

Development of the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box: Enhancing Six-Years-Old Preschool Students' Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the development of English-speaking skills among six-year-old preschoolers, focusing on variations in proficiency. Developing English speaking skills among six-year-old preschoolers is often hindered by limited exposure and varying proficiency levels. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the research examines how play-based, particularly theatre-based, activities foster language acquisition and communication. Using the Borg and Gall model, the study aims to (1) analyse the development and variation of English-speaking skills, (2) design the "Fun Aesthetic Learning Box" Ladders Ropes Adventure as an innovative tool to enhance these skills, and (3) evaluate its usability with teachers and children. Utilizing the Borg and Gall R&D model, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observations involving teachers and students. The findings reveal that guided instruction, peer interaction, and structured play facilitated by the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box where it enhances children's confidence, fluency and vocabulary usage in English. Teachers reported increased engagement and children displayed noticeable improvements in sentence formation and willingness to speak. The research highlights the effectiveness of integrating theatre-based learning kits in creating engaging and productive language environments. These insights provide practical guidance for teachers in developing creative materials and strategies to support early childhood English language teaching. Theatre based learning kits, such as the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box create engaging, low anxiety environments conducive to language development. The findings support integrating creative play tools into early childhood English teaching practices.

Keywords: Board games, Borg and Gall Model, English, Learning Box, Theatre Games, KSPK, Preschool, Speaking skills

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication skills are foundational for young children, significantly influencing their future academic and social success. In the context of early childhood education, nurturing speaking skills is particularly crucial due to the rapid language development that occurs during the preschool years, especially in the English language (Nikmah & Anwar, 2021). However, many preschool students struggle to articulate their thoughts with confidence and clarity (Law et al., 2019). This study presents the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box, titled "Ladders and Ropes Adventure," an innovative educational tool designed to enhance preschool students' speaking skills through structured theatre games. By integrating imaginative play specifically for six-year-olds, this learning box aims to create a dynamic learning environment (Nikmah & Anwar, 2021) where children can improve their speaking skills while engaging in fun and purposeful activities. The Ladders and Ropes Adventure box leverages the natural curiosity and creativity of young learners, aligning its design with the Malaysian National Preschool Curriculum Standard (KSPK) for English language education. According to the (KSPK, 2017), effective language learning in early childhood should emphasize the use of simple sentences and basic conversational skills, encouraging children to express themselves clearly. This curriculum highlights the importance of fostering communication abilities through meaningful, context-rich interactions, aligning well with the principles of theatre games as innovative teaching tools (Bendo & Erbas, 2019). This research also aims to assess the effectiveness of this approach in creating an engaging and enjoyable learning atmosphere that promotes active language use. By combining elements of play, creativity, and structured

language practice, the Ladders and Ropes Adventure box represents a promising strategy for supporting language development in young learners.

Background of The Study

Language acquisition is a critical goal in early childhood education, particularly for preschool children in kindergarten. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Education (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017), the English subject in the national curriculum emphasizes the importance of oral skills for language learning and meaningful interaction. However, young learners often face several barriers, including limited vocabulary, low confidence, and insufficient language exposure, which can hinder their speaking abilities. To address these challenges, the integration of games into educational contexts has become increasingly popular, as it provides children with enjoyable, low-pressure environments that support language practice and social interaction (Guilfoyle & Mistry, 2013). Speaking skills are crucial for children's overall communication development, enabling them to express emotions, share ideas, and form social connections. For preschoolers, strong speaking abilities contribute to self-confidence, vocabulary expansion, and the formation of meaningful relationships, all of which are essential for successful second language acquisition (Bendo & Erbas, 2019). Given that many Malaysian children learn English as a second language, interactive and motivating approaches are necessary to encourage active participation and sustained interest in language use. Theatre games, in particular, are a valuable tool for supporting language development in young children. These games offer a creative and engaging way for children to use language in context, fostering both verbal expression and emotional growth (Guilfoyle & Mistry, 2013). Through dramatization, narrative, and unscripted sketch, children learn to communicate in diverse situations, developing critical thinking, empathy, and social skills along the way. Theatre games also reduce the anxiety often associated with speaking a second language, making children more willing to take linguistic risks and explore new vocabulary (Szanajda & Jie Li, 2023). In the Malaysian context, the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK), first introduced in 2010 and revised in 2017, provides a comprehensive framework for early childhood education. It aims to develop children's potential in physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social domains, aligning with international educational standards (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017). The 2017 revision, made in response to the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013-2025, emphasizes the importance of language development as a foundational component of early education. It includes clearly defined content, learning, and assessment standards, highlighting the importance of effective communication as a cornerstone of holistic child development (Nikmah & Anwar, 2021).

Statement of Problem

Preschool education aims to foster optimal, balanced development through creative and enjoyable learning methods, aligning with young children's natural capacities (Brachaczek & Polok, 2023). However, many preschools overly emphasize academic outcomes, often at the expense of play-based, experiential learning (Mat Saberi et al., 2023). While play is a foundational component of early childhood education effectively integrating it into structured learning remains challenging (Chen et al., 2021). Free play alone may not be sufficient to achieve specific educational goals, as some teachers report difficulties in designing meaningful, engaging activities due to limited resources and time (Pana et al., 2023). To address this, guided play an approach that balances child-led exploration with instructional guidance has proven effective for fostering skills like vocabulary, narrative competence and symbolic thinking (Pyle et al., 2024). This kind of memory guided (Gordon et al., 2013). Despite these insights, many teachers struggle to support six-year-olds in acquiring English speaking skills due to insufficient language exposures and limited opportunities for meaningful conversation (Oktavia et al., 2022). Language barriers further complicate effective communication and needs assessment (Mohamed Isa et al., 2021). However, research suggest that interactional teaching methods and carefully designed learning environments can significantly enhance language acquisition by providing real world practice and immersive contexts (Szanajda & Jie Li, 2023). Given these challenges, this study aims to develop a playful, structured learning box to improve English speaking abilities among six-year-old, fostering confidence and communication skills while aligning with the goals of the National Preschool standard (Eslit & Valderama, 2023).

Research Objectives

In line with the general purpose of developing English-speaking skills among preschool children aged six, the study intends to fulfil the following: To analyse the development of English-speaking skills among six-year-old preschool children and the variation in their proficiency skills. Speaking confidently in English is of utmost importance during early language development since it forms the entire basis for communication, critical thinking, and interacting with others. The second objective is to design the “Fun Aesthetic Learning” box as a tool for enhancing the English-speaking skills of six-year-old preschool children. The goal of this objective is to design a learning package that not only supports the acquisition of language skills but also encourages creativity, self-confidence, and expression of emotions. Applied theatre games, dramatization, and interactive storytelling activities will be part of the kit to offer significant language practice in a benign and enjoyable environment for both students and teachers. The third objective is to evaluate usability of “Fun Aesthetic Learning Box” with the teachers and six-year-old preschool children in enhancing their English-speaking skills. To make the “Fun Aesthetic Learning” box practically useful in a real-world educational setting, it is essential that its effectiveness be evaluated. This objective will assess both the ease of use for the teachers and the engagement of the children so that a measurement of how the kit really helps with language development can be established. Other factors that will be part of the inquiry are: feedback from teachers on how well the kit's activities align with curriculum goals; how well teachers perceive the kit to increase children's confidence, and willingness to speak English (Szanajda & Jie Li, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review situates the current study within broader frameworks of early childhood education, theatre in education (TIE), and creative language teaching. Early childhood is a critical phase for cognitive, social and linguistic development, laying the foundation for lifelong learning (Marzola et al., 2023). In Malaysia, the National Preschool Standards-Based Curriculum (KSPK) or known by *Kurikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan* emphasizes early language acquisition as a core competency, crucial for effective communication and social interaction (KSPK, 2017). Theatre in Education (TIE) has emerged as a powerful pedagogical tool, leveraging dramatic play and creative expression to teach language skills effectively. Influential figures like Viola Spolin, Dorothy Heathcote, and Peter Slade have shown how improvisation, storytelling and role play can deepen children's understanding and language (Yaroslavova & Shraiber, 2016). Studies indicate that theatre games significantly enhance speaking skills by promoting self-expression, creativity and social interaction (Kotelianets et al., 2021). Learning kits, such as language-focused boxes, draw from these principles, offering structured, playful contexts for language practice. These kits typically include materials like flashcard, puppets, picture books, all designed to stimulate dialog and role play (Abd Rahim et al., 2023). This approach aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, emphasizing the critical role of social interaction in cognitive development through the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding (VYGOTSKY, 2019). The study also adopts Borg and Gall's Research and Development (R&D) model, which emphasizes iterative design, testing and refinement of educational tools to ensure effective learning outcomes (Hung et al., 2018). Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for the development of the speaking skills learning box, aiming to create immersive, interactive and meaningful language learning experiences for six-years-old

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Early childhood educational research, particularly that which focuses language development through creative and interactive means, requires a delicate blend between theoretical stimulation and application. This study uses a qualitative research methodology due to the complex nature of assessing the English-speaking skills of six-year-old children attending preschool. Because language learning is dynamic and arises in varying and diverse contexts, qualitative methods that provide sufficient depth and degrees of flexibility are worthy of consideration to capture the meaning realities in preschool classrooms. The choices for collecting data for this research are multiple and involve semi-structured interviews, keeping observation notes, and analysing documents. These methods basically fulfil upon the main objectives of the study, which look deeper into the speaking ability of children, designing the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box, and testing the effectiveness of the

box. Semi-structured interviews are primarily with preschool teachers to produce information on the existing practices, challenges, and opportunities in enhancing children's language skills. These interviews are supported by pre- and post-testing observation of children's speaking skills to shed more light on the testing box application. In line with the study's aim to create an innovative educational tool, the research process also includes pre-field data analysis and needs assessment, thereby guaranteeing the learning box to be contextually relevant and pedagogically sound. The varying learning environments for observing language development in actual practice are seen in the chosen research sites being *Tadika Cahya Kaseh*, *Tadika Pintas Rabbani*, *Tadika Ilmuan Siddiq*, and *Tadika Junior Minda Unggul*, all situated in the Kinta District of Perak, Malaysia. Such selection contributes to the aspiration of capturing various interpretations and contexts for learning. The qualitative approach taken in this study is intended not only to capture the voices of educators and preschoolers but also to assist in informing the ongoing design and refinement of the learning box. Through the iterative process, the research will enhance knowledge of how play-based and theatre-inspired learning tools support language gaining and further enrich early childhood education practices. Following the need analysis done in four preschools, the researcher finalized the selection of *Tadika Junior Minda Unggul* for the actual field testing, considering two factors: the diversity of the learning environment and the study's emphasis on issues relating to English-speaking skills through interactive or theatre-based learning. This choice thus reflects the study's efforts to incorporate a wide range of views as well as learning contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research employed a Research & Development (R&D) approach following Borg and Gall's model. That model prescribes iterative phases of needs analysis, design, testing, revision, and implementation. In Phase 1, semi-structured interviews were conducted with preschool teachers to identify existing speaking challenges and current practices. Four teachers from different preschools participated. Interview questions probed children's speaking difficulties, assessment methods, and the feasibility of using creative tools. Thematic analysis of these interviews guided design decisions. Phase 2 involved planning and initial design. Insights from teachers revealed that traditional methods often failed shy learners, and that there was a lack of ready-made, curriculum-aligned resources. Based on these needs, the researcher sketched a set of theatre-game activities and materials to be included in the box. The design was informed by KSPK speaking goals and Spolin-inspired drama games, aiming to create low-pressure, imaginative tasks. In Phase 3 and 4 (testing and revision), prototype materials were pilot-tested with the research team and a small group of children, then iteratively refined. For example, pilot use showed laminated flashcards were more durable and engaging than paper cards. The game board was made foldable for easy storage and printed on thick laminate with bright, child-friendly graphics. These features were chosen to ensure practicality in resource-limited preschools and to attract young children's attention. Finally, Phase 5 (implementation) involved field testing the finalized box in real classrooms. Teachers were trained briefly on the box's contents and how to facilitate activities, while the researcher acted as a participant-observer during lessons. A total of four six-year-old children in one preschool formed the sample. Data collection included observations, teacher interviews after implementation, and informal child group discussions. Children's speaking performance was also assessed qualitatively through pre- and post-activity observations. Figure 1 explains the entire process of designing learning box to help young learners especially six-years-old by using Borg and Gall R&D model by phases.

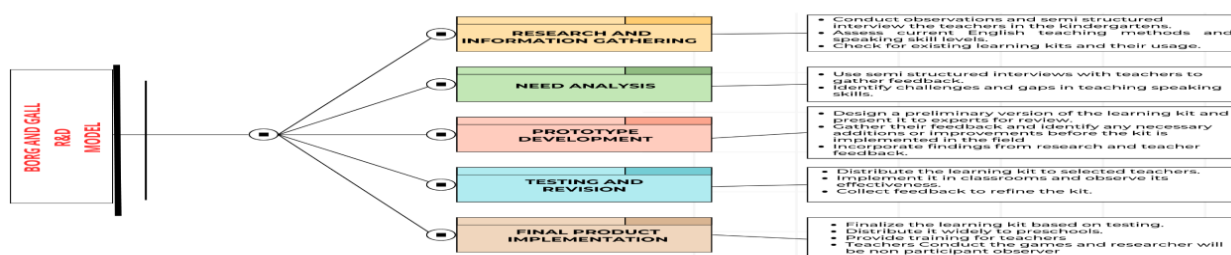


Figure 1: Overview of the Learning Box Development Process of the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box using the Borg and Gall Model

Source: Researcher developing a research framework using the Borg and Gall model

Development of the Learning Box

Based on teacher feedback, the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box was constructed to be engaging, easy-to-use, and aligned with curriculum. The box's contents include: a colourful board game, flashcards with vocabulary and scenario prompts, a dice and icons figure. Many components were explicitly inspired by Viola Spolin's theatre games (e.g. role-play cards, storytelling cues) to encourage improvisation and language use. For example, one activity invites children to act out scenes using simple English sentences, guided by illustrated cards. The box also integrates KSPK-based spoken language tasks, such as greetings and naming favourite items, into play formats. Teacher interviews strongly influenced design details. Teachers had emphasized the need for structured, ready-made materials (since they often lack time to create resources). In response, the box provides scripted role-play scenarios and step-by-step game instructions. It is designed for flexible use in short segments during routine lessons. To support even inexperienced teachers, the manual gives clear examples and tips adapted to six-year-olds' developmental level. Materials were selected to suit preschool contexts: all game pieces are durable (laminated or plastic) and easy to clean, and artwork is high-contrast for young visual tracking. The Fun Aesthetic Learning Box was therefore formulated as the final product served by the culmination of this research-development process, acting as a practical learning tool supporting English-speaking skills among year-old preschoolers. The box, as shown in Figure 1, contains a collection of expertly fabricated items:

- A bright and lively game board with enormous squares bearing printing and visual prompts
- A set of laminated flash cards containing vocabulary prompts, action situations, and tasks for speaking
- Elements of the game comprising a dice and coloured pawns for student participation

This game board is carried out in a simple snakes-and-ladders but in different aspect which is Ladders Ropes Adventure style injected with language challenges students move their coloured pawns and carry out brief English-speaking tasks on issues of daily life, greetings, imaginative, and so on. Each square and card map to the oral communication goals of the curriculum and have been drafted to elicit self-confident speech in a fun and less-threatening atmosphere. This product was developed via successive based on field testing and input from teachers so as to be found to be appropriate in terms of durability and child-friendliness, and effective in actual classroom implementation. The teachers engaged in the trial reported that the colourful presentation and interactive nature of the game managed to seize children's attention, and even motivated the shyer children to participate actively in various English-speaking activities. Figure 2 shows The Fun Aesthetic Box "Ladders Ropes Adventure with Flashcard."



Figure 2: The Fun Aesthetic Learning Box: Ladders and Ropes Adventure Board and Flashcards

Source: Developed by the Researcher

A strong nod to social learning theory (Vygotsky) is evident: many games involve peer interaction, and teachers are encouraged to model target language and scaffold student responses. Overall, the development process was iterative and participant-informed. Teachers reported that the resulting box should help make English practice "fun and creative" for shy learners. Figure 3 shows Vygotsky Elements in Early Childhood

Development where it summarizes the key aspects of Vygotsky's theory of play, providing short explanations for each feature.

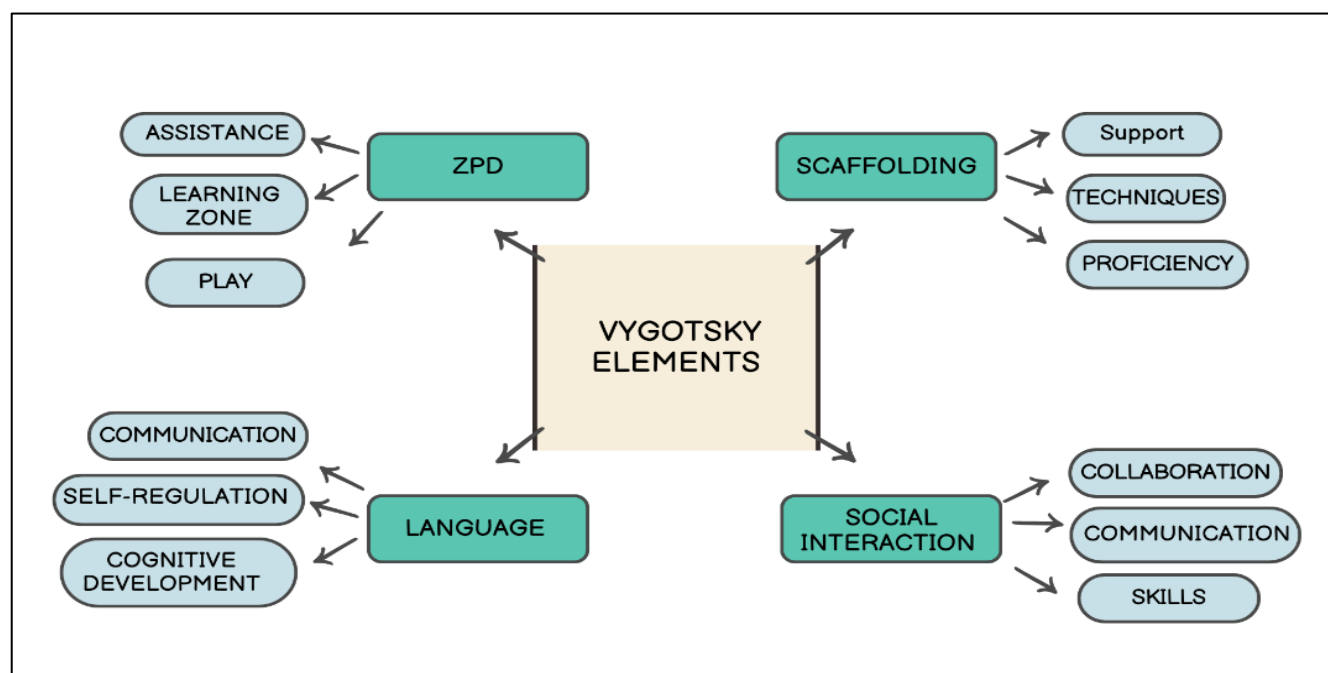


Figure 3: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory Elements in Early Childhood Play-Based Learning

Source: Researcher developing a research framework based on Vygotsky Sociocultural Theory

Classroom Implementation and Findings

In classroom trials, the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box was introduced as a whole-class activity, typically as a game session once per week. The implementation process was as follows: the teacher explained an activity from the box (e.g. moving a game piece on the board and following the prompt on a drawn flashcard), then facilitated children's participation in English, offering examples and encouragement. The researcher observed and took notes on student engagement and interaction. Key findings included increased enthusiasm and participation. Children were noticeably more eager to speak when activities felt like play rather than lessons. For example, during board game turns, even reluctant children took initiative to answer simple English questions or act out prompts. Previously hesitant students showed greater willingness to participate through the structured play. Teachers reported that the playful context (die rolls, colourful pieces, imaginative scenarios) motivated children: one teacher noted, "Even those who usually hesitate to speak in English seemed more willing to try." Observations also confirmed pedagogical benefits. Student engagement was sustained by the box's design: vivid visuals and game mechanics drew attention and refocused children when needed. During play, children used simple sentences and vocabulary from the KSPK standards (greetings, expressing likes, etc.), often giggling and encouraging each other. Group interviews with the children indicated they found the games fun and easier than traditional drills; many volunteered that "English sounds like games now," showing affective shifts from fear to enjoyment. Teacher responses to using the box were generally positive. Teachers appreciated how the box blended language practice with imagination and movement, keeping the energy high and pressure low. One teacher commented that having everything prepared made it easy to try a drama activity she previously avoided. Teachers also noted the importance of their own modelling: when a teacher demonstrated a sentence or gesture, other children followed suit, reinforcing correct pronunciation and usage. After implementation, teachers reported that they could observe modest improvements in confidence: quieter children began speaking up to describe picture cards, and several used new vocabularies in subsequent lessons. The key outcomes from this game are that Higher participation: Students spoke more during game activities; playfulness encouraged talk. Greater confidence in shy children: Students who normally remained silent became willing to answer or act in English when supported by peers or teacher models. Positive teacher feedback: Educators found the box user-friendly and noted that its activities naturally embedded English

practice into creative play. Focus on communication over rote learning: The emphasis was on using language meaningfully rather than mechanical drills, supporting fluency and confidence building.

The findings indicate that integrating theatre games via the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box can effectively enhance young children's English-speaking skills. By making the activity feel like play, the box leveraged children's intrinsic motivation, consistent with literature on guided play and dramatic learning. The observed increase in child participation and willingness especially among normally reserved students suggests the box successfully created a safe, low-anxiety environment for language practice. Teachers' comments underscored that the blend of modelling, peer interaction, and imaginative context helped children experiment with language naturally. Moreover, the tool's alignment with the Borg and Gall framework and KSPK was evident. The iterative design (grounded in teacher input) ensured practical usability. In practice, the box's activities targeted the very KSPK competencies outlined (such as participating in greetings, naming favourite things, simple role-play) and did so through creative play. By combining structured progression with Spolin-inspired interactivity, the box supported both curriculum goals and child-centred pedagogy. Limitation for this research which Teachers noted they could not use the box daily due to time pressures. The number of participants was small (one classroom), limiting generalizability. Managing noise and keeping all children engaged during dramatic play required careful planning. Speaking improvement was assessed qualitatively; future research should include formal language assessments. Despite these limitations, the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box demonstrates promise. Its strengths lie in bridging play and pedagogy: children practiced English naturally in a creative context, and teachers were given a practical tool aligned with curriculum aims. The positive reception by both students and educators suggests that similar theatre-based learning aids can complement traditional early childhood instruction. According to table 1, thematic analysis revealed five key outcomes from classroom implementation. First, children gained confidence, moving from one word response to full sentences like "I like to watch spiderman move". Second, peer support played vital role, with students encouraging each other during role-play, creating a collaborative atmosphere. Third, the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box made lesson planning easier, providing structured prompts for effective sentences modelling. Additionally, the playful format reduced speaking anxiety, motivating even hesitant learners to speak. Finally, students frequently used target vocabulary without prompting, aligning well with KSPK standards. These findings highlight the box's effectiveness in building English speaking skills and creating a supportive learning environment.

Table 1: Thematic Analysis of Classroom Implementation Outcomes

Theme	Evidence from Observations	Teacher Feedback	Child Responses
Increased Confidence	Shy children progressed from single-word responses to full sentences.	"Quieter students began volunteering answers during game play."	"English sounds like games now" (child comment).
Peer Support	Children encouraged peers during turns, boosting participation.	"They help each other act out prompts, which builds confidence."	Children giggled and clapped when friends spoke.
Teacher Facilitation Ease	Teachers used the box's prompts to model correct sentences.	"It's easy to guide activities using the box's clear instructions."	Children followed teacher modelling during role-play.
Playfulness Encouraged Talk	Game context reduced anxiety and increased speaking turns.	"Even usually hesitant kids took initiative during game turns."	Children eagerly rolled dice and answered in English.
Use of Target Vocabulary	Vocabulary aligned with KSPK (greetings, likes, simple Q&A).	"They repeated new words in later lessons without prompting."	Used phrases like "I like red apple" post activity.

Source: Developed by the Researcher

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study innovatively created and then tried out a theatre-game toolkit for English speaking development among six-year-olds. Using the Borg and Gall R&D model, the researcher engaged teachers from the start to ensure that the Fun Aesthetic Learning Box met actual classroom needs. The field testing suggested Fun Aesthetic Learning Box boosted kids' enthusiasm and confidence in English conversation, especially those shy ones; teachers then found the box useful as a way to merge language practice with play. Theoretically, this also creates a dynamic learning environment that supports KSPK standards in a fun and wholesome way—a finding that agrees with all research on the transformative nature of theatre experiences for language learning among very young children. For early childhood educators, it accentuates the need for creative and low-stress speaking activities. The Fun Aesthetic Learning Box itself serves somewhat as a model for lesson planning: The narrative, role-playing, and hands-on prompts can be replicated with other materials readily available. It also communicates the need to equip teachers with ready-to-implement curriculum-based materials. More preparation on the teachers' part is required, although judging from positive results—that is engaged students and an increase in communicative self-confidence—that investment in time will surely bear fruit. The play and learn box packs of this type provide great, fun ways to bolster English speaking skills for preschoolers and would be good to include in early childhood programs. It is recommended that future research scale the implementation of the learning box to multiple preschools to assess its broader impact. Additionally, incorporating quantitative measures, such as standardized language assessments or pre- and post-intervention tests, could provide more robust evidence of the learning box's effectiveness in enhancing English-speaking skills among young learners.

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