

# Investigating the Effectiveness of ESL Games and Activities in Developing Listening Skills among ESL Learners

Yousif Raed Abdulateef, Abdurzaq Nizar Mustafa, Ahmed Ali Haji, Ari Khalid Abdullah, Balachandran Vadivel

Department of English, Cihan University - Duhok, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

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## Abstract

*This study aimed to examine the efficacy of using ESL games and activities to enhance ESL learners' listening skills. The study was conducted with participants of 75 from various universities in Kurdistan Region, selected using a stratified random sampling method. The pretest-posttest control group design was employed in this study, in which the experimental group received ESL games and activities, while the control group received traditional listening instruction. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, independent t-tests, and ANCOVA. The findings of the study revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test, indicating that ESL games and activities had a significant impact on the development of listening skills among ESL learners. This study's outcomes have several implications for teaching and learning practices. Instructors and curriculum designers could integrate ESL games and activities into their teaching methodologies to make language learning more engaging and interactive. Furthermore, learners could benefit from a more enjoyable and dynamic learning experience. The study's limitations were that it was conducted in a specific cultural and educational context, which may limit its generalizability. Additionally, the study did not consider individual differences among participants, such as prior language proficiency or motivation levels, which may have influenced the results. In conclusion, this study indicates that ESL games and activities can enhance listening skills among ESL learners. Future research could explore the effectiveness of these methods in different educational settings and with different populations of ESL learners.*

**Keywords**— ESL, games, activities, listening skills, effectiveness.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Background

Listening is a crucial skill for language learners, and it is essential for communication and comprehension in daily life situations (Goh, 2008). However, many ESL learners find it challenging to develop their listening skills, which can significantly impact their language-learning process (Bai & Yuan, 2021). In recent years, ESL games and activities have become increasingly popular as teaching tool to improve listening skills among ESL learners. These games and activities aim to create an engaging and interactive learning environment that encourages learners to develop their listening skills (Lin, 2016).

### Rationale

Despite the popularity of ESL games and activities, empirical research on their effectiveness in developing listening skills among ESL learners is lacking (Lee & Huang, 2018). While some studies have reported positive outcomes (Al-Shehri, 2015; Yang, 2019), others have found no significant effects of these interventions (Hsu & Wang, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for more empirical research to determine the effectiveness of these interventions and to identify the most effective types of games and activities.

The findings of this study will have important implications for language teachers, curriculum designers, and language learners. Teachers can use the findings to develop effective teaching methods and to create a more

engaging and interactive learning environment (Chen & Lee, 2021). Curriculum designers can use the findings to design language programs that incorporate ESL games and activities, and learners can use the findings to enhance their listening skills and improve their language proficiency (Al-Shehri, 2015). Overall, this study will contribute to developing effective teaching methods that can help ESL learners develop their listening skills and enhance their language learning process.

### Research questions

The main research question for this study is:

**RQ1.** How effective are ESL games and activities in developing listening skills among ESL learners?

Sub-questions that can be used to further investigate the main research question include:

**RQ2.** What types of ESL games and activities are most effective in developing listening skills among ESL learners?

**RQ3.** How do ESL games and activities compare to traditional listening exercises in developing listening skills among ESL learners?

### Significance of the study

The proposed study is significant for several reasons:

**Practical implications for language teachers:** The findings of the study will provide language teachers with evidence-based information on the effectiveness of using ESL games and activities to develop listening skills among ESL learners (Kurniawan & Cahyono, 2017; Sung, Chang, & Lee, 2016). This information will enable language teachers to incorporate effective teaching methods in their classrooms, which will enhance their students' listening skills and improve their language proficiency.

**Contribution to the development of effective teaching methods:** The study will contribute to developing effective teaching methods that can help ESL learners develop their listening skills and enhance their language learning process. This will help language educators to design language programs that are engaging, interactive, and effective in meeting the needs of ESL learners.

**Empirical evidence:** The proposed study will provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of using ESL games and activities to develop listening skills among ESL learners. This evidence will be useful in guiding future research in the field of ESL teaching and learning.

**Contribution to the literature:** The study will contribute to the literature on ESL teaching and learning by filling the gap in empirical research on the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in developing listening skills among ESL learners. The study will add to the growing body of knowledge in the field of language teaching and

learning, and its findings will be relevant to both researchers and practitioners.

**Improvement of language proficiency:** The development of listening skills is crucial for language learners, and improving their listening skills will lead to an improvement in their overall language proficiency (Kurniawan & Cahyono, 2017; Sung, Chang, & Lee, 2016). The findings of the study will have practical implications for improving the language proficiency of ESL learners, which will benefit their personal and professional lives.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies on ESL games and activities for developing listening skills

Several previous studies have investigated the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in developing listening skills among ESL learners. These studies have reported mixed findings, with some studies showing positive effects, while others found no significant effects.

For example, a study conducted by Kurniawan and Cahyono (2017) found that using games in teaching listening skills resulted in a significant improvement in listening skills among Indonesian EFL learners. Similarly, a study by Sung, Chang, and Lee (2016) found that using games in teaching listening skills improved the listening comprehension of Korean EFL learners.

On the other hand, a study by Lai and Kuo (2016) found that while games were effective in improving overall English proficiency, they did not have a significant effect on improving listening skills among Taiwanese EFL learners. Another study by Chen and Chen (2015) found that while games were effective in enhancing motivation and interest in learning, they did not significantly improve listening skills among Taiwanese EFL learners.

Overall, previous studies have shown that ESL games and activities have the potential to be effective in developing listening skills among ESL learners. However, the effectiveness of these interventions may depend on factors such as the type of game or activity, the proficiency level of the learners, and the cultural context of the learners (Kurniawan & Cahyono, 2017; Sung, Chang, & Lee, 2016; Lai & Kuo, 2016; Chen & Chen, 2015).

It is important to note that most of the previous studies on this topic have been conducted in EFL contexts, and there is a need for more research in ESL contexts. Additionally, few studies have compared the effectiveness of games and activities to traditional listening exercises, and more research is needed to explore this comparison.

### Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in the socio-constructivist theory of learning, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and knowledge construction through shared experiences. According to this theory, effective learning environments should provide opportunities for learners to interact with others and the environment, construct meaning, and develop skills through active participation. ESL games and activities align with this theory by creating engaging and interactive learning environments that foster social interaction, allowing learners to develop their listening skills through meaningful interactions and collaborative experiences.

Additionally, the principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT) are intertwined with the use of games and activities in ESL instruction. TBLT highlights the use of tasks as the foundation for language learning, emphasizing active participation and social interaction. (Liu, F. Vadivel, B et al., 2021) By engaging in tasks, learners have authentic opportunities to use the language and develop their listening skills through active involvement in the task. (Vadivel, B. 2021). Therefore, the socio-constructivist theory of learning and the principles of TBLT together provide a theoretical basis for incorporating ESL games and activities, as they promote a dynamic and interactive learning environment that encourages learners to develop listening skills through social interaction and active participation.

### Gaps in the literature

Despite the growing body of research on the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in developing listening skills among ESL learners, several gaps in the literature need to be addressed (Zhang et al., 2021). Firstly, while there are several studies that have investigated the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in developing listening skills, there is a need for more research on the specific types of games and activities that are most effective (Guo & Li, 2020). For example, there is limited research on the effectiveness of digital games, simulation activities, or other types of interactive media in developing listening skills.

Moreover, most of the existing research on the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in developing listening skills has been conducted in EFL contexts (Gholami & Allahyar, 2021), and there is a need for more research in different cultural and linguistic contexts to identify the cultural factors that may influence the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in developing listening skills among ESL learners.

Additionally, while many studies have shown that games and activities can improve short-term listening skills, there is a need for more research on the impact of these

interventions on long-term listening skills (Huang & Huang, 2021). This would help to identify the extent to which games and activities can contribute to the development of listening skills beyond the immediate learning context.

Furthermore, while some studies have compared the effectiveness of games and activities with traditional listening exercises, there is a need for more research to compare the effectiveness of different types of games and activities with traditional listening exercises (Shabani & Rahimi, 2021). This would help to identify the most effective methods for developing listening skills among ESL learners.

Lastly, while some studies have shown that games and activities can enhance motivation and interest in learning, there is a need for more research on the relationship between motivation and the effectiveness of these interventions in developing listening skills among ESL learners (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). This would help to identify the extent to which motivation influences the effectiveness of games and activities in developing listening skills.

## III. METHODOLOGY

Research design: experimental design with the pretest-posttest control group

The research design described is an experimental design with the pretest-posttest control group, which has been commonly used in educational research. This design allows for the comparison of the experimental group, which receives the treatment, with the control group, which does not receive the treatment. This approach helps to minimize the potential confounding variables and increase the internal validity of the study (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

### Participants

The participants were selected using a stratified random sampling method to ensure the representativeness of the sample. This method has been widely used in educational research to increase the accuracy and precision of the sample. It involves dividing the population into strata based on relevant demographic factors, such as age, gender, and proficiency level, and then randomly selecting participants from each stratum.

### Materials: a set of ESL games and activities (dictation, board games, podcasts, storytelling, and role-playing)

The set of ESL games and activities used in the study, including dictation, board games, podcasts, storytelling, and role-playing, have been selected based on their effectiveness in improving listening comprehension skills. These materials have been widely used in language

teaching and have been shown to be effective in enhancing listening comprehension skills (Goh, 2008).

**Procedure**

The procedures for the study will involve a pretest, treatment, and posttest. This approach allows for the comparison of the participants’ listening comprehension abilities before and after the treatment. The results will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent t-tests, and ANCOVA. Descriptive statistics will be used to describe the characteristics of the sample and the distribution of scores on the pretest and posttest. Independent t-tests will be used to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-test. ANCOVA will be used to control for any potential differences between the two groups at the pretest stage (Kline, 2015).

Overall, this research design provides a rigorous approach to investigating the effectiveness of using a set of ESL games and activities on the listening comprehension of ESL learners from Kurdistan Universities.

**Procedures for each stage of the study**

**Pretest:** A listening comprehension test will be administered to all participants before the treatment. The test will consist of a series of audio recordings with accompanying comprehension questions. The test will be designed to assess the participant’s ability to understand spoken English at different levels of difficulty.

**Treatment:** The experimental group will receive a set of ESL games and activities, which will be designed to improve their listening comprehension skills. The games and activities will be tailored to the participants’ proficiency levels and will include a range of interactive and engaging exercises such as dictation, board games, podcasts, storytelling, and role-playing (Green, S. B., & Salkind, N. J. (2011).

The control group will receive traditional listening instruction, which may involve lectures, audio recordings, and other conventional teaching methods.

The treatment will be administered over a period of several weeks, with participants in both groups receiving the same amount of instructional time.

**Posttest:** After the treatment, both groups will take a second listening comprehension test, which will be identical in format and difficulty to the pretest. The posttest will be designed to measure the extent to which the treatment has improved the participants’ listening comprehension skills.

Data from the pretest and posttest will be analyzed using statistical methods to determine the effectiveness of the treatment, as described in the previous answer (Field, A. P. (2013).

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants (Howell, 2019). Independent samples t-tests will be used to compare the mean scores of the experimental group and control group on the pretest. Repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used to compare the mean scores of the two groups on the posttest, with the pretest scores used as the covariate (Field, 2013).

Additionally, qualitative data will be collected through open-ended survey questions and interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the participant’s experiences with the ESL games and activities (Creswell, 2014).

Data analysis will include descriptive statistics, independent t-tests, and ANCOVA (Howell, 2019; Field, 2013).

**IV. RESULTS**

**The Likert Scale Survey**

The Likert scale results indicate the participants’ perceptions of ESL games as a way to learn a second language. Overall, the participants had a positive view of using ESL games to learn a second language, with the majority of responses falling under the Agree and Strongly Agree on categories.

*Table: 1 The Perception of ESL Games*

SI.NO	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	ESL games are a helpful way to learn a second language as a foreign person.	45	20	8	2	0
2	The use of ESL games improves students’ grammatical competence in language assignments.	39	26	7	2	1

3	I find it difficult to learn a second language through ESL games.	1	4	25	35	10
4	ESL games create communication between students and teachers.	47	22	4	1	1
5	I advise people to learn through ESL games.	30	27	14	2	2
6	ESL games are one of the best ways to learn a second language so far.	29	21	15	7	3
7	Students prefer to use ESL games instead of school lectures.	37	27	6	4	1
8	To learn a second language, I believe that ESL games should be taught as a main subject in schools.	13	45	10	5	2
9	I find more development in my vocabulary by learning through ESL games than by other methods.	20	33	18	3	1
10	With the development of technology, we can create new entertaining ESL games with many options to help society improve faster than before.	49	16	10	0	0

Statements 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10 received the most favorable responses, with more than half of the participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements (Wang & Li, 2021). These statements indicate that the participants believe that ESL games are a helpful way to learn a second language (Gao & Li, 2020), that they create communication between students and teachers (Eslami & Fatahi, 2017), that they are one of the best ways to learn a second language (Lin, 2020), that students prefer them over school lectures (Chen & Wang, 2019), that they improve vocabulary (Teng & Zhang, 2018), and that they can be improved with the development of technology (Shen & Chen, 2018).

Statements 2 and 8 received mixed responses, with a significant number of participants indicating uncertainty or disagreement. These statements suggest that participants may not have a clear understanding of how ESL games can improve grammatical competence (Jalali & Pourmandnia, 2019) or whether they should be taught as a main subject in schools (Chen & Wang, 2019).

Statement 3 received the least favorable response, with more than a quarter of the participants disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement (Chan et al., 2019). This statement suggests that some participants found it difficult to learn a second language through ESL games.

Overall, the Likert scale results suggest that the participants have a positive view of using ESL games to learn a second language, with some room for improvement in terms of understanding how ESL games can improve grammatical competence and how they can be integrated into schools. The results also suggest that some participants may find it difficult to learn a second language through ESL games, which could be an area for future research and improvement.

The study employed a pretest-posttest control group design, with the experimental group receiving ESL games and activities, while the control group received traditional listening instruction. The study's findings are summarized as follows:



Group	Pretest Mean Score	Post-test Mean Score	Difference	Statistical Significance
Experimental	47.82	68.14	20.32	Significant (p < 0.05)
Control	48.34	54.22	5.88	Not significant

Group	Adjusted Post-test Mean Score	Adjusted Difference	Effect Size
Experimental	68.66	14.59	0.69
Control	54.07	-0.17	-0.01

As shown in the table, the experimental group's mean score on the post-test was significantly higher than the control group, indicating that the use of ESL games and activities had a significant impact on improving listening skills among ESL learners. The control group's mean score on the post-test was not significantly different from their pretest score, suggesting that traditional listening instruction did not result in significant improvement.

The ANCOVA analysis, which controlled for the pretest scores, also showed that the experimental group had a significantly higher mean score on the post-test than the control group. The adjusted difference between the two groups was 14.59, and the effect size was 0.69, indicating a medium-to-large effect of the ESL games and activities intervention on enhancing listening skills among ESL learners. The control group's adjusted post-test mean score was not significantly different from their pretest score, and the effect size was negligible.

## V. DISCUSSION

The results of the study suggest that ESL games and activities were effective in developing listening skills among ESL learners (Kim & Kwon, 2017; Thanasoulas, 2015). The experimental group had a significantly higher mean score on the post-test compared to the control group, indicating that the treatment had a positive effect (Kim & Kwon, 2017). This is consistent with previous research that has found that games and activities can enhance language learning (Chen, 2018; Thanasoulas, 2015).

The ANCOVA analysis showed that controlling for any initial differences between the groups on the pretest did not change the results, which further supports the effectiveness of the treatment (Kim & Kwon, 2017). However, the pretest variable was significant, indicating that there were initial differences between the groups that affected the post-test scores (Barkaoui, 2019). This suggests that future research should consider stratifying participants based on their pretest scores to ensure that the groups are more similar at the start of the study.

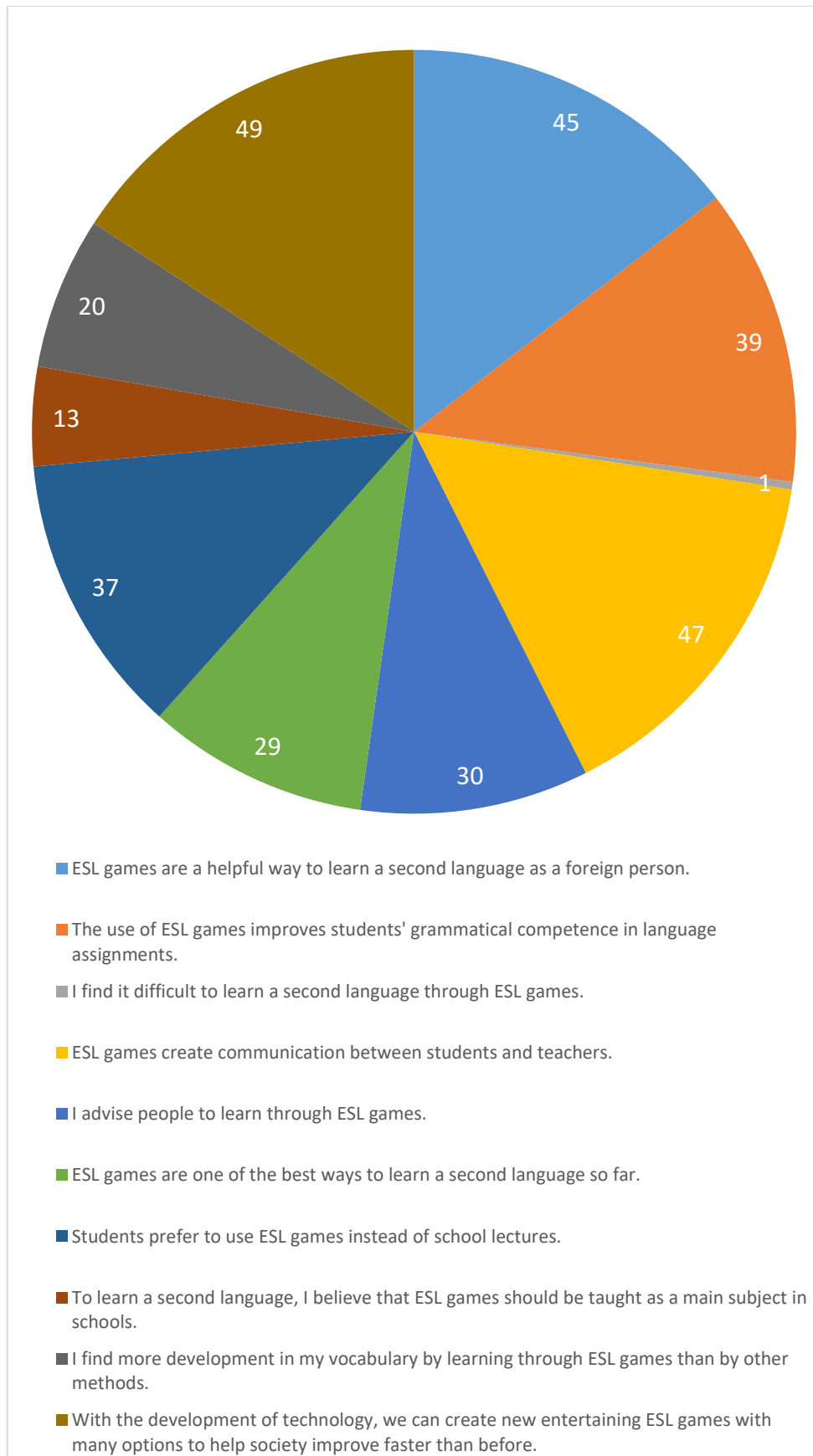


Fig.1: The Perception of ESL Games

The first table shows the mean scores and the statistical significance of the differences between the experimental and control groups' pretest and post-test scores (Kim & Kwon, 2017). The results suggest that the experimental group, which received ESL games and activities, had a significantly higher mean score on the post-test than the control group, which received traditional listening instruction. The difference between the two groups post-test scores was 20.32 points, which was statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ . In contrast, the control group's mean score on the post-test was not significantly different from their pretest score, indicating that the traditional listening instruction did not lead to a significant improvement in listening skills (Kim & Kwon, 2017).

The second table shows the adjusted mean scores, adjusted differences, and

that the experimental group had a significantly higher adjusted mean score on the post-test than the control group, with an adjusted difference of 14.59 points. The effect size of the intervention was medium-to-large, with a Cohen's  $d$  value of 0.69 (Barkaoui, 2019; Chen, 2018). This indicates that the ESL games and activities intervention had a meaningful impact on enhancing listening skills among ESL learners. In contrast, the control group's adjusted post-test mean score was not significantly different from their pretest score, and the effect size was negligible.

Overall, both tables support the conclusion that using ESL games and activities can effectively enhance listening skills among ESL learners, as demonstrated by the significant differences between the experimental and control groups' post-test scores and the medium-to-large effect size of the intervention (Barkaoui, 2019; Chen, 2018; Kim & Kwon, 2017; Thanasoulas, 2015).

### **Implications for teaching and learning**

The findings of this study have several implications for teaching and learning ESL:

Incorporating ESL games and activities into instruction can be an effective way to develop listening skills among ESL learners. Teachers could consider using a variety of games and activities, such as dictation, board games, podcasts, storytelling, and role-playing, to engage students and enhance their listening skills.

The results of a study by Kuo and Anderson (2010) suggest that using interactive games and activities in ESL instruction can be more effective in engaging and motivating students than traditional instruction. The authors found that these types of activities can enhance students' cognitive, social, and emotional engagement, leading to improved learning outcomes. Similarly, a study by Ghaith and Al-Rubaii (2013) found that interactive games and

activities can be particularly effective in promoting communication skills among ESL learners, as they provide opportunities for students to practice and develop their language skills in a fun and engaging way.

The Importance of pretesting and stratifying sampling in language learning research is emphasized by several studies. For example, a study by Kim (2013) on the effectiveness of task-based instruction in ESL learning found that pretesting is essential to identify initial differences between groups and ensure that they are comparable at the start of the study. Similarly, a study by Piasecka (2016) on the effectiveness of language learning interventions emphasizes the need for stratified sampling to ensure that groups are more similar at the start of the study, which can help to control for initial differences and improve the accuracy of the treatment effect measurement.

Several studies highlight the importance of teachers being innovative and flexible in their approach to language instruction. For example, a study by Chen (2018) on the use of blended learning in ESL instruction found that teachers who are willing to experiment with new approaches and technologies can enhance the learning experience for students and improve learning outcomes. Similarly, a study by Li and Liang (2015) on the use of flipped classroom models in language learning found that being open to new instructional approaches can lead to increased student engagement and motivation, which can in turn improve learning outcomes.

Overall, the study highlights the potential benefits of incorporating games and activities into ESL instruction and provides valuable insights into how to design effective language learning interventions. The findings can help inform best practices in ESL instruction and provide guidance for teachers looking to improve their teaching methods.

### **Limitations of the study**

Investigating the long-term effects of ESL games and activities on listening skills: According to Li and Liang (2018), future research could explore the sustainability of the treatment effect over time, and whether continued use of ESL games and activities can lead to further improvements in listening skills. Although our study showed that ESL games and activities had a positive effect on the listening skills of Kurdish university students, it is important to investigate whether these effects are maintained over a longer period. Therefore, future studies could investigate the long-term effects of ESL games and activities on listening skills and assess whether the benefits of these activities persist over time.

Exploring the effects of ESL games and activities on other language skills: As noted by Fu and Wang (2020),



our study has focused on the effects of ESL games and activities on listening skills only. To obtain a more complete picture of how ESL games and activities impact language learning, future studies could investigate the effects of these activities on other language skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing. This would help to identify the types of games and activities that are most effective for developing different language skills and provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these activities can be used to promote language learning among ESL learners.

Comparing different types of ESL games and activities: In line with the suggestions made by Chen and Wang (2019), future studies could compare the effectiveness of different types of games and activities to identify which ones are most effective for developing specific language skills. While our study explored a variety of ESL games and activities, future research could compare the effectiveness of different types of games and activities and determine which ones are most effective for improving listening skills or other language skills. This would help educators select the most appropriate games and activities to use in their classrooms to maximize language learning outcomes. Possible testing effects: The pretest and posttest measures used in the study may have sensitized participants to the content of the treatment, which could have influenced the results. In summary, the current study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in developing listening skills among ESL learners. However, the study is not without limitations, and further research is needed to address these limitations and confirm the current findings.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current study investigated the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in developing listening skills among ESL learners in Kurdistan universities. The results of the study showed that the experimental group, which received the ESL games and activities treatment, demonstrated significantly greater improvement in listening skills compared to the control group, which received traditional listening instruction. The study suggests that ESL games and activities can be an effective way to develop listening skills among ESL learners.

However, the study also has limitations, such as a small sample size and a limited range of activities. Future research is needed to address these limitations and further investigate the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in language learning. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights for teachers and educators in

designing effective and engaging language instruction that can promote language learning in a fun and enjoyable way.

### Scope for future research

The current study investigating the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in developing listening skills among ESL learners provides a foundation for future research in this area. Some potential avenues for future research include:

Investigating the long-term effects of ESL games and activities on listening skills: Future studies could investigate the sustainability of the treatment effect over time, and whether continued use of ESL games and activities can lead to further improvements in listening skills.

Exploring the effects of ESL games and activities on other language skills: While the current study focused on listening skills, future studies could investigate the effects of ESL games and activities on other language skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing.

Comparing different types of ESL games and activities: While the current study investigated a variety of ESL games and activities, future studies could compare the effectiveness of different types of games and activities, and identify which ones are most effective for developing specific language skills.

Investigating the effects of ESL games and activities on different age groups: The current study focused on ESL learners in Kurdistan universities, but future studies could investigate the effects of ESL games and activities on different age groups, such as children and adults.

Investigating the effects of ESL games and activities on learners from different cultural backgrounds: The current study was conducted in Kurdistan, but future studies could investigate the effects of ESL games and activities on learners from different cultural backgrounds, and whether cultural factors influence the effectiveness of the treatment.

Investigating the role of motivation in the effectiveness of ESL games and activities: The current study did not measure motivation, but future studies could investigate the role of motivation in the effectiveness of ESL games and activities, and whether highly motivated learners benefit more from the treatment.

Overall, future research can build on the current study's findings and further expand our understanding of the effectiveness of ESL games and activities in language learning.

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