowest validity coefficient for the vocabulary test is 0.320, while the highest was 0.730, indicating that the overall vocabulary tests demonstrated construct validity. For the survey questionnaire, the lowest validity coefficient was 0.510, and the highest was 0.920, indicating the validity of each item in the survey. Moreover, Cronbach Alpha was used to confirm the reliability of the vocabulary test, yielding a result of 0.926, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.7. Additionally, the internal reliability of the speaking test, assessed using the inter-rater technique with Cronbach Alpha, demonstrated satisfactory reliability at 0.740, while the survey's reliability was 0.915, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The three open-ended questions were approved by an ELT expert, ensuring there was no ambiguity.

Prior to using Speak Up®, the vocabulary test was administered twice: once before the learners played the board game and again after they played the game. The speaking test was conducted promptly afterward. The survey was distributed to the learners one day after the final session of the experimental treatment.

There were three stages of data analysis in this study. Firstly, to answer the first research question, after ensuring that the dependent variable was continuous and the observations were independent of one another, the Shapiro Wilk test and the Levene test were used to determine the normality and homogeneity of the data, respectively. Based on the results, the vocabulary tests were analyzed using a paired sample t-test, while the speaking tests were analyzed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank due to the non-normal distribution of the data, which necessitated the use of a non-parametric method to accurately assess the differences between paired observations.

The results of the vocabulary tests were crosschecked using the t-table. With a p-value of 0.05, if the result of the t-test is higher than the t-table value, then the H_0 can be rejected. On the contrary, if the result of the t-test is lower than the t-table value, the H_0 cannot be rejected. Similarly, the results of the analysis of the speaking tests were crosschecked with a significance level of α=0.05. If the median difference between paired observations is 0, the H_0 is accepted; however, if the median difference is not 0, the H_0 is rejected.

In the second stage of the analysis, the results of the tests were analyzed using the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient to answer the second research question. This correlation was employed because it is a non-parametric measure that does not assume a normal distribution of the data, making it suitable for assessing the strength and direction of the relationship between two ranked variables. If the result of the correlation coefficient is greater than zero, it indicates a positive relationship; conversely, if the value is less than zero, it shows a negative relationship.

Finally, in the third stage of the analysis, the responses from the survey were filtered, cross-tabulated, and summarized. The responses were analyzed descriptively to answer the third research question, providing insights into the participants' preferences, thoughts, and behaviors.

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Volume 13, Issue 3, October 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thirty EFL university learners who participated in the experiment took a vocabulary pretest and a speaking pre-test before using the board game as the intervention medium. Prior using the board game, the researcher instructed the learners to read the guidebook thoroughly. The researcher selected four learners and guided them to play, while the rest of the learners listened and observed attentively to the game rules and mechanics.

Before playing the game, all players should prepare timer, a notebook or sheets of paper, and pens or pencils. All cards are shuffled and placed face down in a pile on the two designated spots of the board. Then, each player chooses a color and a player piece. It is essential that all players must understand the game rules. First, players should agree on a reasonable length of time for answering a question before starting the game. Second, all questions should be read aloud. If the players reading a question is uncertain about the pronunciation of one or more words, they may seek assistance from another player or the teacher. Third, the player responding to a question may request that it be repeated or ask for the spelling or one or more words. The player answering the question is prohibited from looking at the question. Once an answer is provided, the player reading the question states whether it is correct or incorrect. If the answer is incorrect, this player will then read the correct answer as indicated on the question cards. Finally, the player who collects the most scoring stars wins the game.

To decide who goes first, players perform "*hompimpa*", a technique similar to "paper-rock-scissors". The first players then place their piece on the "Start" circle and rolls the dice to establish their first move towards the "Finish" square. Players advance their pieces in a counterclockwise direction. The subsequent actions depend on the type of square where the player's piece lands.

Players must pay attention to the color of the arrow. If the players' piece lands on the color that they chose before playing the game, they must follow the direction of the arrow for their next move. When landing on the "Arrow" square, the players do not draw a card and do not receive or lose any scoring stars.

If the player's piece lands on a "Question" square, which is either green or blue, the next player takes a card and reads the question. If the player answers the question correctly, he or she receive a scoring star based on the cards' color. If the player answers a green card correctly without asking for a clue about the Indonesian word, he or she earn 2 scoring stars. If the player answers a green card correctly by asking for a clue about the Indonesian word, he or she earn 1 scoring star. If the player answers a blue card correctly without asking for a clue about the first and last letters of the target word, he or she earns 4 scoring stars. If the player answers a blue card correctly by asking for a clue about the first and last letters of the target word, he or she earns 2 scoring stars. If the players do not answer correctly, they do not receive a scoring star, and the next player rolls the dice to begin his or her turn.

If the player's piece lands on a square with "say your favorite…", the player can choose to play or pass. If the player chooses to play, he or she must answer the question written on the square. If the player answers in words or phrases correctly, he or she earns 2 scoring stars. If the player answers in a complete sentence correctly, he or she earns 4 scoring stars. However, if the players do not have an answer to the question, it is advisable for them to choose to pass. If the players choose to pass, they do not gain or lose any scoring stars.

When landing on the "Steal 1 Star" or "Steal 2 Stars" square, players have the chance to choose which opponent they want to steal 1 or 2 stars from. When landing on "Freeze", players must pause and wait until their next turn to proceed. When landing on "Roll Again", players must roll the dice again. When landing on "Move Two Spaces Ahead", players must move two spaces forward. When landing on "Go Back Two Spaces", players must move back two spaces.

Players landing on the "Trophy" square have reached the end of the game. If there are two players and Player A land first, Player B can choose to either end the game or continue playing until he or she reaches the "Trophy" square by asking Player A to read the questions. If there are four players and Player A lands first, he or she can continue playing as the player who reads the question for the opponent, but cannot earn any stars anymore. Players count the number of scoring stars earned throughout the game to determine the winner.

After reporting their understanding of the gameplay, all students were assigned to play the board game. They arranged their own schedules with their peers to play at least one round of the game each week in four designated rooms for convenient monitoring. They were allowed to have the same or different opponents in each round of the game. At the end of the intervention period, all learners took a vocabulary post-test and a speaking post-test. Afterwards, the survey was distributed to

capture their perceptions of using the board game, and the following sections report the results of the intervention.

English vocabulary learning and speaking performance

English vocabulary learning

A paired samples t-test was conducted to test the hypothesis regarding the means of the vocabulary tests to answer the first research question. Table 1 depicts the statistical results of this analysis.

Table 1. *The t-test results of english vocabulary learning*

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre test – Post test	-9.267	3.685	.673	-10.643	-7.891	-13.772	30	.000

As shown in Table 1, the $t_{obtained}$ (t-test) is -13.772. This $t_{obtained}$ is compared to the critical t-value from the t_{table} (df=30, α=0.05, the t-value is ± 2.042) to test whether the H_O can be rejected. It can be seen that the value of the t-test is higher than the value of the t-table (-2.042 > -13.772). Therefore, the t-test result indicates that H_O is rejected and H_1 is accepted.

The statistical analysis infers that the mean of the vocabulary post-test is significantly higher than the mean of the vocabulary pre-test. This confirms that, after the intervention, the learners' English vocabulary development has significantly increased compared to their performance before the intervention. This finding emphasizes that the use of board games like Speak Up® has the potential to aid EFL learners in improving their English vocabulary development.

It is evident that the integration of a board game in this study effectively provides EFL learners with a more meaningful learning experience in acquiring English vocabulary, which ultimately enhances their learning performance. The findings of this study support the notion that board games can significantly aid in the vocabulary development of EFL learners (Aufa & Zuhriyah, 2024; Coraizaca et al., 2023; Naderi & Moafian, 2023; Ningrum et al., 2023; Sitanggang et al., 2023), indicating a positive effect on their vocabulary learning performance.

English speaking performance

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was employed to assess the impact of Speak Up® on the speaking skills of EFL university students. This statistical test aimed to evaluate the hypothesis concerning the median of the speaking test scores. The results of the statistical analysis of the speaking tests conducted by the EFL university students participating in this study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *The Wilcoxon signed-rank test results of english-speaking performance*

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Rater 1 PostTests Speaking	Negative Ranks	0[a]	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	30[b]	15.50	465.00
Rater 1 PreTest Speaking	Ties	0[c]		
	Total	30		

a. Rater1 PostTest Speaking < Rater1 PreTest Speaking

b. Rater1 PostTest Speaking > Rater1 PreTest Speaking

c. Rater1 PostTest Speaking = Rater1 PreTest Speaking

Test Statistics [a]

	Rater1 PostTest Speaking - Rater1 PreTest Speaking
Z	-4.816[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
b. Based on negative ranks

From the data shown in Table 2, it can be observed that there are median differences between the speaking pre-test and post-test scores. With the p-value (α) of .000, the z-value is -4.816. This indicates that there is a statistically significant increase in speaking scores when the learners received the intervention, leading to the rejection of the H_O .

The statistical analysis reveals that all learners involved in the study exhibit positive improvements in their speaking performances (positive ranks = 30). This result demonstrates the potential of Speak Up® to improve EFL learners' speaking skills, as all learners showed positive differences in their speaking tests scores.

The analysis establishes a foundation for the effectiveness of implementing board games to enhance the speaking skills of EFL learners. This finding supports previous research that highlights the benefits of board games in improving EFL learners' speaking skills (Maranatha, 2023; Pittayanantakul & Phusawisot, 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

The relationship between the english vocabulary development and speaking improvement

The second research question aimed to establish the relationship between two variables: vocabulary development and speaking improvement among EFL university learners, using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The results of the correlation coefficient are depicted in table 3.

Table 3. *The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient result of the relationship between vocabulary development and speaking*

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Volume 13, Issue 3, October 2025

improvement

			Vocabulary Improvement Scores	Speaking Improvement Scores
Spearman's rho	Vocabulary Improvement Scores	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.995
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	30	30
	Speaking Improvement Scores	Correlation Coefficient	.995	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	30	30

It can be seen from Table 3, with α=0.05, the coefficient result is .995. This establishes a positive relationship between the two variables, meaning that as the scores of vocabulary tests increase, the scores of speaking tests tend to increase as well, and vice versa. The statistical analysis indicates that the relationship between vocabulary development and speaking skills is statistically significant. Therefore, the H_O is rejected because as the scores of the vocabulary tests are associated with the results of the speaking tests. This study demonstrates the potential of board games to establish a positive relationship between vocabulary development and speaking skills in EFL classrooms (Alshumrani, 2024; Guo & East, 2024; Hartini & Ardini, 2024; Ork et al., 2024).

EFL learners' perceptions towards using speak up® as a learning tool

The third research question inquired about EFL university learners' perception of using Speak Up® to develop their English vocabulary and improve their speaking skills. The survey consisted of two sections. The first section aimed to gather information related to the learners' playing time and total rounds of playing Speak Up®. The second section sought to reveal the learners' overall experience with using Speak Up®.

Based on the data, it was revealed that learners played Speak Up® an average of 30-45 minutes for more than six times. The duration of each game round varied depending on the dice rolls and the time taken by players to respond to the instructions. All players faced different opponents in each game round to avoid boredom, as each player might exhibit different characteristics while playing the game.

According to the second part of the survey data, learners' perceptions were measured across three dimensions: effectiveness, usability, and satisfaction. Table 4 displays the results of the learners' overall experiences while playing Speak Up®.

Table 4. *The learners' perceptions on using Speak Up®*

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Effectiveness	4.56	0.57
Usability	4.59	0.58
Satisfaction	4.62	0.59

Referring to Table 4, it shows that, in general, learners exhibited positive perceptions across the three dimensions, with the highest mean of the dimension in satisfaction (4.62), followed by usability (4.59) and effectiveness (4.56).

The highest means in the dimension of effectiveness are "My strategy in using English words in speaking situations, i.e., conversation is improved after playing Speak Up®" (4.63), "Speak Up® brings many opportunities for me to use the English words that I learn in speaking situations" (4.63), and "Speak Up® can be an alternative learning media for my English vocabulary development and speaking improvement" (4.63). This finding highlights the importance of presenting target English words through recurrent presentations and exercises to enhance EFL learners' understanding and broaden the retention of knowledge (Francis et al, 2025). Moreover, as Gonçalves et al. (2023) reiterated, board games facilitate the social construction of knowledge in language learning by involving learners in complex social activities. Therefore, it is advisable to consider Speak Up® as a valuable tool learning tool for improving English vocabulary and speaking skills. The results of the learners' perceptions of Speak Up® across three dimensions are summarized in table 5.

Table 5. *The learners' perceptions toward Speak Up®*

Dimension	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Effectiveness	My vocabulary knowledge is improved after playing Speak Up®.	4.55	0.50
	My vocabulary development is improved after playing Speak Up®.	4.53	0.55
	My ability in using English words in speaking situations, i.e. conversation is improved after playing Speak Up®.	4.58	0.55
	My strategy in using English words in speaking situations, i.e. conversation is improved after playing Speak Up®.	4.63	0.54
	Speak Up® assists me in improving my English speaking skills.	4.48	0.60
	"Read the Question" is useful to improve my English vocabulary and speaking skills.	4.40	0.67
	"Respond and Make A Question" is useful to improve my English vocabulary and speaking skills.	4.58	0.55
	"What's your fave" is useful to improve my English speaking skills.	4.58	0.59
	Speak Up® brings many opportunities for me to use the English words that I learn in speaking situations.	4.63	0.54
	Speak Up® makes me communicate with other players in English.	4.60	0.55
	Speak Up® can be an alternative learning media for my English vocabulary development and speaking improvement.	4.63	0.59
Usability	I understand rules of the game.	4.53	0.68
	I do not experience any troubles when playing the game.	4.63	0.59
	I understand Speak Up®'s questions and instructions.	4.63	0.59
	The challenges in the game are not too difficult.	4.60	0.55
	The duration to play in one round is not too long or too short.	4.65	0.53
	Waiting time for each player to play is not too long or too short.	4.65	0.53
	The time given to answer the questions or respond to the instruction is not too long or too short.	4.58	0.59
	I have enough control when playing the game.	4.63	0.54
	I like the color combinations of the board and the card.	4.58	0.54
	The questions on the card are readable.	4.48	0.60
	The size of the board and the card is sufficient.	4.53	0.60
Satisfaction	I like playing Speak Up®.	4.80	0.46
	I find it easy to play Speak Up®.	4.65	0.58
	I like the features of Speak Up®.	4.53	0.64
	I enjoy the challenges of Speak Up®.	4.53	0.75
	I feel comfortable playing the game.	4.58	0.59
	I am satisfied playing Speak Up® and will play again.	4.63	0.54

Table 5 shows that in the dimension of usability, the highest means for the statements are "The duration to play in one round is not too long or too short (4.65) and "Waiting time for each player to play is not too long or too short" (4.65). It is important to consider that a well-designed board game, where time and interaction are crucial elements of game mechanics (Gonçalves et al., 2023), can significantly enhance its effectiveness as a teaching and learning tool in EFL classrooms.

Meanwhile, in the dimension of satisfaction, the highest means for the statements are "I like playing Speak Up®" (4.80) and "I find it easy to play Speak Up®" (4.65). This finding emphasizes that a well-designed board game can intensify learners' interests in the learning process (Reisdorfer-da-Silva et al., 2025; Stav et al., 2024) leading to increased motivation for learning (Lailia et al., 2024). Therefore, board games maximize positive outcomes in language learning, particularly in the context EFL.

Based on the open-ended questions, it was revealed that 16 students enjoyed learning the targeted words through the green card questions and one student stated, "The green card questions are easier that the blue ones" (Student 17). While 12 students liked "Steal Two Stars", the other 8 students did not enjoy "Freeze" or the instruction to "Sing Your Favorite Song". One student remarked, "Delete Freeze because we did not do anything" (Student 11), and another student noted, "We often felt confused about what to sing in under one minute" (Student 9). Some suggestions for the development of Speak Up® were mentioned, including providing more challenges, adding additional clues in the blue card questions, including more bonus questions, and developing a digital version of Speak Up®. Overall, Speak Up® can foster positive enjoyment among students by making the learning process engaging and interactive.

Practical pedagogical implementation

EFL teachers can integrate Speak Up® into lesson plans as a dynamic activity or an alternative formative assessment by determining which learning objectives will be the focus, such as vocabulary acquisition, speaking fluency, or comprehension skills. When including the game as a classroom activity, teachers can allocate a specific session for gameplay after introducing the target words. This approach allows students to engage in speaking situations that reinforce vocabulary and language structures.

An ideal class size for using Speak Up® is between 20 and 40 students at the CEFR A1-B1 level. This size facilitates effective interaction among players while ensuring that each student has ample opportunity to participate and engage with the game, as one board game can be played by 2-4 players. It is important for teachers to ensure that the pacing of the lesson allows for adequate time for gameplay while keeping students engaged. This can be achieved by alternating between direct instruction and interactive gameplay, as effective pacing is crucial for maintaining student interest and maximizing learning outcomes (Rodríguez-Ferrer et al., 2024).

Furthermore, teachers can use Speak Up® to observe students during gameplay to assess the learning objectives established at the beginning of the lesson, such as their ability to use vocabulary in context, their fluency, and their interaction skills. For example, if the goal is to enhance vocabulary retention, teachers can evaluate how well students use the targeted words during gameplay.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the English vocabulary development and speaking improvement of EFL university learners while using Speak Up®. First, the study demonstrated that Speak Up® reinforced their English vocabulary learning and speaking performances. Second, there was a positive relationship between vocabulary development and speaking skills among EFL learners after playing Speak Up®. Third, the learners expressed positive acceptance of playing Speak Up®.

However, several limitations in this study should be acknowledged to enhance the credibility of the findings. One limitation is the relatively small sample size, which may not be representative of the broader population of EFL learners. A larger and more diverse sample could provide more generalizable results in future research. Additionally, the present study's reliance on self-reported data regarding learners' acceptance and enjoyment of Speak Up® may introduce bias, as students might have provided socially desirable responses rather than their true feelings.

Furthermore, the study did not control for external factors that could influence vocabulary development and speaking skills, such as prior language exposure, individual learning styles, or the use of other instructional methods alongside Speak Up®. Future research should consider these variables to better isolate the effects of the game. Lastly, the duration of the intervention may have been insufficient to observe long-term

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impacts on vocabulary retention and speaking proficiency. Longer-term studies could provide insights into the sustained effectiveness of Speak Up® as a learning tool. Thus, while Speak Up® shows potential as an alternative learning tool for the vocabulary development and speaking skills of EFL high beginner learners, addressing these limitations will be crucial for validating the findings and informing future research.

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