

**Teacher experiences and perceptions of using game-based tools
to assess English language proficiency**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

in the Faculty of Education

at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Supervisor: Dr C Combrinck

October 2023

Declaration

I declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.



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MEd

Teacher experiences and perceptions of using game-based tools to assess English language proficiency

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my late father, Ndabayakhe Malusi Jeremia Maseko, who inculcated the passion and value of education in me. Your strong belief and pride in me has kept me going. I also dedicate this research to my son, Nhlosoyenkosi, may you reach for the stars and be the best version of yourself.

Acknowledgements

To have achieved this milestone in my life, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people:

- The Holy Trinity of God, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who have given me the strength, zeal and perseverance to complete this study;
- Dr Celeste Combrinck, my research supervisor, for her constant motivation during the times where I almost gave up, invaluable advice and guidance;
- The language editor, Mr Luke Perkins, for the professional and exceptional editorial work on the final product of this study;
- To my family, thank you for your continuous support and encouragement and always reminding me that I must not quit;
- My friends, study partner and my mentee, Andiswa Rathogwa, who constantly checked up on me and were my source of strength in tough times during this research;
- Lastly, but not least, all of the participants and schools that took part in this study at Ermelo Lake Chrissie. Thank you for unselfishly and fruitfully contributing to this study.

Abstract

Many approaches are available to enhance learning English and to aid learners in acquiring the necessary language skills. One of the approaches gaining popularity in teaching and learning English is game-based learning. South African learners attending urban township schools face many challenges in attaining the necessary level of English language skills that will ensure that they perform well throughout their primary, high school and tertiary education. The current study explored English teachers' experiences with using games as tools to assess high school learners from an urban township school and a rural school.

The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which is inspired by the work of Barrett-Tatum (2015) was used as the framework for the current study. A qualitative research approach was used within a case study design. For the current study, purposive sampling was employed to select teachers who were using games-based assessment. In total, four teachers from two schools participated. Semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes were used as data collection strategies to triangulate the findings.

The study's results revealed that game-based learning can improve the extent to which learners acquire English language skills, provided that it is properly integrated into the curriculum. Although some evidence was provided that the use of game-based learning can assist teachers in formatively assessing learners' English language acquisition skills, it cannot be regarded as conclusive. Further research into the role of games-based assessment is needed.

Key Terms: English language learning, game-based learning and assessment, board games, formative assessment

Language editor


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List of abbreviations

EFAL	English First Additional Language
NCS	National Curriculum Statements
EAP	English Access Program
RELO	Regional English Language Office
CHAT	Cultural-Historical Activity Theory
ELLS	English Language Learners
GBL	Game-Based Learning
GBA	Games-Based Assessment
LiEP	Language in Education Policy
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
GSD	Gert Sibande District
GET	General Education and Training
FET	Further Education and Training

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1 CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The current study explored English language teachers' experiences of using games as useful tools for assessment of high school learners from an urban area. The study focused on teachers of English as a First Additional Language (FAL) and their experiences of game-based learning in the English Access Micro-Scholarship Program classroom. A qualitative approach was taken to investigate teachers' experiences of the use of English games to assess learners' English proficiency skills.

The English language is an important part of our everyday communication and is widely used in professions such as education, entertainment, and business. Depending on how learners perceive the language, English can have either a positive or negative impact on them (Zulfiqar et al., 2019). Over the years, a number of approaches have been employed to ensure that learning English is made fun and that learners acquire the necessary language skills.

One of the approaches that has been gaining popularity in the teaching and learning of English is game-based learning. Scholars advocating the use of games in teaching and learning argue that games enable learners to learn while they play (Paris & Yussof, 2012), that games allow participants to exchange information and generate ideas, and to simplify problems and complete tasks (Pivec et al., 2003). Although there seem to be a number of benefits associated with game-based learning, there are also drawbacks to it.

These include the fact that games can lead to expectations of learning being easy, that learners can become engrossed in the game, leading to them losing the essence of what the teacher is attempting to teach, that they reduce learners' attention span, and that they have financial implications because instructors may need to be trained, among other things (Ford, 2015).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

South African learners attending township schools face a number of challenges in attaining the necessary level of English language skills that will ensure that they perform well throughout their primary, high school and tertiary education. Among the contributing factors to this challenge is that learners have to switch from their mother tongue (MT) to English as a language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in Grade 4. According to Bitenelkome (2010), studies conducted in the area of MT education in South Africa show that Grade 4 learners in township schools are not yet sufficiently proficient in English to master new learning areas such as Natural Science, Social Sciences and other learning areas. Secondly, teachers are seeing an increase in the number of diverse learners entering the South African education system. Learners are diverse in terms of their academic capabilities, countries of birth or origin, and cultural and social backgrounds.

This diversity in South African classrooms therefore requires teachers to familiarise themselves with emerging new forms of teaching and assessment in order to accommodate diverse learners. According to Sibanda (2018), the four main English FAL skills are: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Although language structures and conventions are listed as one of the skills in English in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document, it is incorporated into all the four skills mentioned above. Previous studies have shown that most South African learners find it difficult to acquire English language skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing (Sibanda, 2018). One of the obstacles to learners acquiring appropriate English language skills is the manner in which they are assessed. Chavalala (2015) identified some of the assessment challenges faced by learners.

Firstly, it is argued that some teachers fail to set clear instructions when assessing because they focus on lower cognitive levels, and this focus has a negative effect on learners' performance (Chavalala, 2015).

Secondly, some teachers who do not understand assessment standards set by the National Curriculum Statements (NCS) may frame questions that are not in accordance with the correct assessment standards. Lastly, Chavalala (2015) states

that many English FAL learners fail to apply language and literacy skills learned in English to other areas of the curriculum. Therefore, in trying to solve some of the language learning challenges faced by teachers and learners, there is a need for newer approaches to the teaching and assessment of literacy skills to improve the performance of learners not only in English FAL, but in other learning areas because language proficiency affects performance in other subjects (Chavalala, 2015).

The use of educational games in teaching vocabulary and other prominent language skills has been gaining popularity for several decades (Derakhshan & Khatir, 2015). However, what has received little attention is the possibility of using games to assess learners. This study seeks to explore the extent to which the Activate board games for teaching American English can be used to assess learners' listening, speaking and language structures and conventions skills by focusing on teachers' experiences.

1.3 BACKGROUND TO THE ENGLISH ACCESS MICRO SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The English Access Micro Scholarship Program (EA) is a global program funded by the United States Department of State that was launched in South Africa in 2007. The program aims to provide learners with a variety of global citizenship skills, with the core components of improved English language skills and a stronger South African-US cross-cultural understanding at its core (United States [U.S.] Department of State, 2019). Critical and creative thinking, leadership, information technology, civic outreach, and media literacy are among the global citizenship skills taught to learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Furthermore, the program teaches learners English skills and language structures, which may lead to better job and educational opportunities but it also exposes learners to the U.S. culture, education and history (U.S. Department of State, 2019). In addition, it is imperative to point out that learners in the program are not only taught skills that are in the English curriculum, but they are also taught leadership, critical thinking, information communications technology as well and interpersonal skills to mention a few. According to the U.S. Department of State (2019), the project's targeted locations are usually townships and or rural high schools in South Africa where learners in grades eight to ten have extra-curricular opportunities. The

Regional English Language Office (RELO) at the U.S. Embassy ensures that there is monitoring, evaluation of the Access Program, recruitment of learners and teachers, the training of teachers as well as the development of the course content (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

It is recommended that the program should be completed in twenty-four months or less in a school and that the program must deliver a minimum of 360 hours of instruction after school, during weekends and during school holidays at the host secondary school (U.S. Department of State, 2019). The contact sessions take place two days a week and each class lasts for one and a half hours to three hours a day. Furthermore, there are also intensive sessions run in which learners can practise English language skills, build teams, gain confidence and learn in friendly and stress-free environments.

RELO defines friendly and stress-free learning environments as conducive learning spaces in which English language components should break free from traditional instructional models to deliver a more meaningful, interactive language learning experience centred on the learner (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Also, in these settings, a learner-centred model is used through project-based and task-based approaches to assist learners in using English to understand, discuss, and resolve authentic local and global challenges (U.S. Department of State, 2019). In addition to the weekly contact sessions, learners are exposed to the intensive sessions which take place off-site of the host secondary school. It is during the contact sessions where English language instruction is combined with enhancement activities and learners are encouraged to speak English as the aim is to build learners' English language skills. The program's contact sessions are distinguished by a sense of fun as well as active learning through the use of games, among other things (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

1.4 RATIONALE

As education is slowly moving away from paper-based assessments to more authentic learning and assessment activities, it is becoming more imperative for attention to be drawn to new ways of assessing learning (Wood et al., 2013). It could be argued that the traditional 'once-off' assessment activities do not fully provide

adequate structures for assessing learning, and game-based learning mechanisms could improve engagement and provide the opportunity for a variety of new, authentic learning task assessments for both formative and summative purposes (Wood et al., 2013). One can then argue that games-based assessments could be used as an additional approach to paper-based assessments in order to gauge learners' English language skills.

Authentic assessment requires learners to apply what they have learned in a new, complex circumstance or situation (Shaw, 2019). Authentic assessments, it is argued, challenge the traditional paradigm of multiple-choice or automatically scored tests and quizzes, which can lead learners to believe that learning entails staying up all night cramming to memorise expected answers (Shaw, 2019).

The concept of authentic assessment entails using creative learning experiences to put learners' skills and abilities to the test in realistic situations as well as establishing connections between real-world experiences and school-based ideas (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014). Some examples of authentic assessment are: portfolios, games, experiments, journal entries, character analysis, analysing a story or chapter of a story through drawings and written work as well as research projects to name a few. Games are said to have been recently used in a broad spectrum of subject matter including mathematics, social behaviour, computer science, social language and culture learning among other things. This increased use of games is because they provide learning environments that facilitate learning through customised narratives, feedback and problem-solving support (Min et al., 2019).

Although numerous studies have been conducted on the use of games in language teaching and learning, little attention has been given to the extent to which games can be used in assessing learners' English language skills. For this reason this study aims to investigate teachers' experiences of the use of English games to assess learners' English proficiency skills. In this study, I assumed that cooperative board games for teaching and learning English could be used as formative assessment tools to evaluate learners' English language acquisition skills. Furthermore, collaborative learning improves learners' language skill acquisition, achievement, and positive attitudes by improving comprehension and problem-solving skills

(Capar & Tarim, 2015). Learning occurs through practise and a variety of experiences, according to Ertmer and Newby (2013).

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember. Involve me, and I learn”, is a quote by Benjamin Franklin that summarises the educational philosophy of John Dewey who stated that learners learn best by doing rather than by listening. This philosophy advocates for experiential learning. In this study, the possible impact of English language board games in the English Access Program will be explored, particularly the extent to which English language games can be used to assess learners’ English acquisition skills.

The purpose of this study was to:

- investigate teachers' experiences with using board games as a tool to assess English First Additional Language proficiency skills;
- find out how learners' English language acquisition skills (listening and speaking, as well as language structures and conventions) are assessed;
- investigate how the use of game-based learning assists teachers in formatively assessing learners' English language acquisition skills;
- determine measures implemented by the English Access Program to improve teachers' knowledge of using language games as assessment tools,
- and establish how language games influence learners' listening, speaking, and grammar skills.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following primary and secondary research questions will guide this study:

Primary research question:

- *What are teachers’ experiences of using game-based learning as a tool to assess English First Additional Language proficiency skills?*

Secondary research questions:

- *How are learners’ English language acquisition skills (listening and speaking as well as language structures and conventions) assessed?*

- *How can the use of game-based learning assist teachers to formatively assess learners' English language acquisition skills?*
- *What measures are put in place by the English Access Program to improve teachers' knowledge of using language games as assessment tools?*
- *How do language games influence learners' listening, speaking and grammar skills?*

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study explored the extent to which English language games could be used as useful tools to assess learners' English language skills. The focus was on formative assessment, which is assessment for learning. The study followed the constructivist research paradigm which accentuates that people construct their realities socially. In their study, Mills et al. (2006) claimed that the constructivist paradigm emphasises the subjective interrelationship between the researcher and participant and that this approach to research is inductive in nature because the researcher enters a research environment having no preconceived ideas to prove or disprove. The instrumental case study was used for this research.

A case study is a research method that is used to gain a comprehensive, multifaceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-world context (Crowe et al., 2011). Crowe et al. (2011) state that the central feature of a case study is that it researches deeply into an event or phenomenon as well as its natural context. Additionally, Seawright and Gerring (2008) argue that cases are used to represent the larger population, they perform a heroic role wherein a small sample stands for the whole population, as long as it is with the context of a phenomenon that is being investigated. The current study used the instrumental case study which can be defined as a research method that employs a specific case (some of which may be better than others) to gain a broader understanding of an issue or phenomenon (Crowe et al., 2011).

The four participating teachers shared their experiences, beliefs and ideas on the use of games as assessment tools to assess learners' English FAL listening, speaking and language use skills. The participating teachers were Further Education and Training and Senior Phase teachers who are qualified to teach

grades 8 to 12. Additionally, the group of teachers teach English FAL and are or have been part of the Access program, which means they have already received training from the Regional English Language Office (RELO). The group of learners that was observed were in grades 9 and 10 and were in the age range of 13 to 18.

The selected cases comprised two government-owned high schools.

One school hosted the English Access Program from 2016 to 2017 while the other school was currently the host of the program.

Two of the participating teachers were from the school currently hosting the Access program, and the other two were from the school that hosted the program in 2016 and 2017. The names of the schools and participating teachers were kept confidential.

1.7.1 Data collection

For the purposes of this study, the qualitative research approach was employed. The qualitative research study approach was selected for this study in order to make sense of English FAL teachers' experiences, perceptions and attitudes towards the use of games as assessment tools to gauge learners' English language skills. Three data collection methods were used, namely: semi-structured interviews, researcher journal field notes and classroom observations. The researcher made use of handwritten notes, and voice recording to capture data collected during the interviews. During the interviews, participants responded to the main and secondary research questions in order for the researcher to get in-depth understanding of the extent to which game-based learning can be used as formative assessment tools to assess learners' English language skills.

This gathering of in-depth information was achieved by using open-ended questions so that participants were afforded the opportunity to share their experiences. Moreover, probing questions in the introduction were used to put participants at ease and then more detailed questions were used as the interview developed to get more insight and perceptions of the participants. To conclude the interview, clarity-seeking questions were used in order for the researcher to evaluate whether or not the perceptions of participants were clearly captured and understood.

Secondly, data collected through researcher field notes captured the researcher's comment of the impressions, environmental contexts, behaviours and nonverbal cues of participants. The researcher prepared a list of factors to take note of in the field using the aspects of the conceptual framework of the study. This assisted the researcher in noting the occurrences before, during and after the lessons, the context in which the lessons took place, and how the participants behaved. After the observation, the researcher made descriptive notes to reflect on what happened in the field.

Lastly, the researcher took notes about the observations made during lessons. To achieve this, the researcher prepared an observation schedule that included aspects of how the lessons began, developed and ended, how the teachers linked new knowledge with learners' background knowledge and how lesson objectives were outlined at the beginning and end of the lessons. Classroom observations were used to complement the interviews. The researcher observed behaviour patterns of both learners and teachers, the classroom context, seating arrangements, how learners interacted with the games, and if all learners were actively involved during the lessons.

The interviews took place during the second school term of 2022 using the Zoom video conferencing platform and lasted for at least fifty minutes. During the interviews, teachers from two schools where the English Access Program was running in one school, and was running from 2016 to 2017 in the other school, were asked to share their experiences on the use of the Activate board games for teaching American English as a tool to formatively assess learners' listening and speaking as well as grammar skills.

The observations were implemented in the third school term of 2022. During the observation period of four sessions, the two English language skills (listening and speaking, and language structures and conventions) and how they were assessed using the Activate board games, were observed. During the first two sessions, learners were introduced to the games and were taken through the rules of the games which were used to assess learners' grammar and listening and speaking

skills. In the last two sessions, learners played the games which could be used to assess grammar and listening and speaking skills.

1.7.2 Data analysis

During the ongoing process of analysing qualitative data, the researcher read the data to find themes in the context of open coding. Data analysis was performed in order to obtain information relevant to the research questions. Data obtained during the semi-structured interviews was analysed through thematic analysis. According to Clarke and Braun (2018), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning, also known as themes within qualitative data. This approach focuses on coding and theme development (Clarke & Braun, 2016). This method was therefore used to look for themes, categories and sub-categories from the data. For the purposes of analysing data gathered through the observations, a checklist was employed to code data and check for emerging themes. To analyse the field notes, the researcher analysed the jotted and descriptive notes taken during the observations by writing analytic notes, which allowed the researcher to take note of impressions about her observations. Furthermore, manual analysis was done through reading the notes to see if there were any issues emerging.

1.8 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

Table 1.1: Concept Clarifications

KEY TERMS	DESCRIPTIONS
Teachers' experiences	The notion that teachers are acquainted with defining how learners learn.
Assessment tools	Materials that can aid in evaluating and assessing how learners learn and can provide different opportunities to assess learners beyond the traditional methods of assessing (Centre for Teaching Innovation, n.d.)
Teachers	A group of qualified individuals responsible for teaching learners. They are also developers and facilitators of assessment.
Diverse learners	Learners from different racial, social, socioeconomic, religious and cultural groups. Also refers to learners with different educational or academic capabilities.
English FAL	Language spoken by non-native speakers or learners, it promotes multilingualism and intercultural communication.
Proficiency skills	Learners' ability and experience to use English to communicate meaning that is either spoken or written. Learners' ability to express themselves.

1.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study focused on the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which is inspired by the work of Barrett-Tatum (2015). CHAT was used to gauge the role of English board games in formatively assessing learners English acquisition skills. According to Nickerson (2023), CHAT is a theory which claims that human activities can be described and analysed by focusing on the dynamics of motivation, how society is structured and the means of doing activities.

Because this study focused on English language games and the possibility of using them as formative assessment tools, the CHAT theory was relevant in the study because it assumes that all activities have a certain structure and can be aided by particular tools, instruments or artefacts, and are performed to meet a specific purpose (Nickerson, 2023). For the purposes of this study, the six aspects of the theory were looked at, namely: subjects, mediating artefacts, community, object, sense/meaning and outcome.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The first chapter of the dissertation is an introduction that includes: the background, rationale, study purpose, research questions, methodological considerations, clarifications of concepts as well as an introduction to the literature.

The second chapter includes a literature review as well as a conceptual framework. The literature provides a more in-depth understanding and knowledge that can be useful when drawing conclusions. At the end of Chapter 2, the conceptual framework on which the study is based is explained. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that was used to carry out the study.

The methodology includes the following topics: research philosophy, methodological considerations, research techniques and data collection instruments. Following a description of the data collection instruments, data analysis and interpretation, trustworthiness, and ethical concerns are addressed.

The data gathered through interviews, observations, and researcher journal field notes are presented in Chapter 4. The review of literature and the conceptual

framework was used to comprehend the data that was obtained and discussed in the study, ultimately leading to address the research questions. The final chapter includes a summary, discussions of the research questions, conclusions, implications and recommendations for future research.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

English language teachers are important role players in ensuring that their learners acquire the necessary English language skills. They are expected to assist learners to acquire language skills by teaching as well as assessing learners. This chapter will review literature on the use of games in teaching and learning. Firstly, game-based learning will be discussed in detail. Additionally, gamification and board games will be looked at in the same section. Curricular expectations of English FAL will be explored. Factors contributing to learners' lack of English skills will be presented. The importance of English language skills will be discussed in section 2.4. The next section aims at exploring the consequences of learners not acquiring English language skills. Teachers' assessment practices and their possible challenges in assessing with different methods or tools will be unpacked in section 2.6. Teachers' assessment practices of English First Additional Language skills nationally will be discussed. Also, elements of game-based learning will be discussed. The next section introduces and defines the game-based learning elements featured in the English Access Program. A discussion on why board games are a good example of game-based learning and why they are a good example of game-based learning as an assessment tool will follow. The conceptual framework relevant to the study will also be presented and discussed, with the chapter being concluded in section 2.11.

2.1.1 Defining Game-based learning, gamification and board games

It is important to state that this study focuses on game-based learning, particularly the use of board games and the extent to which they can be used to assess learners' English language acquisition skills. In this section, game-based learning, gamification and board games will be defined. The concept of educational or serious games will also be looked at. Kopecká (2019) states that the use of board games is not something new because schools across the globe have incorporated board games into the curriculum. Likewise, Shernoff et al. (2014) claim that the use of educational video games and gamification is considered a promising strategy for increasing learner-centred teaching. Although games were used in the past as a source of entertainment and are considered by many to be designed for amusement, some scholars have come to believe that using games for teaching and

learning can be useful and can make the learning and teaching process more engaging (Kopecká, 2019). It is important to state that games for entertainment purposes are different from serious games that are designed for educational purposes (Kopecká, 2019). Furthermore, serious games or educational games have incidental educational value (Kopecká, 2019). One can define incidental learning as learning which occurs during an event when learners acquire unplanned or unintentional skill/s or knowledge because a teacher has made use of other activities that require observation, interaction with others, and repetition. Similarly, Hanif et al. (2019) allude that the concept of 'educational game' is used as a substitute for game-based learning. In their study conducted on game-based learning, Pho and Dinscore (2015) defined the concept as borrowing certain gaming principles and then applying them to real-life settings to engage users. Pho and Dinscore's study was conducted in Spring, Texas, South America. Hanif et al. (2019) define game-based learning as "a type of gameplay with defined learning outcomes." Gamification, on the other hand, is defined as the incorporation of game-like elements, also known as game mechanics, into non-game settings in order to provide opportunities for engagement, flexibility, competition, and collaboration (Pho & Dinscore, 2015). Additionally, gamification is described as those aspects of the interactive system that aim at motivating and getting the end users to become involved through the use of game mechanics and elements (Hanif et al., 2019). One can state that engagement, competition and collaboration are gamification elements which can be employed for teaching and learning purposes, while board games can be defined as any game in which small pieces are moved around on a board with a pattern on it (Kopecká, 2019). According to Phuong and Nguyen (2017), drills and task-based approaches are combined with board games.

As a result, board games in the classroom encourage genuine interaction as learners get the opportunity to express themselves informally. Furthermore, such games can be used to improve learners' speaking skills as well as to assess the learning progress of English second language learners (Phuong & Nguyen, 2017). The use of board games with the intention to teach and assess learners' listening and speaking skills will be unpacked in sub-section 2.1.2.

Having defined game-based learning, board games and gamification, it can be stated that the former concepts are applicable in this study because *Activate games for learning American English* are board games that teachers can use for teaching and learning while having a specific and clearly defined learning objective. It has however been unclear whether the games can be used as assessment tools to assess learners' English acquisition skills, and this is what the study aims to find out. Gamification is not applicable to this study but was defined in order to distinguish between game-based learning and gamification, as these concepts are often confused. In the next section, a discussion is presented regarding some of the challenges teachers and learners encounter when language structures and conventions skills are taught, and a recommendation of using board games as teaching and learning tools is made.

2.1.2 The challenge of teaching language structures and conventions skills

It can be stated that if learners possess adequate grammar or language structures and conventions skills, they are able to construct clear and good sentences, which then impacts on their speaking, reading and writing abilities. However, if learners have not acquired adequate language structures skills, this may have a negative effect on how learners express themselves and how they acquire English as a first additional language. Koutris (2017) stated that teaching language structures and conventions in the classroom becomes the foundation for skills development, because this skill is an essential language aspect and provides the foundation for skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In a study conducted by Klingner et al. (2006), it was established that English language learners often display lower academic achievement, mainly in literacy. The study was based on previous research studies that were conducted between the years 1971 and 2005 in California and Spain. The study targeted English language learners who struggled with reading and who might have had learning disabilities. In addition, existing research studies on learners who are English language learners (ELLs) were located. ELL learners in the American context correspond with South Africa's FAL learners.

It is worth noting that the studies were sought from computer searches using the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). It is imperative to point out that Klingner's study was relevant to this study because it outlines challenges other than learning disabilities which make ELLs struggle with language and literacy acquisition. Klingner et al. (2006) argued that ELLs show unsatisfactory academic achievement particularly because of inadequate English language acquisition skills. It was, however, unclear in this study if these learners had difficulty in developing literacy mainly because of their limited proficiency or because of other factors, such as learning disabilities or barriers. In a study conducted by Paris and Yussof (2012) in Pahang, Malaysia, which is a developing country, the focus was on TESL foundation programme students. 115 learners participated in the study and were divided into four groups. The study's findings reveal that grammar classes, which focus on language structures and conventions, are perceived by most learners as intimidating, boring and complicated (Paris & Yussof, 2012). Furthermore, respondents in the study agreed that grammar rules are difficult to understand. As a result, 88% of the respondents agreed that board games motivate grammar learning. Additionally, board games could be an interesting method to teach grammar rules because 90,4% of the study's respondents agreed that board games could assist with improving grammar and could help with remembering grammar rules. One can therefore state that Paris and Yussof's (2012) findings are relevant to the current study because both studies focus on finding appropriate approaches to deal with the anxiety of learners regarding grammar, instead of only using teacher-centred traditional teaching approaches. The latter have a fixed learning structure which makes it difficult for learners to be motivated, creative and innovative. Unlike practical instruction, theoretical instruction discourages learners from keeping and recalling concepts and information more promptly due to less learner involvement and interaction with the learning process (Lamrani & Abdelwahed, 2020). It is important to point out that none of the cited studies on the integration of board games are in the African context. The current study focuses on the extent to which board games can be used to assess learners' English acquisition skills, particularly listening and speaking skills as well as language structures and conventions.

According to Paris and Yussof (2012), one of the strategies that can be employed to alleviate the anxiety of learners and ensure learner interaction and motivation during grammar lessons is by introducing grammar rules using activity that is meaningful; or the integrated approach, which involves the use of games to teach language skills. Similarly, Phuong and Nguyen (2017) claim that when teaching grammar skills, teachers can make use of board games to help learners practise grammar rules during lessons, review some grammar structures at the end of the lesson or recall grammar knowledge after several grammar lessons. Previous studies show that the use of educational games in teaching vocabulary and other language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking has been gaining popularity for several decades (Derakhshan & Khatir, 2015). Similarly, Kopecká (2019), theorises that games have been used as a learning tool for centuries and that game-based learning has become more widely known, especially due to technological advancements.

This study therefore focuses on the extent to which English language board games can be used to assess learners' English acquisition skills. In the next sections, the notion of using board games to teach listening and speaking skills will be explored.

2.1.3 The use of board games to teach listening skills

Listening plays an important role in daily communication and is a skill which should be taught at school level so that learners can use it even outside an academic context. In this section, an argument on how board games can be used to enhance learners' acquisition of the listening skill will be presented. Playing board games could help learners develop their listening skills. According to Sevik (2012), listening is the initial stage in both first and second language acquisition. Therefore, the effective teaching of listening skills is at the core of the development of other language skills.

According to Syafii et al. (2020), although listening may appear to some to be a simple skill, it takes practise. According to Azzahroh (2015), teaching learners listening and speaking skills should be a more interactive and communicative process in order to instil confidence in learners to explore and articulate their ideas through speaking. Listening and speaking skills are skills that support each other,

therefore learners with good speaking competence are most likely to possess good listening skills as well (Takarroucht et al., 2022). The use of board games in teaching and learning can therefore greatly enhance learners' listening abilities because learners are guided during gameplay to listen not only to the teacher, but also to other learners in the classroom (Syafii et al., 2020). One of the ways to train learners to listen while playing games is by having learners listen to the rules of the game, and even to other players who are playing the same game. Also, teaching listening can be done explicitly with numerous opportunities for learners to use so that listening becomes habitual (Syafii et al., 2020).

Having said that, one can argue that game-based learning can have an impact on the way learners acquire listening skills. However, the extent to which game-based learning can be used to assess learners' English acquisition skills is still not clear. According to Syafii et al. (2020), assessment of listening skills should be done for different purposes. As a result, four purposes for assessing listening skills were identified in their study, namely: the assessment of language proficiency to assess learners' language abilities; representing an oral skill wherein listening is combined with another skill; assessing achievement, that is testing to provide grades; and diagnostic testing, which can be used to find out where learners' knowledge is lacking so that teaching can then target their needs.

2.1.4 The use of board games to teach speaking skills

Based on the recent studies' findings presented above, it can be said that the use of board games can to a certain extent enhance learners' English language structures and conventions as well as listening skills. In this section, the focus will be on the role board games can play to teach learners' speaking skills. In a study conducted by Syakur (2020), it was alluded that the most important thing in ensuring that learners learn the skill of speaking is motivation. Motivation is said to be of the essence in teaching speaking skills because it ensures learners' willingness to practise English regularly (Syakur, 2020).

The use of game-based learning (GBL) in teaching and learning can be a source of motivation to the learners. One of the studies which found that motivation was enhanced by GBL was a study conducted by Becker (2010). It was claimed in that

study that fun and learning are not necessarily mutually exclusive because learning through games enhances learners' intrinsic motivation (Becker, 2010). Intrinsic motivation can be defined as an internal drive that urges someone to fulfil something (Paris & Yussof, 2012). In the context of GBL, intrinsic motivation explains the beneficial effects of applying games in English language lessons which aim at addressing any of the four language skills, which are: reading; writing; listening and speaking; and language structures and conventions. In their study, Paris and Yussof (2012) focused on the use of games in grammar lessons wherein learners were offered the opportunity to use a variety of games which encouraged them to embrace grammar mastery and build foundational grammar skills. Additionally, it was found that learner motivation was positively affected using familiar games. Similarly, in a study conducted by Syafii et al. (2020), it was reported that games can be used as a tool to enhance learners' motivation because they can be humorous, engaging, interesting and at times challenging. Furthermore, games are said to allow learners to use language in a non-stressful learning environment. According to Syafii et al. (2020), learners who had previously showed negative attitudes towards listening and speaking, finally had a positive attitude when games were used. A high level of enthusiasm and motivation among learners was observed during the learning process through GBL.

Cheng (2018) believes that the importance of using board games in the language classroom to help enrich the speaking skills in English as an additional language should be addressed in the development of oral performance, which includes speech activities based on fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation.

The amount of language produced during the task is defined as fluency, not necessarily accuracy, because accuracy refers to linguistic features such as grammar, pronunciation, or the discourse (Cheng, 2018). While there are numerous advantages to using board games for teaching speaking skills, not every board game can be used to improve learners' overall speaking skills (Cheng, 2018). In his study, Cheng (2018) discovered a relationship between the use of sufficient board games and the improvement of learners' oral performance. It was stated that study participants felt less anxious when speaking English during board games. One can

therefore state that language anxiety may influence the oral performance of learners (Cheng, 2018).

There were, however, some limitations to Cheng's (2018) study, such as time constraints and the precise factor of influence that is said to have improved the participants' oral performance. While the study lasted longer than the previously mentioned research, most participants are said to have stated that their oral performance would improve more if the project was extended to three months (Cheng, 2018).

Additionally, when a teacher is facilitating teaching and learning in a classroom of more than 20 learners, it is difficult for the teacher to provide all learners with fair and equal opportunities to express themselves orally. Thirdly, it was clear in the study that the participants' oral performance improved over the course of the study, primarily because their language anxiety decreased; however, it was unclear whether learners' anxiety decreased due to familiarity and repetition of playing the board games, especially since they were exposed to the same routine for each game.

Furthermore, while the study's goal was to determine the impact of board games on the oral performance of English as a second language, one could query how the improvement was measured, because the repetition of a task or game cannot necessarily mean that a learner has mastered the concept. It could instead mean that the learner has the ability to recall because of the repetition of a game.

2.1.5 Advantages and disadvantages of using board games

In this section, the benefits and drawbacks of using board games will be looked at. Phuong and Nguyen (2017) point out that the benefits of using games on language teaching and learning include the motivation of learners, the promotion of learners' interaction, improve learners' language acquisition and increase learners' achievement. Kopecká (2019) argues that in the classroom, board games create a non-threatening, playful, yet competitive environment where learners can focus on content, and reinforce as well as apply what they have learned.

Additionally, when board games are properly integrated into the curriculum, learners can improve their critical thinking, analysing, reasoning, planning, and communication abilities (Kopecká, 2019). Having stated that, one can assert that board games create conducive and learner-centred learning environments. However, the extent to which board games can be used to assess learners' English language acquisition skills is unclear, which is the focus of this study. Phuong and Nguyen (2017) identified some of the benefits of using games on language teaching and learning, including the enhancement of learner interaction and the enhancement of language acquisition.

Stojković and Jerotijević (2011) conducted a study exploring the reasons for using or avoiding games in an English First Language (EFL) classroom and amongst their discoveries they found that games can increase learners' motivation and promote learning. Secondly, because games can be used in a group or peer work setting, this can enhance teamwork and enable successful interaction among learners. Thirdly, games are said to provide favourable conditions for effective language acquisition. Lastly, games make it possible for learners to practise the four basic English skills which are: listening and speaking, language structures and conventions, reading and viewing and writing and presenting. Examples of board games that teachers can use to open a platform wherein learners can practise the basic English skills will be discussed in sub-section 2.1.5.

Although games can be a useful method or tool when teaching learners English language skills, they have a number of drawbacks which give rise to some challenges for both teachers and learners. The first challenge learners may face when games are used in teaching them English language skills is that games are characterised by a lot of repetition which may lead to learners losing interest when the same games are used more than once. Similarly, Stojković and Jerotijević (2011) claim that if learners are already familiar with the games, they might not get equally involved as they would when using games that they are not familiar with. Secondly, Stojković and Jerotijević (2011) point out that the use of games in the classroom can create chaos leading to discipline issues because of the high levels of noise. Third, there is a high risk of deviating from the primary goal of the game-

play activity due to insufficient rule instruction, which can result in excessive playing and a lack of learning (Stojković & Jerotijević, 2011).

2.1.6 Examples of board games teachers can use to teach English language skills

Examples of board games that teachers can use to teach English language skills include Scrabble which can be used in English lessons to introduce new vocabulary, and unusual or more advanced words. The game can be played with a dictionary close by so that learners can learn new words as well as dictionary skills (Kopecká, 2019).

The second game is 'Once upon a time' and allows learners to tell an interesting story not to win, but rather to practise their storytelling, speaking skills and active use of vocabulary. In addition, Upwords, Bananagrams, Scattergories and Catch Phrase are other examples of board games teachers can utilise (BusyTeacher.org, n.d.). When playing Upwords, learners can make use of their collection of letters to build words on the crossword grid. This game can assist in building of learners' vocabulary. In Bananagrams, learners are given a few letter tiles, and these can be used to form a grid of words.

In Scattergories, learners are given ten categories, and players should then think of a word which begins with a designated letter to fit each of the categories. Catch Phrase is a word guessing game. During this game, learners are given a disc which gives them a word, and they can say anything to get the rest of the players to guess the word on the screen. Once the word is guessed, the disc is passed on to the next player.

2.1.7 Curricular expectations of English FAL

In this section, the curricular expectations of English FAL will be looked at. Much attention will be on the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). First additional language or second language refers to a language which is not a learner's native or mother tongue but can be used for the purpose of communication. In the South African context, many learners have English as a medium of learning and teaching. According to CAPS, learners are expected to be

able to use both their home and first additional language effectively by the end of Grade 9 (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011).

While CAPS states that learners' home languages should be used for learning and teaching, the reality is that most schools have not followed the proposal of the Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) and have thus continued to use English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) from at least grade 4 (Mpiti, 2016). South Africa is currently argued to have an excellent post-apartheid LiEP that is among the most practicable and appealing in the world (Govender, 2015). The policy was formulated with the goal of ensuring communication across racial, linguistic, and geographic barriers. According to van Staden (2021), the LiEP has played an important role in developing the South African education system to one of equity and equality in order to address past inequalities.

Furthermore, this policy seeks to promote language equity and quality education in all eleven South African languages, while preserving home languages and providing access to effective language acquisition (van Staden, 2021). Correspondingly, Govender (2015) argues that although the South African Constitution embraces the notion of language rights and multilingualism, the education sector does not completely reflect the multilingual nature of South Africa.

Furthermore, Govender (2015) alludes that although South Africa has an excellent language policy on paper, there still are numerous concerns about the extent to which the policy serves its purpose in providing sufficient improvement in a learner's academic performance. One can thus argue that good policies are not fruitful if they do not yield the desired results.

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoH) (n.d.), South African Basic Education, which is described as education and training provided at primary and secondary school level, is divided into four phases, namely: the Foundation Phase (Grade R-3), Intermediate Phase (Grade 4-6), Senior Phase (Grade 7-9) and Further Education and Training Phase (Grade 10-12). When learners enter the Senior Phase, it is expected that they should already be capable in the FAL in terms of both interpersonal and cognitive academic abilities (DBE,

2011). Furthermore, at the FAL level, it is assumed that students arrive at school with no prior knowledge of the language.

Consequently, in the first few years of school, the emphasis is on developing learners' abilities to speak and understand the language (DBE, 2011). However, when it comes to practicality, because learners in the Senior Phase may still struggle to communicate effectively in the additional language, necessitating the provision of support for these learners. The National CAPS requires that learners be taught using a text-based, communicative, and process-based approach. Both text-based and communicative approaches rely on the continuous use and production of various texts (DBE, 2011). According to CAPS (DBE, 2011), a learner should have a lot of exposure to the target language and numerous opportunities to practise and use the language by communicating for social or practical purposes.

It is important to note that the English first additional language curriculum aims to prepare learners to listen and speak for a wide range of purposes, audiences, and contexts, use language structures and conventions effectively. It is therefore imperative to state that for the purposes of this study, attention will be on the extent to which game-based learning can be utilised as an assessment tool to assess Grade 9 learners' language acquisition skills. Having explored the curricular expectations of English as a first additional language, the following section will explore LoLT, school factors, and home factors that contribute to learners' lack of English skills.

2.1.8 Factors contributing to learners' lack of English skills: LoLT, school and home factors

According to CAPS (DBE, 2011), learners at the first additional language level are not expected to have any prior knowledge of the language when they arrive at school. As a result, the emphasis in the first few years of school is on developing learners' abilities to speak and understand the language. An additional language is one that is not the learner's native or mother tongue but can be used for certain communicative functions (DBE, 2011).

In the South African setting, many learners use their additional language, often English, as the LoLT. Furthermore, most learners are taught in their home language

in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1–3). However, home language teaching does not necessarily take place as intended, or as policy mandates. South Africa has eleven official languages, of which nine are indigenous languages and two are English and Afrikaans (Mpiti, 2016).

According to Sibanda (2017), in the South African context, learners are taught in their home language in the Foundation Phase before transitioning to English, for most learners in grade 4. It is in grade 4 that learners elect the LoLT and in most instances, the most elected language is English (Sibanda, 2017). Moreover, over 80% of South African learners speak an African language, but in grade 4, learners are taught in English, which has a 10% native speaker population (Sibanda, 2017). Apart from the language of learning and teaching having an impact on learners' acquisition of English language skills, Sethusha (2013), Gordon (2019), Misbah et al. (2017) and Mpiti (2016) identified other contributing school-related and home factors. According to Misbah et al. (2017), there are a few home factors contributing to learners' difficulties in acquiring English language skills. Contributing factors include issues of poverty, social environment, learners' interests, and attitudes. Secondly, one other main contributing aspect is the lack of parental involvement (Misbah et al., 2017).

With the increase in single-parent-headed families, such parents are said to be working hard to support their children, and in such conditions parents become too busy to get involved with their children's schoolwork (Misbah et al., 2017). Closer parental involvement is said to lead to positive increments in a child's development (Misbah et al., 2017). Additionally, South African learners taking English as a second or additional language may have inadequate exposure to the language and support from home because parents cannot check their children's work, or help them with their homework when they themselves are illiterate; but this not true of all parents (Mpiti, 2016).

School factors contributing to learners' difficulties in acquiring English skills include a lack of teaching and learning resources, poor teacher training, high teacher-learner ratios, and classroom assessment practices (Sethusha, 2013). In addition, English First Additional Language learners, who are children who speak a language

other than English, have limited ability to understand, speak, read, and write English. These learners face the challenge of learning core content while also developing academic language skills such as reading and writing (Stefanson, 2012). According to Stefanson (2012, p. 12), academic language can be defined as ‘the type of language competence required for learners to gain access to English-taught content, and, more broadly, for success in school and any career that requires mastery of large and complex bodies of information and concepts’.

2.1.9 The importance of English language acquisition skills

It is imperative to take note of the importance of learners’ English acquisition skills because learners do not only need to show their literacy skills when they are dealing with subject or school curriculum-related courses, but also need the skills for everyday social interactions. Furthermore, Stefanson (2012) claimed that English literacy is not only fundamental for academic success because teaching and learning is administered mainly through the language, but is also important at home, as well as in the community setting. For instance, one would need to possess basic language skills in order to be functionally literate and understand instructions on how to connect and operate a washing machine, or coffee machine, for example.

It is critical to point out that there are two types of skills to learn while acquiring a second language as identified by Stefanson (2012). The first set of skills are Basic Interpersonal Conversation Skills (BICS) and the second are the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency skills (CALP).

The former, according to Stefanson (2012), is the language learnt through experience and is not formally taught in class. BICS is used to communicate in everyday life in society. In contrast, the latter can only be taught and learnt formally, and requires ample time for a person to become more skilled and proficient at the language (Stefanson, 2012). Looking at the two set of language skills mentioned, English language learners can acquire English skills both formally and informally, provided that they are constantly exposed to environments that will allow them to experience the language.

2.1.10 The effects of learners not acquiring English language proficiency skills

According to Sebole et al. (2019), language competence and proficiency are essential for educational success. Language proficiency can be defined as an individual's ability to communicate effectively in conversation with oral language used as a subset and includes academic as well as social language (Sebole et al., 2019). In a study conducted by Olifant et al. (2020), it was concluded that without strong literacy skills, learners with English language acquisition difficulties have limited post-secondary education and employment options. The same study found that while most South African learners could critically analyse texts, they were unable to apply the majority of the critical reading strategies they claimed to use (Olifant et al., 2020). Furthermore, South Africa is in the grip of a reading crisis, which means that South African learners in phase exit grades (grades 4, 6, and 9) do not understand basic English and may be inadequate at writing meaningfully (Mpiti, 2016). According to the South African Human Rights Commission (2023), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2021 found that 81% of South Africa's grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning.

Furthermore, development of learners' levels of critical reading instruction remains a challenge that must be effectively addressed (Olifant et al., 2020). Not only are South Africa's learners' reading skills unsatisfactory, but it is also argued that most learners in South Africa cannot write and process at grade-appropriate levels (Mpiti, 2016). Similarly, Gordon (2019) states that oral language proficiency is a foundational skill that is required to develop the ability to read, which in turn is required, together with writing, for all types of learning. It goes without saying that the four English language skills identified by CAPS are related to each other. This means that for learners to be able to verbally express themselves in the English language, they should have adequate reading, writing and grammar skills.

For this reason Mpiti (2016) states that among the four English FAL skills, writing is perceived to be the most challenging and difficult skill for second language learners. This skill is important for learners to acquire because it plays a crucial part and is useful in the classroom through reinforcing grammatical structures and vocabulary (Mpiti, 2016).

2.1.11 Teacher assessment practices and possible challenges in assessing with different methods/ tools

In this section, an argument will be presented on how teachers' lack of assessment literacy impedes learners' English language skills acquisition. Assessment plays a crucial part in the process of teaching and learning because learners and other stakeholders can be provided with feedback about learners' progress, strengths and weaknesses, instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy can be judged, and policy can be informed (Braun & Kanjee, 2006). For example, a learner's language proficiency and skills can be assessed in various ways including written standardised tests, oral exams, creative writing and other practical exercises. Sethusha (2012) claims that when it comes to teachers' classroom practices, teachers' understanding, beliefs, opinions and perceptions are closely related to how they administer assessments.

Furthermore, teachers' perceptions on assessment are said to be informed by both their experiences as well as their qualifications (Sethusha, 2013). It is important to note that when exploring teachers' assessment knowledge, a number of factors should be considered. These include the authenticity of assessments and the manner in which assessment can be used as formative feedback in order to improve teaching and learning.

According to Klingner et al. (2006), one of the flaws of assessment practices is bias in testing, particularly concerning measures of learners' potential. To elaborate, it is argued that several intelligence tests tend to undermine or underestimate the potential of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, as a result, educators misinterpret a learner's lack of full proficiency in English as a second language as an intelligence deficit or as a language or learning disability (Klingner et al., 2006, p. 115). Another challenge identified by Wang et al. (2008) with regards to assessment knowledge is teacher assessment literacy. Teacher assessment literacy can simply be defined as a teacher's ability to know different types of assessments, the construction of assessment items, and the technique of assembling and administering of tests (Wang et al., 2008). Similarly, Kanjee and Mthembu (2015) define teacher assessment literacy as an individual's

understanding of the ultimate assessment concepts and procedures deemed likely to influence educational decisions.

Furthermore, assessment-literate educators understand which assessment methods to employ in order to gather reliable information about learner achievement. Similarly, Mertler and Campbell (2009) claim that assessment-literate teachers enter the assessment realm knowing exactly what they are assessing, why they are assessing, and how to best assess the skill or knowledge of interest.

It is important to note that teachers construct their own understanding of assessment based on their own personal experiences (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015). Furthermore, assessment-literate teachers can use assessment to maximise learners' motivation and learning by involving learners as full participants in assessment, record keeping and communication.

According to Wang et al. (2008), teacher assessment literacy is the knowledge a teacher possesses on assessment and their perspectives on it. Major assessment challenges faced by South African teachers include: the inability to connect assessments, whether formative or summative, to clear learning objectives, not applying proper assessment methods, developing quality, grade or phase appropriate assessment exercises, using accurate scoring criteria and sampling appropriately, and avoiding bias in assessment (Kanjee & Mthembu, 2015). One of the strategies English FAL teachers can employ to overcome the assessment challenges they face is to accurately categorise learners into precise performance levels so that they have detailed information about what learners know as well as what they are able to do. Additionally, Klinger et al. (2006) identified three ways of improving assessment practices.

The first one requires that educators use alternative strategies and ways of assessing learners' strengths to determine the upper limit of their full potential. For example, the South African English Home Language and FAL curriculum has four main skills (Reading and viewing, Listening and speaking, Writing and presenting, and Language structures and conventions) which allow individual learners to become acquainted with the language through the different skills. The second

strategy involves conducting observations of learners in different settings. The last strategy entails giving attention to learners' home language and to the role of language acquisition when determining whether a learner may have any learning disability (Klinger et al., 2006).

Assessment in all its forms is important in an English FAL classroom because it gives the teacher an indication of where learners are in attaining language proficiency skills. Also, formal and informal assessment could enhance learners' performance (Akinyeye & Pluddemann, 2016). According to Mkhwanazi (2015), formative assessment in a teacher's classroom is fundamental and has great potential to promote and accelerate learning. Similarly, Mngomezulu (2019) points out that formative assessment is the most effective strategy that teachers can use to enhance learners' motivation and achievement. Not only does formative assessment ensure that learning objectives are achieved, but it also provides both teachers and learners with the required information to adjust teaching and learning strategies (Mngomezulu, 2019). Formative assessment of English as an additional language is argued to benefit learners more because it provides them with apt feedback, which then impacts how they perceive language learning (Torres, 2019). According to Mngomezulu (2019), teachers teaching English FAL should not depend on one form of assessment, as this limits how learners construct knowledge. Instead, formative assessment should be conducted formally and informally, while learning is taking place. Other forms of formative assessment include: projects, practical demonstrations, presentations and game-based learning.

2.1.12 Teachers' assessment practices of English First Additional Language skills nationally

Kanjee (2009) points out that inadequate teacher expertise and content knowledge, limited access to relevant teaching and learning resources, poor understanding of assessment and curriculum, high teacher workloads and large class sizes, continued reliance on traditional forms of assessment practices, and teachers' unwillingness and/or inability to adapt their assessment practices to the changing demands of the new educational system are all factors that have an impact on effective classroom assessment practices. Furthermore, in order to improve teachers' classroom assessment practices, they should be offered adequate

support as well as appropriate teaching and assessment resources (Kanjee, 2009).

Moreover, high-quality assessment practices must adhere to a set of common principles known as reliability, validity, fairness, discrimination, and meaningfulness (Kanjee, 2009). Alkharusi (2010) identifies some examples of assessment practices including the use of a table of specifications to plan assessments, communicating assessment by informing learners about purpose of assessment before it is administered, developing a rating scale for performance criteria in advance, and providing learners with opportunities to write test questions based on their understanding of the instructional objectives. Cain (2023) argues that teachers should not only rely solely on tests to assess their learners because tests are not an accurate way to measure their skills or levels. Cain (2023) recognises some assessment practices teachers can implement in their classes, including the use of rubrics and performance criteria which allows for the evaluation of a variety of learners' work, and oral presentations or performances which can be used continually as they are a good way to monitor a learner's comprehension through a longer period of time.

This strategy may help assess learners whose reading or writing skills may not be very good, but who have good oral skills (Cain, 2023). Thirdly, teachers can make use of non-verbal assessments because they are a good strategy to assess learners who are shy or learners who are not as proficient in English. Fourthly, written assessments can be employed as they are a good way to see how learners can apply their knowledge of English over a wide variety of concepts (Cain, 2023).

Lastly, portfolios can be used to gather various samples of learners work to track their development over a period (Cain, 2023). Over the years, assessment practices have become learner-centred. According to Keetshabe (2010), learner-centred education places the responsibility on learners by inviting them to construct their own meanings. A learner-centred environment allows learners to evaluate their own experiences of their prior knowledge and experience of life, and what they experience on a day-to-day basis.

It is stated in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) of English First Additional Language (FAL) in the Senior Phase (grades 7 to 9) that when

teachers are assessing learners' English language skills, the assessments should not be seen as separate activities but one integrated activity (DBE, 2011). For instance, teachers use rubrics to address the different language skills in the task. When assessing listening skills, teachers evaluate their learners' ability to answer questions and participate in discussions.

Learners' reading abilities are assessed by the extent to which learners show comprehension of what they are reading either individually or as a group. Reading comprehension can be evaluated by learners' ability to answer questions based on the text they are reading or by retelling what they were reading. Learners' writing skills can be assessed by focusing on their ability to convey meaning and how correctly they have written a text. Furthermore, the CAPS document stipulates that for written activities, learners' language structures should only be assessed in context (DBE, 2011).

Moreover, when teachers administer formal assessment tasks, they should focus on a particular skill; however, it is possible for one task to incorporate more than one skill because English language learning is an integrated process, thus the focus should not mainly be on the learner's final product, but on the process that he or she follows. It is also imperative to point out that English language teachers do not only assess written work, but also practical and oral work too (DBE, 2011).

2.1.13 Game-based learning elements

Although gamification and game-based learning (GBL) may seem to be similar on the surface because they both hold the notion that games can be used to educate, the concepts are different from each other in numerous ways (Loveless, n.d.). At the classroom level or setting, gamification is implemented by adding game elements to traditional instruction. However, with GBL, true games are used to provide the learning experience (Loveless, n.d.). If teachers make use of the GBL concept in their classrooms, they can either use games developed specifically for the classroom, or adapt existing games because GBL relies on games to deliver instruction (Loveless, n.d.).

In a publication on GBL, Chakraborti (2016) identified four components, namely: motivation, feedback, practice, and reinforcement. Motivation is embedded in the notion that educational games have different levels and therefore provide rewards at each level like badges or points, which help to motivate the learner to move forward.

Secondly, games in education provide feedback that is constant and immediate (Chakraborti, 2016). This is imperative as real-time feedback assists learners know their status and move further to reach their goals.

Thirdly, games enable learners to practise because they are based on the principle of “try-try-try” to solve or achieve the game goal (Chakraborti, 2016). GBL also allows repetition which can strengthen learners’ memory, and this helps learners retain the information for a longer time, thus GBL advocates the practice of reinforcement (Chakraborti, 2016). Similarly, Plass et al. (2015) identify adaptivity and graceful failure as other elements of GBL. Adaptivity can be defined as the game's ability to engage each learner in a way that reflects his or her unique situation (Plass et al., 2015).

This includes everything from the learners’ current level of knowledge to their cognitive abilities to their emotions. GBL allows learners to fail gracefully, according to the concept of graceful failure. Failure is not viewed as an undesirable outcome in GBL, but rather as an expected and, in some cases, even necessary step in the learning process (Plass et al., 2015). As a result, the consequences of failure in games encourage risk-taking, new experiences, and exploration. According to Loveless (n.d.), GBL is also adaptable because it can be used with individual learners or the entire class. Secondly, each game play takes a different turn because it can be re-used across multiple sessions to produce different results (Loveless, n.d.).

Furthermore, in GBL, games can be used repeatedly. In an educational blog about game-based education, Loveless (n.d.) argued that GBL encourages learner engagement, and higher levels of learner engagement increase the likelihood that learners will remember what they learn (Loveless, n.d.). Also, increased learner

engagement allows learners to be more motivated to learn and retain content knowledge (Loveless, n.d.). Previous studies, according to Loveless (n.d.), show that learners were able to retain vocabulary learning more strongly, demonstrating the broad impact GBL may have. It is important to point out that although the blog unpacks the concept of game-based education, there were however no participants in the study. One can then state that because the study did not include participants, these are theoretical ideas that are still to be tested.

Activate Games for Learning American English are a collection of board games used in the English Access Program (EAP) classrooms to offer learners an opportunity to practise vocabulary, grammatical patterns, listening and speaking, and interaction skills in a learner- centred environment. These games are based on the following elements of GBL: flexibility, learner engagement, motivation, practise, reinforcement and adaptivity. Activate games are flexible in the sense that learners can play or use them as individuals or in a group setting. Secondly, the notion of learner engagement encourages learners to not be passive but rather to be actively involved in the learning process.

Furthermore, one can state that GBL is embedded in the common English phrase 'Practise makes perfect' because EAP learners are offered an opportunity to regularly use the Activate games to practise their language and listening and speaking skills so that they become proficient English language learners. Moreover, the more they practise, the more they will be able to retain the knowledge and information for a longer time because of the constant repetition of vocabulary, grammatical patterns and interaction skills. The table below highlights the differences between GBL and gamification. After the comparisons of the two concepts, a section about why board games are a good example of GBL and a good example of assessment tools will be presented.

2.1.14 Game-based learning versus gamification

Table 2.1 details the differences between game-based learning and gamification.

Table 2.1: The differences between game-based learning and gamification.

Game-based learning	Gamification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet learning objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes adding game components to the lesson.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning is achieved through playing the game. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game mechanics can be introduced to a non-game setting to encourage learner-involvement or engagement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded in problem-solving and critical thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded -n external rewards (e.g. badges, awards and achievements).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be tangible or digital games. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience points can be used instead of traditional grades.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can incorporate simulation to allow learners to experience the learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for choice—it is not always a linear path to learning.

As emphasised in the table, the most important differences are that when gamification is employed in a learning environment, gaming components are incorporated in the lesson. However, in game-based learning, the learning process occurs through playing the game. In addition, game-based learning is the addition of actual games in a learner's learning journey. Furthermore, gamification is embedded in the use of different activities and processes with the aim of solving problems through the use of game elements such as points systems, badges, levels to mention a few. Game-based learning on the other hand helps with addressing a specific skill or learning objective without integrating gaming elements in the learning process. It is important to state that the main differences between gamification and GBL is that gamification upholds the use of different activities and processes with the objective of solving problems by using gaming elements including points system, badges and levels. GBL on the other hand assists with addressing a specific skill or learning objective without incorporating gaming elements in the learning process.

2.2 BOARD GAMES AS GOOD EXAMPLE OF GAME-BASED LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT TOOL

Thomas (2018) argues that games are a medium which can be used for the teaching and learning process. As a result, the power they have can be utilised in the classroom. It has been indicated before that one of the pros of board games is their ability to encourage real communication, collaboration, engagement or interaction in the classroom. Board games are a good example of GBL because they have rules that players must follow, they have at least one goal, they have a means to measure progress or success, they have a recognisable ending and lastly, they must either be competitive or cooperative in nature (Thomas, 2018). According to Gonzalo-

Iglesia et al. (2018), educational boards are a good example of GBL because firstly they promote discussion, collaboration and build communication.

Secondly, board games intend to support participative, experimental and cooperative techniques that encourage 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication. Also, board games are perceived as motivational teaching and learning tools. Additionally, Treher (2011) advocates for board games as an example of GBL as they are an important tool for providing hands-on and critical thinking skills and knowledge development. Secondly, board games can be used for teaching people of all ages, grades and phases on all subjects (Treher, 2011). Lastly, when games are played in teams, players learn collectively so that no one feels left out for not knowing the correct answer (Treher, 2011).

With regards to learning assessment and the incorporation of games, that is, board games being an example of an assessment tool, it is argued that games can be difficult to grade and assess because teachers often face the challenge of trying too hard to build assessment into game play, which can destroy the fun factor (Pope, 2021). This challenge according to Pope (2021) can be resolved by providing learners with feedback rather than grades. Providing feedback is said to be more appropriate as it allows learners to retrace their steps and make corrections (Pope, 2021).

2.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which is inspired by the work of Barrett-Tatum (2015) will be used to gauge the role of board games in formatively assessing learners English acquisition skills. For the purposes of this study, the six aspects of the theory will be looked at, namely: subjects, mediating artefacts, community, object, sense/meaning, and outcome. The conceptual framework for this study is presented in Figure 1 below. This version was recreated to represent the Cultural-Historical Activity theory.

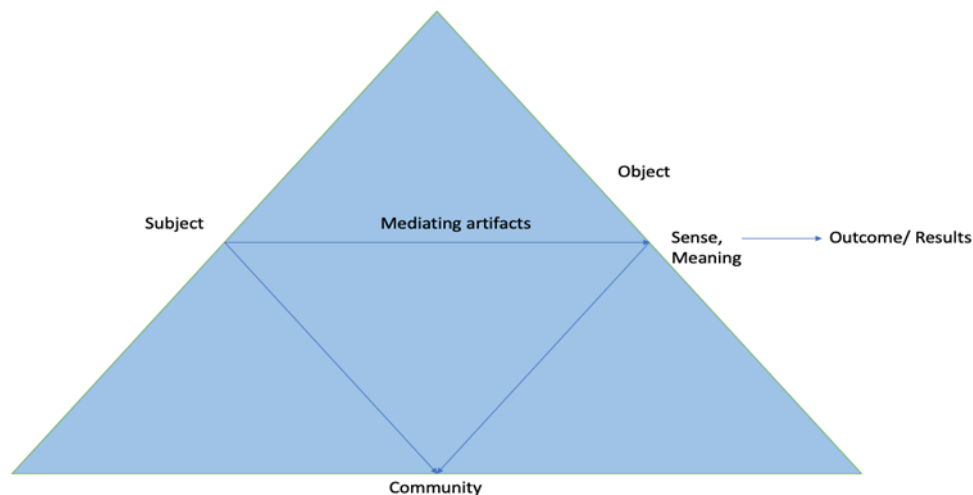


Figure 2.1: Relationship between Teacher, use of language games for teaching, learning and assessing learners' language proficiency skills.

Adapted from Barrett-Tatum (2015)

In the context of this study, subjects will be the teachers of the EAP who not only assist learners in making sense and meaning of what they learn, but also possess certain assessment knowledge. Additionally, learners will be looked at through the lens or eyes of the teachers. Mediating artefacts are the *Activate games for learning American English*, which can be used as assessment tools. Community in the context of this study will be all stakeholders involved in the EAP including teachers, learners, parents, the entire school community, and the Regional English Language Office (RELO) of the American Embassy.

Object is the English language which the learners in the EAP take as a first additional language. Sense or meaning in this study will be the manner in which learners comprehend, gather information, gain an understanding of the information and then using the understanding to complete any given activity. Lastly, the outcome will be the end results in the form of progress that learners make when games are used as tools for formatively assessing their English language skills. The CHAT theory also comprises two other aspects, namely the division of labour, and rules. In the context of this study, division of labour refers to the manner in which duties are allocated to EAP teachers to ensure the smooth running of the project. The duties include the planning and delivering of lessons, designing and implementing teaching and learning tools and assessments, and the planning of enhancement activities and immersion sessions such as camps. Moving on to rules, these can

include the relevance of the EAP curriculum to the CAPS curriculum, school policies and rules of the program.

There is an existing relationship between the six aspects of the CHAT theory because teachers, as subjects, plan, administer and give feedback on assessments learners undertake. Secondly, they come up with strategies on how mediating artefacts can either be designed or utilised so that learners come to grip with the English language content. Furthermore, teaching and learning does not only impact the teachers and learners involved, but also all stakeholders. In the context of the EAP, learners who are part of the program receive academic support from the teachers, while the teachers get support from the RELO office. Also, there is a relationship with parents, other teachers who are not in the program, the school management team and the school governing body so that there is a smooth running of the program in the hosting school. Furthermore, teachers in the program play a crucial role as they are the driving force, which is why division of labour is also imperative. With regards to rules, teachers are an important aspect because they not only provide consistency, but also help guide learners and teachers' actions towards the desired end goal.

To gain further insight into the use of games to teach language skills, teachers were encouraged to share their personal experiences on GBL as a strategy to teach and assess learners' English language skills. Teachers shared their thoughts on how games could be used to teach language structures and conventions instead of teaching the skill through direct rules. Moreover, teachers shared their thoughts on how GBL could improve how they assess learners' English language proficiency skills, measures put in place by the EAP to develop teachers' assessment knowledge, and the limitations teachers encounter when using GBL to teach and assess learners' English language skills. Regarding mediating artefacts, the focus was on how the use of GBL assists teachers to formatively assess learners' English language skills, how traditional assessment methods are different than GBL when learners' English language skills are assessed, and the extent to which GBL impacts learner motivation and involvement. This study focused on two English language skills: listening and speaking, and language structures and conventions. Teachers' perceptions on how these skills are assessed through GBL were therefore sought.

Teachers were also encouraged to share their experiences of how they ensure that all learners are actively involved and how their skills are measured for progressive performance purposes.

2.4 CONCLUSION OF THE CHAPTER

The focus of this chapter was on reviewing literature on the extent to which GBL can be used as a tool to teach and assess learners' English language skills, particularly listening and speaking, as well as language structures and conventions. One can state that English teachers are key role players in ensuring that learners are equipped with English language skills, especially in lower grades. Studies have shown that learners are overwhelmed by speaking activities and language structures and conventions, and therefore perceive the classes and activities to be tedious and complex.

This therefore calls for the invention of different approaches or strategies of teaching grammar as well as listening and speaking skills. One of the strategies which is gaining popularity to remove learner anxiety and ensure learner involvement, interaction and improved confidence among learners, is the use of games. It has been shown that the use of games allows for incidental learning to occur because as learners play, they interact with their peers, observe their peers and repeat the games. This chapter provided definitions of GBL, board games and gamification. GBL is game play with planned and clearly defined learning objectives, whereas gamification involves adding game-like elements or mechanics in non-game settings to ensure engagement, flexibility and collaboration. Board games on the other hand can be used to improve learners' speaking skills as they make learners to be less anxious while speaking.

In the South African context, many learners are taught in English despite not being native speakers of the language. Although CAPS expects these learners to be able to use both their home language and English FAL adequately by the time they exit the senior phase, this is not always practical because many learners cannot communicate or use English satisfactorily. Furthermore, South African learners lack English skills partially because of the LoLT. It can also be stated that there are several home and school factors contributing to learners' lack of adequate English

skills. Research showed that many South African learners are illiterate because they lack adequate reading, writing and speaking skills. One can argue that one of the contributing factors to this is that learners are not properly acquiring language structures and conventions skills as important building blocks or foundation for the development of other language skills.

Though the literature presented has shown that games can be a powerful tool for improving learners' listening and speaking skills, not much attention has been given to language structures and conventions. The chapter also looked at teacher assessment practices and it can be stated that some of the assessment shortcomings include the use of improper assessment methods and assessments which are not connected to learning objectives among others. The chapter also outlined features which make GBL different from gamification, namely: motivation, feedback, practise, and reinforcement. Moreover, an argument in favour of board games as a good example of GBL was presented. Board games are a good example of GBL because they consist of rules, have a specific goal and a way to measure progress. While board games encourage collaborative learning, it was unclear if they can be classified as good assessment tools because they are difficult to grade. The literature presented above reveal that when GBL is implemented, learners' listening and speaking skills are enhanced. Previous studies also show that learners who had previously displayed a negative attitude towards lessons addressing grammar, and listening and speaking skills, eventually showed a positive attitude when games were used. Therefore, one can concur with the findings of the recent studies that enhancing English lessons with GBL can be an effective strategy to encourage learners' motivation, interest and enthusiasm in the learning process. With regards to the gaps in the literature presented, past research does not reveal how feedback was given to learners after they completed game-based assessments of their listening, speaking and grammar (language structures and conventions) skills.

Lastly, the chapter outlined the CHAT theory, which is inspired by the work of Barrett-Tatum (2015) as the conceptual framework relevant to the study. Six aspects of the theory (subject, mediating artefacts, community, object, sense/meaning and

outcome) will be considered. It is important to note that these aspects are aligned with the study's research questions.

3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the use of game-based learning to assess learners' English language acquisition skills in the English Access Program. It focused on teachers' perspectives and experiences, and looked at how English language games can influence learners' listening, speaking and grammar skills.

The current study used the instrumental case study research design and methods which were employed to obtain a better understanding of the role games can play, not only in teaching and learning but also in the assessment of learners. The study focused on *activating games for learning American English* in teaching and the formative assessment of learners' English language skills in the Senior Phase in high schools. To gain insight into how using game-based learning is different from the traditional methods of assessment, the study's focal point was on teachers' assessment knowledge and their participation in the English Access Program. The conceptual framework Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), inspired by the work of Barrett-Tatum (2015) was used to gauge the role of board games in formatively assessing learners' English acquisition skills. Formative assessment is an important aspect of the teaching and learning process because it can indicate whether or not constructive teaching takes place and also if learners are gaining the necessary knowledge or skills. That is why this study focused on the assessment of learners while learning is occurring. For this study, the six aspects of the theory were investigated, namely: subjects, mediating artefacts, community, object, sense/meaning and outcome.

The methodology of this study is described in this chapter. There are seven sections in Chapter 3. The research paradigm for this study is described first, followed by a discussion of the methodological approach. The methodological approach is followed by the research design and the research questions of this study. The procedures used to conduct the research, such as sampling, data gathering, and data analysis, are discussed in the next section. A description of the methodological standards that applied to this study as well as the ethical considerations that were considered, follows. The concluding section of the chapter brings the chapter to a close.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

3.2.1 Definition and importance of the research paradigm

A research paradigm is very important in the research process because it outlines a researcher's viewpoint and approach to a study. It further determines whether or not a study's research questions are answered at the end. According to Rahi (2017), research paradigms can be defined as a collection of beliefs shared by scientists, they determine how researchers view the world and go about conducting research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) further assert that research paradigms are general philosophical orientations about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study. Thus, for the purposes of this study, constructivism will be followed because this paradigm will enable the researcher to develop subjective meaning and experiences that teachers possess about game-based learning as an assessment tool for English language proficiency.

3.2.2 Constructivism

Rahi (2017) defines constructivism as a school of thought that mainly focuses on the deep understanding of a concept, and aims at exploring the understanding of the world in which people live. Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue that constructivism is based on the notion that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Furthermore, individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. Since this study aims at exploring the extent to which English games can be used in teaching and the formative assessment of learners' English language skills in the Senior Phase in high schools, a constructivist paradigm was used as it is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by individuals from their own experiences and understanding. The constructivist paradigm is therefore relevant to this study as it will enable the researcher to gain insight on the phenomenon under study through the views and experiences of participants.

To gain insight into how using game-based learning is different from the traditional methods of assessment, the study's focal point was on teachers' assessment knowledge and their participation in the English Access Program. The conceptual framework CHAT, inspired by the work of Barrett-Tatum (2015) was used to gauge the role of board games in formatively assessing learners' English acquisition skills.

Formative assessment (assessment for learning) is an important aspect of teaching and learning because it can indicate whether or not constructive teaching has taken place and also if learners are gaining the necessary knowledge or skills. That is why this study focused on assessment for learning.

3.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The current study used a case study design to conduct qualitative research. Case studies, according to Maree (2016), are in-depth investigations of specific elements of a programme, an event, or activities that are carried out individually or in groups over time. A case study of the perspectives and experiences of English Access Micro-Scholarship Program teachers in classrooms where game-based learning is employed as an assessment tool was chosen as the study's research design. It is worth noting that only one case study was used as they are more convenient, less expensive, and consume less time. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a qualitative case study is a research design that allows for the analysis of a phenomenon in its context while using a variety of data sources. The exploratory case study approach was employed in this study to ensure that the subject being investigated is not examined through a single lens, but rather via a range of lenses that will show and understand different aspects of the phenomenon. Learners' acquisition of English language abilities was investigated through the eyes of English teachers who employ board games to assess their learners' English language skills in a formative manner.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The exploratory qualitative case study design was used to address the research questions and acquire empirical data. When little is known about the phenomena or topic being studied, an exploratory study is conducted, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018). In an exploratory research case study, the researcher tries to understand participants by listening to them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The exploratory case study was employed as it seeks to investigate a phenomenon within its real-life context and can be used when researchers seek to gain familiarity with an existing phenomenon and acquire new insight into it (Hassan, 2024). Although extensive research studies have been conducted on the impact that game-based learning has on teaching and learning English as a second or additional language, not many research studies have been done on the possibility of

employing game-based learning for formative assessment purposes. This study sought to understand and describe how game-based learning can be used to assess learners' English acquisition skills formatively.

There are several advantages to exploratory research. Using an exploratory qualitative case study reduces costs (Lelissa, 2018). Exploratory research assists in the development of a research project's foundation, which can lead to other research investigations., The exploratory approach to research, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018) can enable other researchers to find potential causes for a problem, which can then be further researched to find out which is the most likely cause.

There are advantages to employing an exploratory qualitative case study as the research design of a study. According to Menon (2019), using a qualitative exploratory case study makes it possible to understand perceptions and is usually focused on a small sample population, making it feasible to collect in-depth and rich data. A researcher can make changes to the study as it progresses because exploratory case studies are also characterised by flexibility. Furthermore, they are cost-effective and can assist in laying a foundation for further research to be conducted. Although there are numerous benefits of employing a qualitative exploratory case study, the constraints of using it as the research design must be examined before employing it. This method of research typically uses a smaller sample, meaning that the results cannot be accurately interpreted for a broad population (Lelissa, 2018). It is vital to note that the exploratory case study approach was appropriate for this study because the researcher's goal was to learn about teachers' viewpoints on the extent to which board games can be employed in English classes to formatively assess learners' English acquisition skills.

3.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study attempted to address the main research question:

The main question: *What are teachers' experiences of using game-based learning as a tool to assess English First Additional Language proficiency skills?*

The semi-structured individual interviews were analysed in this study to ascertain the extent to which board games can be used as assessment tools to assess learners' English language skills. The data collected helped to gain in-depth insight into teachers' views and experiences on the use of games to assess learners' English language skills.

Sub-question 1: What measures are put in place by the English Access Program to improve teachers' knowledge of using game-based learning as assessment tools?

In an attempt to answer sub-question 1, semi-structured interviews were used. This specific question helped to gain an in-depth understanding of the role played by continuous teacher or professional development on teachers' improved knowledge of assessment, particularly, assessment through game-based learning.

Sub-question 2: How can the use of game-based learning assist teachers in formatively assessing learners' English language acquisition skills?

Classroom observations, semi-structured individual interviews and researcher field notes were used in an attempt to answer sub-question 2. In order to comprehend the teaching and learning environment created by the use of games for teaching and learning, particularly the acquisition of English language skills, classroom observations were used as a data collection method. This specific question helped me gain more understanding of teachers' experiences of using board games to assess learners' English acquisition skills formatively.

Sub-question 3: How are learners' English listening, speaking and language structures and conventions skills assessed?

Data collected through semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and researcher field notes assisted in gaining more insight into the different assessment approaches teachers employ to gauge learners' listening, speaking, and language structures and conventions skills.

Sub-question 4: How do language games influence learner's listening, speaking, and grammar skills?

In order to determine the extent to which the learners' progressive performance was influenced or not by English language games, when listening, speaking and grammar skills were addressed in the classroom, data was collected through semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and researcher field notes.

3.6 RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods can be defined as the techniques a researcher employs to conduct research (Walliman, 2021). To answer the research questions, the research methods must be relevant and appropriate for the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out that research methods should guide the researcher on the following points: participants in the study, research sites, data collection methods and data analysis. The research methodologies employed in this study are described in this section. Section 3.6.1 outlines the sample for the current study while the methods used in the analysis and interpretation of data are discussed in Section 3.6.2.

3.6.1 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to gather data for this investigation. This strategy can be employed when sampling is carried out with a specific goal in mind. Purposive sampling participants are chosen because they are thought to represent qualities relevant to the research issue at hand (Maree, 2016). Also, purposefully selecting participants and research sites for the study helps the researcher get a better understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a result, the researcher makes decisions about which participants should be chosen. CHAT, which was discussed in Chapter 2 (Barrett-Tatum, 2015) guided the study's sample selection. Participating teachers were purposefully selected so that they could meet the needs of the study and also provide the study with the best information.

3.6.1.1 The participants

The participants for this study were purposefully selected from the English First Additional Language teachers in the Gert Sibande District in the Mpumalanga province. The teachers were purposively selected to take part in the study because of their extensive experience in teaching English as a first additional language in grades 8 to 12. Secondly, the participants were also selected based on the notion that they would provide most value to the study because of the experience they also possess in working in the English Access Program, where the English language

games are used for teaching English language proficiency skills. Seeing that the teachers are acquainted with CAPS as well as the English language games, the researcher saw fit for the teachers to take part in the study so that they could share their personal experiences and insights about the use of English language games as assessment tools to assess learners' English language proficiency skills. It is critical to note that the teachers were hired in the English Access Program after undergoing a rigorous selection process. These teachers had to first apply, after which they competed in an open, merit-based competition. Following that, the region's Access Coordinator interviewed them for ultimate selection. The participating teachers were therefore chosen because they all underwent this selection process.

The group of four English Access Program teachers who teach grades 8 to 12 were selected to participate in video conferencing semi-structured interviews for those from School B, and face-to-face interviews and audio recordings for those from School A. Verbatim transcriptions were used as methods of documentation as the researcher was interested in exploring the role of English language games as assessment tools for English proficiency skills. To gather additional data, classroom observations were employed. A total number of four lessons conducted by Participants 2 and 3 were observed. Both teachers conducted two lessons each. Furthermore, the lessons conducted by the participating teachers addressed the skills of listening and speaking as well as language structures and conventions; game-based learning was employed during all four lessons.

3.6.1.2 The research sites

Concerning the research sites, two schools (Schools A and B) where the teachers work, were also selected purposively because they hosted or are still hosting the English Access Program. Both schools are in the Gert Sibande District and fall under two different circuits. School A (a township school) is in the Msukaligwa 1 circuit, whereas School B (a rural school) is in the Breyten circuit. School A is in Ermelo and hosted the EAP in the past, whereas School B is outside Ermelo and is currently hosting the program. The teachers described as Participants 1 and 3 are from School A, while Participants 2 and 4 are from School B. Research sites were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study.

The details of the participants and research sites are provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Summary of the sample of participants

Case	No. of participants	Gender	Age	Teaching experience in English FAL	Teaching experience in the English Access Program
School A	2	Female Female	36 23	10 years 1 year	3 years 2 months
School B	2	Male Female	38 63	12 years More than 20 years	2 years 8 years

Table 3.1 gives a summary of the selected participants from the two schools. Four teachers took part in the study; three female and one male.

School A consisted of two participants, the first female participant was aged 36 with 10 years of teaching experience in the GET and FET phases. The teacher is currently teaching grades 10 and 11, and was employed by the English Access Program for three years. The second participant from School A was a female who was 23 years old and had one year of experience in the GET phase teaching English as a first additional language. Currently, the teacher teaches grades 8 and 9. The teacher has one year of teaching experience and was designated to teach in the English Access Program. She had worked in the program for two months. This female teacher is the least experienced teacher and was included in the study because there are only two teachers working in the English Access Program in School A. In school B there were two participants. Participant 1 at School B was a 38-year-old male with 12 years of experience teaching learners in grades 8 through 12. The teacher had two years of experience in the English Access Program and is now a grade 12 English and Life Orientation teacher. The second participant in School B was a 63-year-old female who had taught English and IsiZulu to learners in grades 8 through 12 for more than 20 years. This participant has experience serving as a subject advisor and a teacher. She started a private school, where she is presently the principal. She had eight years of experience as a teacher and service provider in the English Access Program.

3.6.2 Data collection strategies

In qualitative research studies, researchers apply multiple sources of data to study and understand the phenomenon that they are studying (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Collected qualitative data usually is written text or data gathered through audio tapes from individual face-to-face interviews and observations (Ranney et al., 2015). Likewise, Creswell and Creswell (2018) argued that using multiple sources of data in qualitative research such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual information instead of relying on a single data source enhances the trustworthiness of a study's findings. It was for this reason that data collection methods were thoroughly selected, designed and adapted for this study in order to support and complement the study. This study aimed at determining how well “*English Activate Games*” might be employed as tools for assessing learners’ English language proficiency.

To examine if there was a match between the data acquired through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and researcher field notes, this study used a variety of data-collecting methods including individual semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and researcher field notes. According to Maree (2016), a qualitative study's conclusions are more reliable when the data were collected utilising a range of data collection methods. Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that triangulation, which is the collecting of data using a variety of sources, such as interviews, observations, document analysis, or researcher field notes can increase the credibility of a study's conclusions. For this study, triangulation was employed to strengthen reliability. This study therefore included a variety of data collection methods, such as semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and researcher field notes. With the use of board games, the researcher was able to explore teachers’ opinions, experiences, and knowledge of formative assessment in a classroom where English was taught as an additional language.

Table 3.2: Summary of the data collection methods and instruments employed in the study

Conceptual framework	Research questions	Data collection method	Analysis
Community is at the centre of the process of making and interpreting the meaning and all forms of learning, communicating and acting. (FOR MAIN, 1 AND 2)	What are teachers' experiences of using game-based learning as assessment tools to assess EFAL skills?	The semi-structured interview	Thematic data analysis
	What measures are put in place by the English Access Program to improve teachers' knowledge of using game-based learning as assessment tools?	Semi-structured interview	Thematic data analysis
	How can the use of game-based learning assist teachers in formatively assessing learners' English language acquisition skills?	Semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and researcher field notes	Thematic data analysis
<p>Learning occurs through collective activities that are purposefully conducted around a common object.</p> <p>Humans make, use and adapt tools of all kinds to learn and communicate (Lim & Li, 2022).</p>	<p>How are learners' English listening and speaking, and language structures and conventions skills assessed?</p> <p>How do language games influence learners' listening, speaking, and grammar skills?</p>	Semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and researcher field notes	Thematic data analysis

As can be seen from Table 3.2, there are three main claims provided by the CHAT theory about the extent to which the use of mediating artefacts can transform or enhance the learning process.

3.6.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

As previously mentioned, semi-structured interviews, researcher field notes, and classroom observations were used to gather data for this study. Individual interviews were conducted with a purposely selected sample of participants for the researcher to obtain data that would address all of the research questions. The two face-to-face semi-structured interviews and two video conferencing semi-structured interviews were deemed a suitable data collection strategy for this study in order to comprehend the phenomena being studied. Research supports the idea that knowledge is formed between people in interviews, frequently through conversations (Cohen et al., 2018). Second, in an interview, two or more persons exchange their perspectives on a topic of mutual interest, and they also emphasise the social context of the research findings (Cohen et al., 2018). In order for the researcher to understand the phenomenon under investigation, interviews were used to collect data so the researcher could interact with the participants. The purpose of the interviews was to learn about teachers' experiences using the *Activate board games for teaching American English* to teach and assess learners' English language abilities. The researcher also wanted to learn about the benefits and constraints of bringing game-based learning into the classroom setting. It is important to note that different participants were asked the same interview questions to learn about their different perceptions and experiences. To avoid interrupting teachers while they were teaching learners, all of the interviews were conducted after school hours. The researcher aimed to investigate the extent to which teachers can use the *Activate board games* to teach and formatively assess learners' English language skills by conducting interviews. The researcher also wanted to learn more about the advantages and drawbacks of integrating game-based learning into an English FAL classroom context.

3.6.2.2 Classroom observations

Classroom observations are a convenient way of systematically noting people, events, behaviours, settings, artefacts and routines. Observations were relevant for this study because the researcher wanted to observe and record the occurrences of learners' classroom behaviors and routines. Moreover, the researcher also aimed at observing the classroom setting when board games are used to teach and assess learners' English language skills. Instead of relying on reported data and second-

hand descriptions, the researcher was able to collect first-hand, live data from genuinely occurring social events through classroom observations (Cohen et al., 2018). Researcher field notes were written and recorded during and after participant observations in the classroom setting. Classroom observations helped the researcher to close the gap between the claims made by participating teachers during the semi-structured interviews and the actual behaviour of the participants in the classroom setting. The observation schedule was designed beforehand as a guide on what to observe during the lessons presented. A total of four observations took place after school when the teachers conducted English extra classes for the English Access Program. The observation schedule is attached.

3.6.2.3 Researcher field notes

Another form of data collection method employed in this study was researcher field notes. In order to confirm that what the participating teachers mentioned during the interviews was reflected in the lessons they taught, and before I could examine the extent to which English language games could be utilised as a formative assessment tool, the use of field notes was required. According to Glen et al. (2014), using interviews alone to obtain data does not result in sufficient data, which is why three methodologies were used to gather in-depth knowledge on the topic under study. According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), field notes can be used as a way of documenting the required contextual information because they ensure rich context continues beyond the researcher. It is imperative to point out that before observations, the researcher made a list of the aspects of the lesson to note. These included: learners, teachers, the classroom setting, lessons and how the games were incorporated into the lessons.

3.6.3 Research procedures

In order for the researcher to become familiar with the guidelines of the games and the relevant or particular language skills that each game addressed, the researcher first has to obtain and study all the *Activate board games* for teaching American English. The researcher also evaluated the criteria used in giving learners feedback after board games were used to teach and assess learners' English language skills. The Activate board games for teaching American English are a set of board games that teachers can use to assist learners to practise a variety of vocabulary and grammatical patterns. Because the games cover several basic English vocabularies

and grammatical patterns such as parts of speech, tenses and sentence construction to mention a few, using them in an English first additional language class is feasible. This, therefore, means that the games are flexible enough to be used with CAPS.

Examples of the games include the game “Guess what?” which is a card game that is used in the classroom and provides different opportunities for learners to practise making descriptions in English. In this example, the learner describes something by giving his or her group mates descriptive clues. The game is thought-provoking because learners may think something is easy to describe, but if a learner is not a native English speaker, it might be challenging and exciting to describe shoelaces, for instance. The second game is “Word bricks”. This game exposes learners to various words written in English. These can be nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns and so on. Learners are given these words, which are then used as building blocks to complete phrases and sentences. The game can be used to teach sentence construction, vocabulary and grammatical patterns.

The third game is “Picture this’”. This game focuses mainly on storytelling. It is a card game as well, which has pictures and learners are supposed to tell a story using the picture they get. The story does not have to be a learner’s own story, but they have to formulate a story using a picture that they see and the next learner who plays, builds up the story that the first learner already started. This is a group effort to make up one story and it also builds on learners’ memories because they have to remember what the first learner said so that they can build on that.

In addition to what the participating teachers said regarding their experiences utilising English games as formative assessment tools and the actual events that occurred during the classes, the researcher also used observations. For this study, four lessons which lasted 60 minutes each were observed wherein language structures and conventions, and listening and speaking skills, were addressed through game-based learning. Two skills were under investigation in the current study, hence lessons addressing them were observed. As the participating teachers integrated the games with what the EAP curriculum stipulated on the specific days, they were in charge of determining how many lessons were observed. Participants

2 and 3 were teachers who conducted the lessons observed. Further, classroom observations were conducted to see how teachers used game-based learning as a form of assessment during lessons. Smit and Onwuegbuzie (2018) define observation as a method of data collection that requires systematic and meaningful use of one's senses, particularly looking and listening.

Maree (2016) argues that observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without questioning or communicating with them. The method of focused observation was adopted in this investigation. With this type of observation, certain entities are judged unnecessary and can be neglected in this form of observation, and the researcher often focuses on well-defined, observable entities (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). The lesson conducted by Participant 2 addressed the topics: vocabulary building, tenses and responding to open-ended questions. Parts of speech were taught incidentally during the second lesson. The participant focused on the skills of listening and speaking as well as language structures and conventions. Participant 3 also conducted two lessons which focused on vocabulary building and grammatical patterns. The participant addressed the listening and speaking, and language structures and conventions skills as well. The four specific lessons were observed because game-based learning was employed. The researcher focused on whether and how the teachers linked the lesson to the learners' prior knowledge or experience, and how the teachers unpacked the rules of each game when the lesson objective was introduced and skills assessed. The observations were carried out for the researcher to gain a variety of perspectives on game-based learning and the extent to which it may be utilised to formatively assess learners' English language skills.

3.6.4 Data analysis

Maree (2016) claims that qualitative data analysis aims to determine how participants make sense of phenomena by exploring their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences. Similarly, Ngulube (2015) asserts that qualitative data interpretation focuses on transforming raw data by looking for, assessing, recognising, coding, mapping, exploring and describing patterns, trends, themes, and categories in the raw data so that it is possible to

interpret them and provide their underlying meanings . This section will specify the steps followed by the researcher in analysing the data collected. The researcher's objective in this study was to examine and extract meaning from various records of evidence to discover constructs such as dominating, significant, and frequent themes, occurrences, patterns, and trends. This is a key step in providing explanations rather than just accounts of what happened during the interviews and observations. Interview transcripts and field notes of the researcher were also analysed.

3.6.4.1 Interview analysis

Data was analysed to obtain information that was relevant to the study's research questions. Thematic analysis was used to evaluate the qualitative descriptive data for this study. Thematic analysis was used to uncover, analyse, and summarise patterns and themes within the data to give detailed and rich data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Through thematic data analysis, the researcher read the data by getting a general impression of the information received by reviewing and rereading all of the data collected during the interviews. The researcher was able to detect patterns or themes of a similar type by using thematic content analysis. Thorough transcription of the interviews ensured that the researcher could code across the entire dataset. The transcription of data assisted the researcher to familiarise herself with the data so that it could be labelled according to themes.

Interview data were analysed so that the researcher could create codes. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe coding as the process of classifying data by grouping text or picture segments together and inserting a term that corresponds to a category in the margins. The researcher initially employed opening coding, reviewing the data to identify themes. To further analyse the data, the researchers' field notes, observations and semi-structured interviews were all transcribed. As data was being gathered, the researcher began to analyse it. The researcher studied the first interview transcripts, taking thorough notes and making comments to organise them into topics and categories. The researcher was able to introduce order into the collection of concepts and ideas she gathered from the participants by carefully reviewing the data. Sub-themes were discovered when the researcher examined the data several times, and they were then linked to the relevant topic.

Finally, the researcher examined the interview transcripts and field notes again, grouping related notes and remarks. This was done to confirm that the categories chosen matched the research goals. The information gathered from the investigation was then compared to the literature in an iterative process.

Further, the collected data was also linked to the study's conceptual framework in the following manner: subjects who are English FAL teachers were interviewed so that the extent to which game-based learning can be used as an assessment tool could be investigated. Mediating artefacts were the *Activate games for learning American English*, which the study sought to establish as appropriate assessment tools. The community was a stakeholder involved in the teaching process. The object was the English language which the learners who were observed take as a first additional language. Sense or meaning is how learners comprehend, gather information, gain an understanding of the information and then use the understanding to complete any given activity. Lastly, the outcome was the results in the form of progress that learners make when games are used as tools for formatively assessing their English language skills.

3.6.4.2 Classroom observation and researcher field notes analysis

The researcher also analysed researcher field notes taken during the observations. Data collected through semi-structured interviews and class observations, together with the field notes, were then integrated. The data was arranged in categories and themes so that similarities and differences could be highlighted. The researcher then consolidated and interpreted the derived patterns and themes. Through the use of an Excel spreadsheet, 21 codes were generated from the data collection methods employed and three themes were created from the codes. The themes are:

- The benefits of employing games for teaching and learning;
- Continuous professional/teacher development through games-based training; and
- Games can broaden assessment practices.
- Games make it possible to assess multiple skills.

3.7 METHODOLOGICAL NORMS

This section will discuss how the quality and credibility of this qualitative study were enhanced. This includes establishing whether the researcher's analysis of the gathered data matched the participants' experiences through trustworthiness (Anney, 2014). According to Golafshani (2003, p. 601), trustworthiness is at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability. The level of confidence in data, interpretation, and procedures employed to assure the quality of a study is known as trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016) Making a qualitative study as trustworthy as possible is essential because it produces findings that are more credible and defensible (Golafshani, 2003). Similarly, credibility is necessary to back up the claim that the researcher's findings are significant. (Maree, 2016). Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are the four standards of quality that ensure a study's reliability. The four criteria were defined as follows:

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to confidence in the data. It entails determining if the research results constitute a credible conceptual interpretation of the data obtained from the participants' original data (Universal Teacher, n.d.). Credibility is seen to exist or be ensured when research findings concur with the opinions of the population being studied. In order to compare and contrast the different findings that emerged during each data-collecting technique and draw conclusions that were supported by the data, semi-structured interviews, observations, and researcher field notes were employed as the data collection methods for this study.

3.7.2 Transferability

The degree to which the findings of qualitative research may be applied to other settings or contexts that are comparable can be referred to as transferability, according to Nieuwenhuis (2016). The transferability of this study was enhanced by providing a full description of the research setting and the essential assumptions. It is crucial to note that the findings from this study may be applied to other contexts or settings as long as the same settings or contexts are used, as the sample size for this study was quite small and was purposefully chosen.

3.7.3 Dependability

Connelly (2016) defines dependability as the extent to which qualitative research studies may be repeated in similar contexts or settings with different participants and yet provide similar results. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2018) define dependability as the consistency of a study's findings. The researcher used the same data-collecting methods for all four participants, asked them the same questions, and ensured that their responses were consistent in order to establish dependability for this study. The study's participants were also observed and interviewed in the same settings.

3.7.4 Confirmability

According to Maree (2016), confirmability is the extent to which participants, rather than the researcher's bias, motive, or interest, affect the conclusions of a qualitative study. Triangulation was used to enhance confirmability in this study. Also, the findings of this study echo the views and perceptions expressed by the participants throughout the discussions. The researcher also provided adequate quotations from transcribed interviews. The participants' direct quotations were provided as evidence for themes which emerged in the study. Second, the quotes were used to show that the conclusions were derived from the collected data rather than what the researcher believed to have occurred or arisen.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

In terms of complying with ethical guidelines, the researcher first applied for and received an ethical clearance certificate from the University of Pretoria. The Mpumalanga Department of Education granted the researcher permission to conduct research at two high schools. The school principals were sent letters inviting teachers from their respective schools to participate in the study and requesting permission to interview the teachers about the extent to which the *Activate board games for teaching American English* can be used as assessment tools to assess learners' English language skills. After the requests were approved, the researcher wrote invitation letters to the participants, including teachers and learners, along with consent forms (Appendix A and B). In terms of complying with ethical guidelines, the researcher first applied for and received an ethical clearance certificate from the University of Pretoria.

The researcher ensured that the participants were aware of the study's objective through letters that also included consent forms (Annexure C). They were also told who would see the research report so that they could make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. The researcher was thereby ensuring that the potential participants had enough information to make informed decisions by doing so. The participants were informed that participation is completely voluntary and that they can withdraw at any point before reporting with no repercussions. In addition, the researcher ensured that participants were treated with respect at all stages of the study. The participants were also assured of their anonymity because the data would be reported using pseudonyms.

3.9 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the methodology employed to conduct the exploratory qualitative case study research. The study focused mainly on teachers' perspectives and experiences of using game-based learning as a tool to assess learners' English acquisition skills formatively in the English Access Program. Moreover, the study also looked at how English language games can influence learners' listening, speaking and grammar skills. This chapter described how the research was performed to attempt to answer the research questions.

This study was based on the constructivist paradigm, which is embedded in the assumption that new knowledge is acquired when learners interact and experience the world around them through the knowledge they already possess. The paradigm was relevant in the study because GBL encourages learners to learn by being actively involved in the learning process.

The study followed a case study design to conduct qualitative research. The case study was explorative in nature as the phenomenon of GBL as an EFAL assessment tool was studied through various lenses.

The research questions and relevant data-collecting methods were described since this study sought to answer both the primary research question and secondary research questions. Purposive sampling was used in this study and the participants chosen represented the qualities relevant to this study.

To gather qualitative data, researcher field notes, semi-structured individual

interviews, and classroom observations were all employed. After gathering the descriptive qualitative data, it was then thematically analysed, with patterns and themes identified, analysed and reported. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were the strategies employed to improve the study's validity. The ethical guidelines the researcher adhered to in this study are also outlined in this chapter.

4 CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the main findings of the study, which explores the extent to which English language games can be used as assessment tools to assess learners' English proficiency skills. The findings of the study are presented as themes which will address the study's research questions. The themes are divided into sub-themes that analyse the coded data into categories. The data was collected from two urban area secondary schools, one of which has hosted the English Access Program (EAP), with the other still currently hosting the program. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and a total of four educators participated. Apart from their experience of working as English high school teachers, the participants have worked or are still working in the EAP. Pseudonyms were used when referring to the participating teachers. In addition, the data collected through my field notes and classroom observations was arranged in categories and themes so that similarities and differences could be highlighted. I then consolidated and interpreted the derived patterns and themes. After that, data collected from the interviews and the four lesson observations was integrated.

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews, researcher field notes, as well as the classroom observations. The qualitative data collected are introduced in relation to research questions to which participants responded.

4.2 THEMES EMERGING FROM THE DATA

In this section, Table 4.1 presents the research questions with the themes and sub-themes which emerged from the data. The themes are linked to the research questions as well as the study's conceptual framework, which has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Table 4.1: Research questions and themes linked to the study’s conceptual framework

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	THEMES AND SUB-THEMES	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	DATA COLLECTION METHOD
<p><u>Main research question</u> What are teachers’ experiences of using game-based learning as assessment tools to assess EFAL skills?</p>	<p>Theme 1: The benefits of employing games for teaching and learning.</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: learner participation and involvement.</p> <p>Sub-theme 2: Different learning styles/ abilities are accommodated.</p> <p>Sub-theme 3: Achieving learning objectives and incidental learning occurs.</p>	SUBJECT: Teachers	Semi-structured interviews
<p>What measures are put in place by the English Access Program to improve teachers’ knowledge of using game-based learning as assessment tools?</p>	<p>Theme 2: Continuous professional/ teacher development.</p> <p>- Teachers are better informed on current assessment methods through exposure to current research.</p>	SUBJECT: Teachers	Semi-structured interview
<p>How can the use of game-based learning assist teachers to formatively assess learners’ English language acquisition skills?</p>	<p>Theme 3: Games can broaden assessment practices.</p> <p>Sub-theme 4: Games create more alignment between curriculum and assessment.</p> <p>Sub-theme 5: Games as a new approach to assessment that is less restrictive and intimidating than traditional assessments.</p> <p>Sub-theme 6: Games-based assessments yield authentic results because effective learning takes place, not memorisation.</p> <p>Sub-theme 7: Formative assessment is administered through different forms of activities.</p>	MEDIATING ARTIFACTS: Language board games.	Semi-structured interview, lesson observations and researcher field notes
<p>How are learners’ English listening and speaking, and language structures and conventions skills, assessed?</p>	<p>Theme 4: Games make it possible to assess multiple skills.</p>	MEDIATING ARTIFACTS: Language board games	Semi-structured interview, lesson observations and researcher field notes

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	THEMES AND SUB-THEMES	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	DATA COLLECTION METHOD
How do language games influence learners' listening, speaking and grammar skills?	<p>Sub-theme 8: Games as facilitating assessment: useful for group work, conventions and differential assessment.</p> <p>Sub-theme 9: Administering baseline assessments to evaluate learners' level of proficiency.</p>		

As can be seen in Table 4.1, there are four main themes which centre around the convenience of using games for teaching and learning purposes, continuous professional or teacher development through games-based training, the extent to which games can widen assessment practices, and how games make it possible to assess multiple skills.

4.3 PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The participants were asked to state the number of years of their EAP teaching experience. The coding was as follows for the participants: Participants 1 – 3 are teachers and Participant 4 is a service provider. I identified three themes in relation to the use of English language board games as assessment tools as well as one theme related to continuous teacher development. These are presented in the next section.

4.3.1 Theme 1: The benefits of employing board games for teaching and learning

Concerning the use of English language board games for teaching and learning, the study's findings show that all participants advocated the use of board games in class to teach English language skills. Participant 2 said: *The games create a sense of freedom, a playful place where learning takes place voluntarily. It's not forced on anyone.*

The participants pointed out that in their experiences of using English language board games for teaching and learning, they have observed numerous benefits associated with the use of such games. The participants explained that effective lessons require thorough planning, and that through the use of games, setting achievable learning outcomes is facilitated. Participant 2 said: *Through games, a*

conducive learning space is created, which then lifts up the anxiety associated with traditional forms of assessment. The data shows that through game-based learning, the teaching and assessing of English language skills such as listening and speaking, language structures and conventions, and reading and viewing, is possible. Participant 4 said: *So, I think reading comprehension really is one outcome that is mostly achieved and because there is a lot of speaking and listening to each other in the games and, the learners themselves practice a lot of their listening and speaking skills in the games. So, assessment of multiple skills through games becomes easier.* However, with regards to writing and presenting, some participants indicated that it is challenging for learners to write creatively while playing the games. Hence, writing and presenting was identified as a skill difficult to assess through English language board games. As a result, the participants revealed the importance of using different forms of assessments in order to assess learners as a whole. Assessing a learner as a whole person implies that the intellectual, physical and emotional abilities of a learner are taken into consideration.

According to Wolf et al. (2008), using different forms of assessment is of paramount importance in order to accommodate learners' different learning styles. Teachers ought to make use of sound, versatile assessments in order to validly measure learners' English language proficiency as well as content knowledge and skills. Furthermore, because learners have varying degrees of language proficiency, different assessment forms should be employed. Using different forms of assessment assists teachers in understanding learners' progress in numerous ways. Four of the participants indicated that incorporating both traditional and game-based learning assessments is beneficial as a wide range of skills can be assessed simultaneously. Participant 4 said that: *I wish I can change our curriculum, early and classify the way we assess our learners.* The participant was referring to the fact that traditional forms of assessment are restrictive and leave out learners with different learning preferences, and abilities.

Another participant, a former teacher (Participant 1), mentioned that using different forms of assessments such as formative, summative and diagnostic assessments is one of the ways that English language skills were assessed. In addition, much

attention was on using games to assess learners' multiple English language skills simultaneously.

Next, I discuss the sub-themes that emerged from Theme 1. All sub-themes concern the benefits of employing English language board games for both teaching and assessment purposes. Sub-theme 1 refers to improved learner participation and/or involvement enhanced by the use of board games. The second sub-theme concerns the different learning styles and abilities accommodated by game-based learning. The third sub-theme revealed that achieving learning objectives and incidental learning occurs when game-based learning is used. A discussion on each follows below.

4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Improved learner participation/ involvement

A more learner-centred approach to teaching and learning is characterised by learner participation and involvement. When a learner-centred teaching approach is employed, a teacher's role is not that of being a provider of information and knowledge. Rather, when this approach to teaching and learning is used, teachers become facilitators of the learning process. In this approach, there is an increased level of learner engagement and involvement, and learners are the ones who actively drive the learning process. One of the disadvantages of using game-based learning is that learners tend to focus more on the game play instead of the learning process. Nevertheless, learning occurs naturally or voluntarily through board games, leading to the natural practise of English language skills. This practise of English language skills was revealed in the classroom observations as well as by the participants.

Data collected from the lesson observations reveal that during game-play, learners were actively involved because they asked the teacher questions when they did not understand. For instance, one learner asked if there was a difference between sports and games, another asked what a tropical island was while another learner sought clarity about how the 30 seconds timer worked. A lot of interaction among the learners was also observed. It is vital to point out that when teachers thoroughly facilitated learners during game-play, good teacher-learner relations were observed, learners were relaxed and comfortable in asking teachers questions.

Furthermore, the lessons were characterised by a lot of laughter during game-play which shows that learners enjoyed learning while playing. Participant 2 was of the opinion that when playing the games, learners are more involved and that playing and learning occurs at the same time. In this way, learners gain knowledge in a more relaxed setting. In addition, Participant 3 pointed out that because teachers are facilitators of the learning process during game-play, they enhance learner participation by assigning learners different leadership roles.

4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Different learning styles/ abilities are accommodated

Although the traditional direct teaching approach still has an effect on how learners learn, it is characterised by less learner interaction, engagement and involvement because the main focus is on the teacher as a source of information and knowledge (Dunlop et al., 2020). This study's findings reveal that employing game-based learning in South African classes could create the possibility of involving most learning preferences and abilities, thus increasing the degree to which learners take part in the learning process.

Participant 1 perceived today's 21st century learners as different from learners who were taught in previous generations. According to this participant, 21st century learners are exposed to numerous sources of new knowledge, process information differently, and might be more inquisitive than learners from previous generations. This then calls for such learners to be taught differently. Furthermore, today's learners are exposed to more and different types of technology when compared to previous decades. To reiterate this thought, Participant 2 said: *If the games can be introduced in the traditional classroom setting, every learner would enjoy learning, rather than having a learner that's clever who will always participate when questions are asked but having that one learner who doesn't understand anything.* The participant spoke in reference to the ability of games to accommodate different types of learners, both passive and outspoken learners.

4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Achieving learning objectives and incidental learning occurs

Although English language skills can be taught through structured instruction, learning of English skills can also take place incidentally. This type of informal learning occurs accidentally or unplanned through the use of other activities and

mostly occurs through observations, repetitions, interaction with others as well as through problem-solving (Webb et al., 2013).

During the second lesson conducted by Participant 3, I observed incidental learning taking place. The objective of the lesson was to teach learners how to construct grammatically correct sentences. The teacher began the lesson by writing ten sentences on the board, with some constructed correctly, while others had errors. Learners were then supposed to identify sentences which were constructed correctly as well as identify the mistakes from those which were not correctly constructed. For example, learners were given the sentences *'My ball in the bag'* and *'He came my house at noon'*. When asked about what was incorrect about the sentences, learners were able to state that the helping verb *'is'* was missing from the first sentence. Furthermore, the preposition *'to'* was missing in the second sentence. The teacher further asked in which parts of speech the words falls in. Some learners were not familiar with the parts of speech, so the teacher had to unpack the nine parts of speech. This is a good example of incidental learning because although the lesson's objective was teaching grammar, particularly sentence construction, learners were also taught about the parts of speech.

Participant 4 gave an elaboration of teaching incidentally. The participant stated that: *A teacher can conduct a lesson on listening comprehension by leading learners in reading of a text while learners listen. In this lesson, although the teacher's ultimate learning objective is so that learners listen for comprehension, the learning of words pronunciation may take effect incidentally.*

Furthermore, achieving learning goals or objectives through the use of game-based learning becomes likely if games are not only for enjoyment and fun, but the main objective is for effective learning to occur.

In the next section, I discuss Theme 2. The theme is in relation to the significance of continuous professional teacher development. It discusses how teachers are better acquainted with current assessment methods through exposure to current research. A discussion on this theme follows.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Continuous professional/ teacher development through games-based training

Professional development is considered to be a fundamental feature in amplifying the teaching and learning process to ensure effective learning takes place. It enhances teacher professionalism and quality, and ensures that learners' changing needs are met (Al Asmari, 2013). Furthermore, continuous professional development allows teachers to learn and apply new skills in the classroom.

The data collected through the observations shows that teachers who perceive continuous professional development as an important process for their own growth are not as intimidated by the diverse needs in their classrooms. Instead, teachers are encouraged by the evolving learners' needs to continuously improve themselves. Through the EAP's implementation of the games-based system, teachers are trained so that they are acquainted with the games. However, it is imperative to point out that it is not the use of games which contributed to the teachers' professional development, but rather the EAP's training. Participant 1 perceived that: *The EAP continues to train teachers on games-based assessment and teaching methodologies. And there are also pen pals with other teachers from around the world. There are webinars that teachers join that are presented by other teachers from around the world.* Moreover, the participant argued that continuous teacher development equips teachers on how to incorporate game-based learning with English First Additional Language lessons.

The EAP teacher training promotes the enhancement of teachers' skills as well as allowing learners to experience different teaching styles in the classroom. Furthermore, continuous training enables teachers to learn and employ new skills in the classroom. Participant 2 stated that the program creates opportunities for a system of collaborative learning for teachers related to the games. Also, teachers get to be trained on how to employ learner-centred teaching approaches wherein learners are given a platform to participate actively in the learning process. The participant further said: *The program has helped me a lot because we get to learn how to deliver productive lessons and also to see that we are achieving set goals.*

These findings were supported by the data collected through classroom observations. It was noted that the longer a teacher had worked with the games, the easier it is for the teacher to use the games and integrate the curriculum. To elaborate, during lessons conducted by Participant 2, who possesses two years' experience of employing games in the classroom, the games were accurately integrated with the learning outcomes of teaching learners about the part of speech *adjectives*. Furthermore, the teacher has attended workshops and other training opportunities hosted by the program. These extensive opportunities were however not the case with the lessons conducted by Participant 3, who at the time had only 2 months' experience of working in the EAP and working with the games. This teacher was still to attend the first workshop and training.

Research findings related to teaching theories and assessment methods accurate for the 21st century learner are an important aspect of effective teaching and learning process. Teachers exposed to research findings can be informed on what methods or approaches work, why they work, assist with proper decisions and actions, help with the construction of a range of teaching and assessment skills to deal with what is unexpected among other things. To reiterate this point, Participant 1 said: *Teachers from around the world meet regularly to discuss the latest theories in education, to discuss latest findings, what seems to be working well in other countries, what can be incorporated and localised.* The teacher further stated that teachers share their experiences on the use of games and other current teaching and learning theories that are being implemented in education to meet the needs of 21st century learners.

The next section discusses Theme 3 and the sub-themes which arose from it. In Theme 3, I discuss how board games can improve assessment so that it is far-reaching and not only standardised. Sub-theme 4 relates to the extent to which games create an alignment between curriculum and assessment. Sub-theme 5 focuses on how game-based learning as a new assessment approach is less restrictive and intimidating than traditional assessments. Sub-theme 6 discusses how games-based assessments yield authentic results because effective learning takes place, not memorisation. Lastly, sub-theme 7 unpacks how formative

assessment is administered through different form of activities in game-based learning.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Board games can improve assessment by broadening it

It is important for teachers to employ diverse teaching methods and assessment strategies in order to accommodate diverse learning needs of the 21st century learner. These diverse strategies can assist in ensuring the ultimate engagement of learners in the learning process.

Furthermore, with the ever-changing learning needs of 21st century learners, assessment should be designed for the individual and should thus speak to that individual learner's level of understanding. The use of board games is regarded as a new and practical approach to assess different learning preferences and abilities. Two participants in the study (Participants 1 and 3), indicated that board games help facilitate effective assessment of different learners. Participant 3 perceived that: *The games really work and are beneficial in improving assessment because then assessment becomes broad.* The participant was referring to how assessment should not be standardised, that every learner should be assessed differently at their own level. Assessing learners at their own level is a strategy of giving learners an opportunity to do well.

Reiterating this point, Participant 3 claimed that administering assessments and scoring of learners in an assessment should not be standardised as learners are different. Although the participant made this claim, one can argue that standardised assessments, which are characterised by scoring or grading are still a common form of assessment used to gather evidence of skills or knowledge acquired by learners. Participant 3 further alluded that: *Assessment is not a 'one size fits all' process, assessment should be based on individual learners.* In addition, the participant pointed out that written tests may not serve this purpose well, but games make room for testing to be for different learners.

In the next section, I discuss the four sub-themes which emerged from Theme 3. It is imperative to state that all sub-themes under Theme 3 speak to how the use of game-based learning can assist teachers to formatively assess learners English

language acquisition skills. Sub-theme 4 conveys how games create greater alignment between curriculum and assessment. Sub-theme 5 expresses how games are a new approach to assessment that is less restrictive and intimidating than traditional assessments. Sub-theme 6 expresses the view that games-based assessments yield authentic results because effective learning takes place instead of memorisation. Sub-theme 7 conveys the manner in which formative assessment is administered through different forms of activities when game-based learning is used. A discussion on each sub-theme follows below.

4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 4: Games create greater alignment between curriculum and assessment

As previously stated, game-based learning is a new and practical way of teaching and assessing today's learners, who have ever-changing learning needs. Furthermore, it is an approach which can assist teachers to cater for every individual learner in a classroom. This ideology emphasises the need for today's teachers to take into account how different learners learn, as well as how their different personalities influence the manner in which they learn.

The data gathered from the field notes reveal that the use of game-based learning can support the learning process. Moreover, aligning curriculum with assessment means that the curriculum is consistent with enabling learners to reach the milestones outlined in the learning objectives. Therefore, curriculum that is aligned with assessment ensures that learners have the opportunity to access content and skills outlined.

In relation to aligning curriculum and assessment, Participant 4 stated that: *I think incorporating curriculum with the games, and how you can go back to Bloom's taxonomy and align your assessment strategies to fit in with Bloom's taxonomy when the games are used.* Additionally, Participant 1 pointed out that the games can become a more meaningful and effective tool of assessment if they are integrated with the normal day-to-day lessons.

These findings were supported by the observations wherein Participant 2 gave learners an activity during the first lesson to write a descriptive paragraph about their likes, dislikes, hobbies and interests. The teacher emphasised the importance of

using adjectives, and thus had to remind learners what adjectives are, and gave examples. During the second lesson, the teacher incorporated the descriptive paragraph activity with the game ‘*Would you rather? Why?*’, which requires learners to talk about their personal preferences and then give reasons why they have those preferences. From the observation made during the two lessons, the teacher was able to align curriculum with assessment. The curriculum was aligned with assessment because one of the learning objectives of the lesson was to assist learners to identify and correctly use adjectives. The teacher then integrated the knowledge learners gained in the first lesson with the game, with the intention to assess whether or not learners were able to identify adjectives from their responses as well as from responses of other learners.

4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 5: Games as a new approach to assessment that is less restrictive and intimidating than traditional assessments

The acquisition of any language is a complicated procedure which calls for continuous and constant effort. The use of games can to a certain extent assist learners to make and sustain the required effort of learning a language, especially English as an additional language. The reason for this is that language games may be thought provoking, are a source of learners’ intrinsic motivation and create a meaningful context for language use.

The data collected for this study indicate that the use of games can be employed not only for teaching and learning purposes, but also for assessment purposes. Employing games when assessing diverse 21st century learners has a number of benefits. One of these is the notion that when games-based assessments are administered, different learner abilities and learning preferences are included in the assessment process. Reynolds and Kearns (2017), argue that games are compatible methods of assessment which can be used to assess learners’ development and progress. Emphasising this, Participant 3 said: *OK so usually in a traditional classroom setting, the only person that speaks is the teacher and she conducts the lesson, and the learners are doing little.* The participant also referred to how in a traditional classroom setting learners only take part when they understand, but during gameplay, every learner participates.

Additionally, Participant 4 argued that traditional forms of assessment are an unfair way of assessing learners because of their lack of flexibility. This comment was in relation to the level of anxiety learners experience when they have to sit down for traditional exams or tests. However, when game-based learning is employed as a new approach to assess learners English language skills, learners are more relaxed, actively engaged and fully participate. One can state that traditional forms of assessment are still used in classrooms as a valid way to gather evidence of learning outcomes and skills mastered by learners. As a result, traditional forms of assessment cannot be replaced by games-based assessment, but rather, games could be utilised as an alternative form of assessment.

These findings are supported by the level of learners' involvement observed. The teachers (Participants 2 and 3) were able to create a safe and conducive learning environment for the learners, which is why learners were happy to be actively involved in the lesson. For instance, Participant 2 did not point out to learners that they should ask follow up questions during game-play, however learners asked their peers follow up questions (why, how, when) in order to get more understanding about the questions that the board games required learners to answer. Furthermore, the flexibility of the games created a relaxed atmosphere while learning.

4.3.3.3 Sub-theme 6: Games-based assessments yield authentic results because effective learning takes place, not mere memorisation

Games-based assessment can be defined as the application of principles of game design to measure performance when learners are striving to perform at their best and an approach that seeks to make assessment more authentic (Heinzen, 2014). Authentic assessments refer to assessments wherein learners accurately use or apply the skills and knowledge that they have acquired to a new situation or environment. One can state that games-based assessments are engaging and thus capture authentic or accurate peak performance of learners. In relation to this, Participant 4 claimed that: *Using games for me can be the best way of testing learners rather than using the traditional way which is so fixed.* The participant spoke in reference to the view that games-based assessments give results that are authentic because learning and assessment occurs in a conducive space where learners are relaxed. Thus, constructive learning could take place. Although the use of games can create a conducive learning environment because they are enjoyable,

assessment results can only be authentic if learning objectives and outcomes have been met. Moreover, the fun and relaxation experienced by learners during game-play does not mean that constructive learning takes place automatically.

4.3.3.4 Sub-theme 7: Formative assessment is administered through various activities

It was previously stated that English language learning is a complex process, especially for learners who take it as an additional language and those who have little exposure to the language. The use of various forms of formative assessment activities can give learners exposure to the language, thus making it possible for them to acquire the necessary English language skills. Participant 2 spoke in reference to the view that learners' English language skills were assessed formatively through the use of different forms of activities including pre-tests (diagnostic assessments), formal and informal activities, and post-tests among others. Commenting on this, Participant 4 stated: *We use formative assessment to test their skills which they have gathered. When using the games, you can use sentences exactly like we use when we test grammar skills.* The participant also spoke in relation to the extent to which versatile activities are used to gauge learners' English language skills, such as creative writing projects, oral presentations, *fill in* activities, multiple choice questions and games.

These findings were supported by an observation made during the second lesson conducted by Participant 3. During the lesson, the teacher wrote a few sentences on the board which contained a number of grammatical errors. Learners were tasked not only to identify the errors in the sentences, but to state reasons why the sentences were not grammatically correct. Here, assessment for learning occurred in the form of three activities, that is, to identify the errors in the sentences, state reasons why the sentences were grammatically incorrect, as well as make the necessary amendments so the sentences may be grammatically correct.

Diverse assessment tools are necessary because a single type of assessment cannot accurately measure the acquisition of knowledge or skills, thus having various assessment tools makes it possible to choose the most suitable ones (Reynolds & Kearns, 2017). This notion suggests that assessment methods employed by teachers should go beyond traditional standardised tests and that

various tools of assessment can be used to evaluate learners' learning processes. In addition, Participant 4 pointed out that the complete discarding of traditional forms of assessment is not what teachers are suggesting. Rather they were saying that new forms of assessment could complement traditional forms. Also, traditional assessments have their own advantages. The participant therefore suggested that both the traditional and games-based forms of assessment should be assimilated to ensure that different learning styles and abilities are catered for in assessment.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Games make it possible to assess multiple skills

This section discusses Theme 4 and the sub-themes which arose from it. In Theme 4, I discuss how board games make it possible to assess learners' multiple English language skills. Sub-theme 8 relates to games as facilitating assessment and how games are useful for group work, conventions and differential assessment. Sub-theme 9 relates to administering baseline assessments to evaluate learners' levels of proficiency. A discussion on each sub-theme follows.

In relation to games making it possible for teachers to assess learners' multiple skills, it can be indicated that learners proficient in the English language could be characterised by their high levels of reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary, and language structures and conventions skills. However, a learner may be proficient in English, but that does not mean they will automatically be able to engage at high levels of reading, writing and other skills. Moreover, it was observed from the data collected that learners' English language multiple skills can be assessed simultaneously through the use of games. Participant 3 elaborated on the different types of games she used during the lessons. These games were thought-provoking and required learners to give responses, but they also required them to substantiate their answers. So, one can state that the games equipped learners with vocabulary building as well as how to respond to open-ended questions. The latter was taught incidentally because the learning objective focused on vocabulary building. Participant 4 stated that: *The games cover all aspects of grammar, there is no way learners wouldn't learn grammar. We also assess reading and viewing, writing and presenting, language structures and conventions, listening and speaking.*

These findings were substantiated by the observations made during the lessons. In the second lesson conducted by Participant 2, learners' ability to respond to open-ended questions, the correct use of tenses, and sentence construction, was assessed. Therefore, the English language skills: *Listening and Speaking* as well as *Language Structures* and *Conventions* were evaluated during these lessons.

4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 8: Games as facilitating assessment: useful for group work, conventions and differential assessment

Teachers are said to be facilitators of the teaching and learning process. This means that teachers create a safe and conducive learning environment for learners. Teachers also provide support and guidance during the learning process and formulate the necessary scaffolding. The findings of this study reveal that games-based assessments can be a creative way of assessing learners' skills effectively. Moreover, through games, assessment can be integrated into learning or teachers can also assess after gameplay.

Data collected from the lesson observations reveal that teachers administered short assessments either at the beginning or end of the lessons. Furthermore, the flexibility of the games allowed the assessment of learners' multiple skills simultaneously. It is also imperative to state that the games created space for learners to work in groups and learn from each other. One of the characteristics of game-based learning is the opportunity it creates for learner engagement, participation and involvement. It was evident from the field notes that during gameplay, learners are eager to participate. During the first lesson observation, it was noted that certain groups had very outspoken and fluent learners, who were able to freely express themselves. Some groups, however, had children who are shy. Shy learners eventually warmed up to their group members and to the games, which led to being able to express themselves during game-play. The group work approach was said to be a key strategy which could promote engagement.

Participant 1 said: *I used group work strategies. In group work strategies, we know that there should be a group leader. There should be a scribe, a timekeeper, resource manager and a reporter, because if there's a group leader, the group leader helps to control the direction of his or her group.* The participant spoke in reference to the view that giving learners leadership roles while working in small

groups assists in ensuring learners' active involvement, and that effective learning and assessment takes place. Furthermore, smaller groups make it easier for the teacher to identify learners' different abilities, strengths, weaknesses as well as their struggles. Participant 3 pointed out that she colour-coded the different groups in order to group learners randomly. The participant further elaborated on this and said: *I have had no instant were learners were bored, they fully participate because they are smaller groups, so I haven't yet encountered any limitations.*

Previously studied literature reveals that language structures and conventions is one of the most challenging skills to teach. As a result, learners may perform poorly when assessed. Contrary to this, the findings of this study show that game-based learning could make teaching and assessing of language structures more feasible. This facilitated assessment of language structures may be because the use of games in teaching and learning is learner-centred. The focus is not on the teacher, but on learners and the learning process. The games were described as thought-provoking and interesting, thus making it possible for learners to not only have a say about the content taught through the games, but to also share their thoughts with their fellow group members. Furthermore, because the learning of language structures occurs naturally, teachers do not have to put in extra effort to motivate learners to take part in the games. Rather, learners become motivated themselves because the game-based learning process is enjoyable, making it possible for learners to acquire language structures and conventions skills.

According to Dunlop (2018), differentiated assessment refers to a continuous process through which data relating to learners' needs and strengths is collected by teachers before, during and after instruction from various sources. The study's findings reveal that a classroom has different learners who have different ways and rates at which they process new knowledge and skills as well as demonstrate their progress. On this topic, Participant 3 said: *Games allow testing to be for different learners who are at different English language proficiency levels, even though it might be just one game.* The participant spoke in relation to how the use of games for assessment purposes includes diverse learners who have different learning needs, abilities and strengths.

Participant 4 argued that in a real classroom situation, teachers have different types of learners and the current CAPS curriculum unfortunately cannot accommodate various learning preferences in a classroom. As a result, learners are expected to sit for standardised and structured examinations. This may prove challenging for learners with different learning preferences. Thus, this study's findings show that the use of games makes provision for another avenue of assessment and the gathering of learner performance data, which could be insufficient when standardised approaches are used.

This study's findings also show that games are useful formative assessment tools because not only do they allow the assessment of learners' multiple English language skills, but they are a good resource for capturing learners' attention. Secondly, the games are thought-provoking, and therefore could encourage learners' critical thinking skills. These findings were validated by the lesson observations. It was noted during the lessons that the two teachers (Participants 2 and 3) know their learners and good teacher-learner relations were observed. Both teachers divided the learners or grouped learners according to their different learning abilities, styles and strengths. All groups had very outspoken, less outspoken and shy learners. None of the participating teachers elaborated further on the different types of learning styles. I noted during the classroom observations that during game-play, some learners preferred writing down their responses before presenting them to the group as well as taking detailed notes of what they were learning. Other learners listened attentively to those who spoke and took part in the group discussions. In the next section, I present Sub-theme 9.

4.3.4.2 Sub-theme 9: Administering baseline assessments to evaluate learners level of proficiency

The ultimate objective of the teaching and learning process is so that learners are developed, equipped with knowledge and skills needed in and outside the classroom. The findings of this study reveal that teachers can gauge learners' improved English language skills not only through test scores, but also through observations. One of the study's participants (Participant 2) argued that teachers can make use of baseline assessments to gauge learners' prior knowledge and learners' level of basic English language skills. He further stated that baseline assessments inform a teacher on how to move learners forward and ensure the

acquisition of English language skills. Another teacher (Participant 1) cited that: *We measure their proficiency by how they are able to express themselves, how they make use of language structures, how they are able to write creatively and their ability to read with comprehension.* The participant further stated that continuous assessment also comes in handy when evaluating learners level of English language proficiency skills. Additionally, it was argued by the participant that evaluating learners' progress can also take place through observation, that is, when learners have an understanding of instruction, and when they follow given instructions.

I observed that is that during game-play, learners are actively involved and they fully participate. However, establishing whether their English language skills have improved may be difficult to gauge, especially because only four lessons were observed. Secondly, there was no form of experimental design which was used to gauge if learners English language skills improved or not. Additionally, although scoring of learners is a big part of assessment, the findings of this study did not establish how learners' progress and performance was measured by the teachers because no scoring was observed during the lessons.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter critically presented data and construed how teachers experienced and perceived the extent to which game-based learning can be employed to assess learners' English language skills. From the data gathered and analysed, five themes and nineteen sub-themes were identified with regards to the research questions presented. The presentation of the findings was based on the interviews of three English Access Program teachers and one service provider, class observations and researcher field notes. This chapter presented teachers' experiences and perceptions about the use of English board games to teach and assess English language proficiency skills. The study revealed that English board games are a good tool to use in teaching and learning, especially because they enhance learners' involvement, participation and motivation. However, it is difficult to establish whether or not the use of games positively impacts assessment for learning because only four lessons were conducted. Findings in theme one reveal that using English board games for teaching and learning is beneficial because learners become actively

involved and participate in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, games enhance the opportunity to cater for different learning styles, abilities and personalities. The study also reveals that set learning objectives are achieved and that some skills are taught incidentally when games are employed.

In theme two, focus was placed on continuous professional or teacher development. The participants perceived that teachers who believe in continuous development are able to meet learning needs of the diverse and evolving learners in their classrooms. Secondly, continuous game-based training and workshops for teachers contributed vastly to teacher development. Additionally, the study shows that teachers' exposure to current research findings leads to teachers becoming more acquainted with game-based teaching and assessment methods.

Theme three discussed how the use of English language board games can improve assessment by broadening it so that it accommodates diverse learning needs. This theme established that assessment should be designed so that it speaks to individual learners' understanding and proficiency levels. In relation to sub-theme 4, the study established that games create a platform for curriculum and assessment to be aligned. In sub-theme 5, the findings showed that games are not as intimidating and limiting as traditional assessment approaches, because games-based assessments are not standardised. Sub-theme 6 focused on the authentic results that games-based assessments generate because effective learning occurs, not only mere memorisation. Sub-theme 7 revealed that teachers can formatively assess learners' English language proficiency skills by using different form of activities during the lessons.

Theme four discussed how games make it possible to assess learners' multiple skills. It was established in this theme that when games are employed, more than one skill can be taught and assessed at the same time. Sub-theme 8 focused on how games can facilitate the assessment process, ensure useful group work and be useful for assessing language structures and conventions. The study's findings show that games help facilitate the assessment process as they ensure that multiple skills are taught and assessed simultaneously and are a good source of learner-to-learner engagement. The next chapter, Chapter 5 of the study, gives a summary of

the findings and presents the discussions in relation to the literature and the conceptual framework of the study.

5 CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the analysed data employing the thematic analysis approach. I base my discussions on my interpretation of teacher perceptions and experiences of game-based learning. Literature from previous research studies informed the data analysis process of this study. Findings from the individual semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and researcher field notes examined the role English board games could play if used in the classroom. The study aimed to understand the extent to which English language board games could be employed as assessment tools for language proficiency skills. The chapter will also present the summary of the findings, substantiated by the evidence from the data. Conclusions for the study were drawn in relation to the main research question and the sub-questions.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following section discusses and presents the responses which address the sub-questions in order to construct a foundation for the main research questions. The section will conclude by addressing the main research question of the study.

5.2.1 Sub-question 1: Measures put in place by the English Access Program to improve teachers' knowledge of using game-based learning as assessment tools

Teachers as facilitators of the learning process have the responsibility to ensure that effective learning takes place in the classroom environment. Different teachers will make use of different teaching approaches to meet the needs of learners. Literature and this study's findings reveal that teachers' classroom teaching and assessment practices could be enriched by providing teachers with the necessary and suitable support as well as the appropriate teaching and assessment material (Shepard et al., 2020; De Luca & Lam, 2014).

According to Sethusha (2012), the manner in which teachers perceive assessment is informed by both their experiences and their qualifications. In addition, continuous professional development allows teachers to learn and apply new skills in the classroom. It is worth noting that the teachers who participated in this study were all at a bachelor's degree level. Their professional level however ranged between post level one to post level three. Post level one being a teacher, level two being a

departmental head and three being a deputy principal. When teachers have varying teaching experiences but receive continuous training, their knowledge of teaching methods and assessment practices is developed. According to Orchids international school (n.d.) in India, differences in teachers' qualifications influence not only learners' performance, but also the teacher's views on how learning and teaching should take place.

When exploring the effect of continuous teacher or professional development on teachers' assessment knowledge, it was revealed that despite the teachers possessing the required minimum teaching qualifications, their teaching experience was not the same. To elaborate, Participant 1 had more than 20 years of teaching experience, Participant 2 had 10 years' experience, Participant 3 had 12 years' experience, and Participant 4 had 1 year of teaching experience. However, all teachers perceived professional development as a crucial aspect of their own growth. It was therefore noted from literature and this study's findings that continuous training of both experienced and inexperienced teachers improves their teaching methodology, assessment perceptions approaches.

The participants echoed similar sentiments with regards to the effectiveness of the training offered by the English Access Program in delivering effective lessons by integrating curriculum with the English Activate board games. Although games were used in the past as a source of entertainment and are considered by many to be designed for amusement, some scholars have found that using games for learning and teaching can make the process more engaging (Kopecká, 2019). This study found that teachers addressed English language content through the use of the games in order to enhance learners' English language skills. In other words, the board games were thoroughly incorporated into the EFAL curriculum.

The study also found that teachers are better acquainted with current assessment methods relevant for the needs of 21st century learners through exposure to current research findings. According to the teachers, sharing of best teaching and assessment practices among the teachers also enhances teachers' knowledge of assessment.

5.2.2 Sub-question 2: The use of games in assisting teachers to formatively assess learners' English language acquisition skills

According to Gareis and Grant (2015), formative assessment can be defined as the process of evaluating learning when integrated into teaching. This type of assessment is classified as assessment for learning because it is used when teachers intend to support and promote learning through assessment. When games are employed as formative assessment tools, the feedback can be used to help learners make progress in the game and facilitate learning (Zapata-Rivera & Bauer, 2012).

It was evident from the findings that teachers reacted positively to the use of games as assessment tools of learners' English language proficiency skills. Additionally, the study's findings reveal that games could give teachers a clearer picture of learners' prior knowledge and their level of English language proficiency skills. The study found that games could be a new approach to formative assessment, and as a result, English language games could widen assessment practices. Broadened assessment practices are perceived to cover a wide range of skills, learners' levels, and learning preferences. Teachers felt that board games could help facilitate effective assessment of diverse learners. The participants in the study claimed that diverse learners in 21st century classrooms should be assessed differently at their own level. In other words, when assessing, teachers should take into cognisance learners' different English language proficiency levels and assess learners in accordance to their different levels. It is however worth noting that in reality, time is limited, as teachers have to get through the curriculum and assess learners in the same manner. However, the use of games could widen assessment during formative assessment practices and allow for something more than just standardised testing. Furthermore, the study reveals that games-based assessments designed and administered should cater for individual learners' needs.

The study reveals that although participating teachers relied heavily on the use of written classwork and homework activities to ensure that learning is taking place, they were also open to the group work strategy, especially when games are used. As a result, the teachers (Participants 2 and 3) were able to address the skill "language structures and conventions" by focusing on various topics including

vocabulary building, sentence construction, tenses and the parts of speech. The participating teachers stated that the flexibility of the games enabled them to administer formative assessment by tracing learner progress and make informed decisions about the teaching strategies. Moreover, the study discloses that the use of games for teaching and learning creates more alignment between curriculum and assessment. This means that games can be a more meaningful and effective tool of assessment if they are incorporated into the curriculum. Previous studies (Pope, 2021; Kopecká, 2019) show that when board games are properly integrated into the curriculum, learners can improve their critical thinking, analysing, reasoning, planning, and communication abilities (Kopecká, 2019). Board games can create conducive and learner-centred environments. Data collected from the lesson observations revealed that lessons should be planned thoroughly and in accordance with CAPS. When this is done with achievable learning outcomes, board games act as a mediating artefact which bridges the gap between curriculum and assessment.

Board games can be less restrictive and intimidating than traditional assessment methods. Additionally, Cain (2023) argues that teachers should not only rely on tests to assess their learners as other methods could offer insights into aspects which tests may not measure. The study found that teachers view games as a new approach to assessment and allows for more evaluation of English language multiple skills. Furthermore, the participants claimed that games are a good way of monitoring learners level of comprehension continually. The study showed that when teachers administer games-based assessments, the inclusion of different learner abilities and learning styles in the assessment process could be enhanced. All of the participating teachers indicated that traditional form of assessment methods are associated with stress and anxiety, whereas games are associated with relaxation.

The findings of the study support the approach of using various forms of formative assessment activities. A variety of assessment methods expose children naturally to the language which could promote acquisition of language skills. Participants pointed out that when using the games, the learners are assessed formatively through activities which include pre-tests (diagnostic assessments), formal and informal activities, and post-tests.

5.2.3 The assessment of learners' listening, speaking and language structures and conventions skills

Despite the positive perceptions teachers held with regard to the potential use of games, the findings of the study also showed an over-dependence on the use of games to address listening and speaking skills and language structures and convention skills. What was unclear was whether or not teachers were able to incorporate the curriculum, specifically reading, viewing, writing and presenting skills, with the games. Participant 4 claimed that all English language proficiency skills can be taught and assessed through the games, whereas Participants 1 and 3 gave contradictory responses. They argued that the games required learners to listen to their group members and also express themselves verbally when their turn came. The teachers then emphasised the fact that the *Activate games for learning English* make it possible for teachers to assess speaking, listening and language structures and conventions skills. But they felt that games do not assess reading, viewing, writing and presenting skills.

It further emerged from lesson observations that prompt feedback is not given by the teachers after gameplay. Although all participating teachers echoed similar sentiments about the effectiveness of games in formative assessment, it was noted that no feedback was given to learners about their performance during the games. Instead, teachers reiterated learning objectives at the end of their lessons. These findings were contradictory with what Participant 4 said. When asked about how feedback could be given, the teacher mentioned that scoring is used to give feedback to learners through rubrics. However, this was not evident in any of the lessons. This study can conclude that the lack of providing learners with feedback when games are used limit their effectiveness as English language formative assessment tools because learners' progress and development is not documented and learners receive limited insight into their progress and next steps. According to Hattie and Timberly (2007), there are three kinds of feedback teachers can give, namely: Feed up, Feedback and Feed forward. Feed up is related to the achievement of learning objectives which may occur either by direct judgement (e.g. when a learner does well in a test or assignment) and by comparing a learner's achievements against each other. Feedback on the other hand relates to the

provision of information about a learner's progress. Lastly, Feed forward relates to information that leads to greater possibilities for learning. Moreover, Feed forward places emphasis on the learning process. One can therefore state that in this study, the participating teachers may have used Feed forward because through assessment administered using game-based learning, teachers were able to identify learners' prior knowledge as well as gaps related to the content. This study revealed that provision of prompt feedback after employing games-based assessments requires strengthening through continuous training and interventions.

5.2.4 Games influence learners' listening, speaking and grammar skills

One of the participating teachers mentioned that the flexibility of the games creates an opportunity for teachers to teach and assess more than one skill simultaneously. Participant 4 elaborated on this viewpoint by stating that when learners are working on a writing and presenting activity, their language structures and conventions skills can be addressed without formally having to teach that aspect of grammar. In addition, it is worth noting that because the games require learners to work in groups, both Participants 2 and 3 ensured that learners were grouped according to their different or varying levels of English language proficiency skills. The study reveals that not only does the grouping of learners assist learners with active involvement and participation, but it could also expose learners to different leadership roles because each group member is given a responsibility to fulfil.

In relation to games making it feasible to teach and assess language structures and conventions, it is worth noting that there are nineteen components which should be covered in the South African English language curriculum. According to CAPS (DBE, 2011), these components include: punctuation; spelling; parts of words; nouns; determiners; pronouns; adjectives; adverbs; prepositions; verbs; conjunctions and transition words; interjectives and ideophones; vocabulary development and figurative language; phrases; clauses; sentences; conditional sentences; passive voice; and reported speech. The participating teachers seemed to have different viewpoints about the teaching of language structures and conventions. Participants 3 and 4 advocated for the incidental teaching of language structures through the use of board games with the intention to alleviate boredom that learners associate with grammar. The teachers argue that the traditional

approach of talk and chalk where rules of grammar are unpacked followed by activities is not an effective way of teaching. The traditional lecture style of teaching could be boring for both the learners and teachers. Teachers felt it was better to incorporate language with the games to make the lessons to be more interactive and interesting for learners.

With regards to differential assessment, it is imperative to point out that data from the lesson observations reveals that multiple sources of activities were employed by teachers to evaluate learners' needs and prior knowledge of vocabulary, tenses and parts of speech. It was evident from the lesson observations that different learners' needs were accommodated through the use of various activities, including the board games. However, because the speed at which learners acquire new skills and process new knowledge varies, it cannot be confirmed that all learners who participated in the games were competent in all the aspects addressed during the lesson observations.

The study's findings further show that baseline assessments can be administered to assess learners' proficiency levels before the use of games and then perhaps after the use of games. The study showed that not only can teachers measure improved English language proficiency skills through test scores learners attain in written activities, but also through the observations made by teachers. Participant 1 argued that she is able to measure whether skills improved by the extent to which a particular learner expresses himself or herself orally or on paper. It is important to point out that although teachers may know their learners' needs, strength and abilities, using this approach to gauge learners' levels of English language proficiency skills cannot be effective in all contexts, especially for teachers working with large groups of learners.

5.2.5 Main research question: Teachers' experiences of using game-based learning as assessment tools to assess EFAL skills

5.2.5.1 Teachers' experiences

The findings of this study provide evidence for the role of board games in the formative assessment of learners' English language proficiency skills. The main conclusion which I drew from my study is that teachers were eager to meet various learning needs by using different formative assessment tools. The teachers are

committed to providing the necessary support to improve learners' performance. However, their main focus was on the extent to which games can be used for teaching and learning, not on assessment, because little or no feedback was given to learners after the games were used as assessment tools. Although there was evidence from the study that the use of G-B-L can assist teachers in formative assessment of learners' English language acquisition skills, it however cannot be regarded as conclusive. The following sections will unpack the conclusions drawn from the study in accordance with the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2 and in relation to the sub-questions presented in Chapter 1 of this study and the discussions of the preceding section.

5.2.5.2 The benefits of employing board games for teaching and learning

The literature review indicated that there are a number of benefits associated with using English language games for teaching and learning. According to Phuong and Nguyen (2017), the use of English language games during lessons can enhance motivation, promote interaction, improve language acquisition and increase overall English achievement. Furthermore, Kopecká (2019) argues that games create a space conducive for teaching and learning wherein learners' attention is drawn to the content for reinforcement and application. The study's findings also revealed that games-based assessments can be a creative approach to evaluate language proficiency skills when they are integrated into learning. Furthermore, it was noted that teachers administered activities either at the end or beginning of the lessons in order to incorporate the language aspects they intended to address through the games.

In the study, individual participants were asked to share their experiences of using game-based learning as a tool to assess learners' English language proficiency skills. Through the participants' responses, my attention was drawn to the flexibility of English language board games when used in the classroom, not only for assessment, but also for teaching and learning. Participants were acquainted with the *English Activate games* and their benefits when incorporated into the curriculum. However, there seems to be a lack of knowledge about the extent to which game-based learning could disadvantage learners if used as an assessment tool. In other words, game-based learning could be a useful tool for teaching and learning, but

may not be effective as an assessment tool if teachers are unaware of the shortcomings of using the games for assessment purposes.

Two of the participating teachers referred to the disadvantages of employing game-based learning as an assessment tool. However, the other two teachers merely dwelt on their general knowledge or understanding of why English language games are useful in the classroom, especially for teaching and learning. Based on the findings, it is recommended that *English Access Program* teachers should be trained on how to use game-based learning for assessment. Furthermore, teachers should be sensitised on the disadvantages of using board games in assessment, and be trained on how to overcome the challenges.

One of the advantages of using game-based learning is the extent to which it encourages engagement and participation. According to Loveless (n.d.), higher levels of learner engagement during teaching and learning could lead to effective learning because of the likelihood that learners will remember what they learn. Furthermore, it is argued that the higher level of learner engagement that is encouraged by game-based learning enhances learners' intrinsic motivation (Loveless, n.d.) to take part in the learning process.

The study's findings show that the games used during the lessons ensured that learners were not passive due to the high levels of engagement the games encourage. Also, the thought-provoking nature of the games encouraged learners' motivation to participate. Another sub-theme that emerged from the data was that various learning preferences are accommodated in game-based learning. This finding aligns with that of Yildiz and Şimşek (2022), that the use of games for educational purposes notably increases learning achievement. Children have different ways of processing information, and they therefore learn best or effectively when the information they receive is versatile in format and presentation. The flexibility therefore of game-based learning ensures that learning occurs along various paths, instead of just one linear path, and as a result different learners could be catered for. The finding noted that when game-based learning is employed, the learning process is more personalised.

The findings indicated that most of the participants who were interviewed stated that when game-based learning is used, learners are exposed to more diverse ways to learn. Most of the participants argued that during game-play, the most outspoken and shy learners take part because the games give every participant an opportunity to voice their opinions.

The study also found that game-based learning assists with achieving learning objectives and with the phenomenon of incidental learning. Incidental learning in linguistics refers to the acquisition of a word, expression or concept without the conscious intention to commit the element to memory, it also refers to learning which occurs when the intention of the task or learning objective is elsewhere (Hulstijn, 2013). Incidental learning is the opposite of intentional learning, which refers to the deliberate attempt to commit factual information to memory. It was noted during the lesson observations that teachers had set realistic learning objectives before the lessons commenced. At the end of each lesson, the set learning objectives were achieved. Moreover, the finding noted that not only were the lessons based on the learning objectives, but incidental learning also took place. Classroom observations showed that achieving learning goals through the use of game-based learning was likely because games are both fun and effective teaching tools. What could however not be established was the extent to which formative assessment of vocabulary, sentence construction, parts of speech, tenses, skills and knowledge was effective. This was because learners were given different activities to complete before and after lessons, yet no feedback was given to establish whether the intended skills the teachers addressed were acquired or not.

5.3 REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY

5.3.1 Reflection on the conceptual framework

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, this study aimed to explore how English FAL teachers can use game-based learning to formatively assess learners' English language proficiency skills. The exploration was conducted through the lens of the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which is inspired by the work of Barrett-Tatum (2015). This model is centred around the view that technology can mediate teaching and learning in a transformational manner (Batiibwe, 2019). The CHAT theory takes into cognisance the following aspects in the teaching and learning

process: subjects, mediating artefacts, community, object, sense/meaning, and outcome/results as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

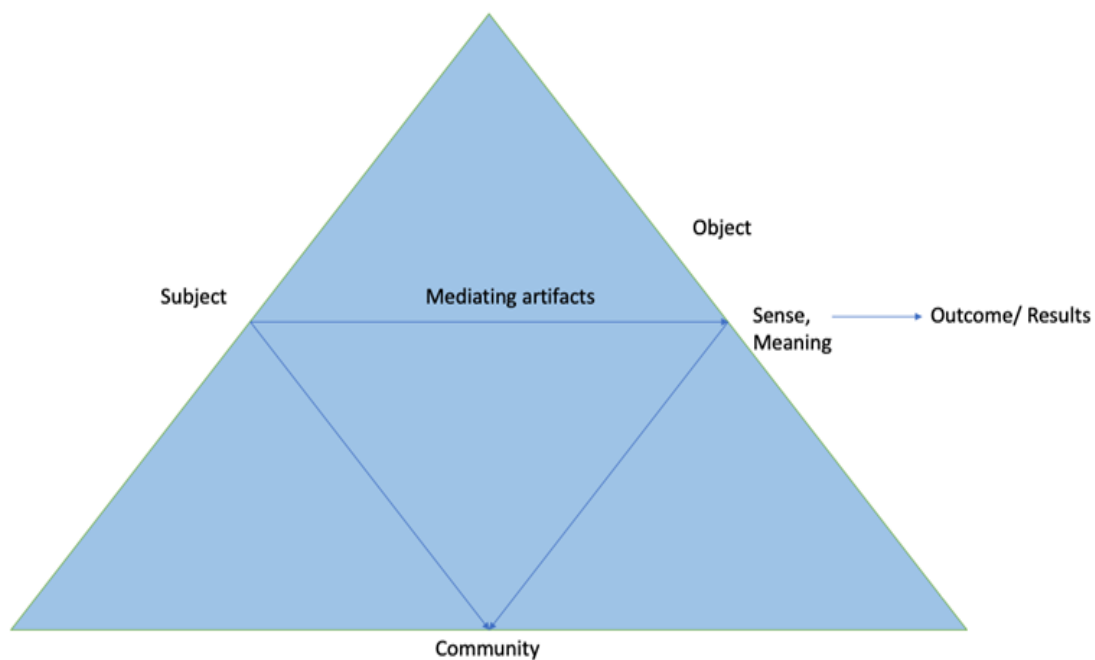


Figure 5.1: Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

Adapted from- Barrett-Tatum (2015)

The conceptual framework as indicated in figure 5.1 recognises that teachers in this study acknowledge that effective and transformational learning occurs when learners are actively involved in the learning process. The main aim of this study was to establish how teachers integrated game-based learning with English language lessons and then ultimately using the games as formative assessment tools. Teachers chiefly indicated that a strategic shift is necessary in formative assessment wherein traditional forms of assessment could be used in conjunction with games-based assessment to reduce test stress. Teachers also expressed the vital role played by teacher/ professional development in equipping teachers with effective assessment practices, including games-based assessment approaches. However, it is necessary for teachers to be trained on ways to provide learners with prompt and constructive feedback after the use of games in a lesson for assessment purposes.

The CHAT model upholds the need to use and adapt tools of all kinds to learn and communicate. Teachers from the sampled schools primarily expressed concerns

about the limitations of traditional forms of assessment. The limitations according to the teachers are the inability of traditional forms of assessment to accommodate learners' different learning preferences or abilities. It can be stated that effective assessment practices that yield desired outcomes should be embedded in effective classroom learning practices. Though the study established how the use of mediating artefacts improves learner participation and involvement, which then has a positive impact on effective learning, teachers with the necessary skills are required to formulate ways in which games-based assessments can be graded or scored. The scoring or grading of games-based assessments will then give teachers and learners an indication of whether or not learners' English language skills are improving.

5.3.2 Reflection on the research methods and design

In the current study, the researcher could have revised Question t (Annexure C) of the interview guide to provide more information about the phenomenon under study. The question could have been rephrased to allow teachers to explain exactly how feedback is given to learners after game-based assessments have been used. Questions v and w (Annexure C) sounded repetitive to participants, hence they had a difficult time expressing their perceptions, views and experiences on the matter. One of the questions could have been asked differently or totally removed. The use of classroom observations did not provide as much information or evidence as I had initially anticipated. The evidence extracted from this data collection instrument includes the importance of thoroughly planning game-based learning lessons in accordance with CAPS, and that prompt feedback is not given by teachers after gameplay. Apart from that, more information could have been extracted from this instrument by observing more lessons so the phenomenon could be understood better. Additionally, a quasi-experimental design could have yielded test evidence of what the possible effect of the game-based activities were.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research focused on issues related to other research done in South Africa and other disadvantaged African countries and the findings of this study are aligned to those of preceding studies to a certain extent. Because the study used a smaller sample size, as is natural in qualitative research, the study's findings cannot be generalised to all South African schools and also schools across the globe.

The interviews conducted in this study paid attention to teachers with experience working in the EAP, and did not include other teachers who do not have experience with the EAP, learners or HODs. The study could have yielded more valuable results if learners' perceptions and experiences were taken into cognisance as well as the views of other teachers and HODs. Also, interviews took approximately 50 minutes each, and it was easy for participants to stray into topics that were not directly addressed in my initial questions. It is important to also point out that finding interviewees with the relevant amount of information and experience about the EAP within the vicinity of the Ermelo region was a challenge. Interviews used in the study pointed to teachers' perceptions and experiences without any supporting evidence of learners' improved performance. Further, finding private and quiet venues was also another challenge because all teachers shared staffrooms with other colleagues. The noise in the background was disturbing sometimes and their colleagues walking in the staffrooms interrupted the participants in answering questions. At School B for instance, I had scheduled an interview on a specific day, but on my arrival, the teacher decided to reschedule because of the disruptions.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and conclusion drawn from this study reveal some benefits associated with game-based learning for formative assessment purposes. However, there are still a few challenges experienced by teachers in this regard. It is therefore against this background that the following recommendations are made.

5.5.1 Recommendation 1: Training/workshop of teachers on providing feedback after a games-based assessment.

The current study found that the emphasis during lesson observations was on employing game-based learning as a teaching and learning tool to improve learners' English language skills. However, the study discovered that teachers' knowledge of how to use game-based assessments is limited. It was evident that teachers could not differentiate between game-based learning (the use for teaching and learning) and games-based assessment (the use of games for assessment purposes), although the two are intertwined. Therefore, there is a need for teachers to be trained on how to use English board games for formative assessment purposes.

Secondly, teachers need training on how to provide learners with constructive and prompt feedback after the administering of games-based assessments.

5.5.2 Recommendation 2: The efficient use of English language games to teach and assess reading and writing skills.

Reading and writing skills are important skills that need to be developed and supported continuously. Therefore, the formative assessment of learners' reading comprehension and not just their ability to recognise and pronounce words should be administered through the use of games. Also, employing games-based assessments to assist learners to practise the construction and communication of creative ideas, in a coherent manner, is recommended.

5.5.3 Recommendation 3: Future studies

Game-based learning in the South African context should be strengthened through further research studies. The effectiveness of game-based learning as a formative assessment tool and the possible effect on English language acquisition skills (reading, writing, speaking and language structures) is recommended for further research.

5.6 Conclusion and reflection

The study explored the extent to which game-based learning could be used as formative assessment tools to assess learners English language skills. Despite the limited use of board games as a formative assessment strategy in English First Additional Language classrooms, the study found good teacher practices. These include the incorporation of English language topics as stipulated by CAPS with the English board games and applying a learner-centred teaching approach.

This study allowed me to understand the significance of viewing learners as active participants in the learning process instead of passive agents who must be loaded with knowledge. It has also enlightened me on the importance of employing formative assessment in English FAL through the use of games-based assessments. As an English FAL teacher in the education fraternity, I had realised that the focus of many English teachers (including myself) is on written assessments when evaluating or gauging learners English language acquisition skills, irrespective of how learners can express themselves in other forms. However, since taking part in this research, I have been able to incorporate the use of written assessments and

games-based assessment techniques in my class with the hope that I will encourage learners' active participation in the assessment process. Also, I used this strategy to help learners grasp important English language concepts without me being the one imparting knowledge, but having them as active participants. Through this research, I have learned to create a more learner-centred classroom environment wherein effective assessment for learning takes place. The findings of the research could inform the language educational community by providing insights into the benefit of games-based learning, as well as the challenges.

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6 ANNEXURES

6.1 ANNEXURE A – THE PARTICIPANT’S SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

C. Semi-structured interview questions

INTRODUCTORY/PROBING QUESTIONS

- a. When did you join the English Access Program?
- b. Briefly describe your duties as an English Access Program teacher.
- c. Elaborate on how lessons and assessments are planned and executed in the program.
- d. How has the experience you have gained in the English Access Program shaped your teaching experience?
- e. What English language skills do you teach and assess in the program? Explain why.
- f. How are English language skills (*listening and speaking and language structures and conventions*) assessed in the program?

3.1.1 How are learners’ English language acquisition skills formatively assessed?

- g) How is it different assessing learners’ English language skills using traditional methods such as written assessments compared to using game-based learning?
- h) To what extent does game-based learning impact learner motivation and learner involvement?
- i) How do you ensure that all learners in a classroom are actively involved when game-based learning is used as an assessment tool?
- j) Explain which skill/s are challenging to assess through game-based learning and why.

3.1.2 What are teachers experiences of using game-based learning as a tool to assess learners’ English Language proficiency skills in the English Access Program?

- k) What are your views on the use of games to assess learners’ English language proficiency skills?
- l) Describe your experiences of using English language games in teaching language skills.
- m) Give examples of learning outcomes that are achieved when games are used to teach and assess learners’ English language proficiency skills.
- n) How can game-based learning be beneficial in improving how teachers assess language skills?

3.1.3 What measures are put in place by the English Access Program to improve teachers knowledge of using language games as assessment tools?

- o) What do you do as an individual to improve your knowledge in assessment of learners?
- p) What measures are put in place by the English Access Program to develop your assessment knowledge?

3.1.4 How can the use of games assist teachers to formatively assess learners’ English language acquisition skills?

- q) What types of English language games do you use in teaching and assessing language proficiency skills?
- r) What limitations do you encounter when teaching and assessing language skills through the use of games?
- s) How do you overcome the challenges you face when using language games to assess learners’ English language proficiency skills?

t) Explain how learners' English language proficiency skills are measured.

u) Briefly elaborate on the different games you use to assess specific language skills.

3.1.5 How do language games influence learners listening, speaking and grammar skills?

v) What role do games play in improving learners speaking skills?

w) How can the use of games help learners gain grammar skills?

x) Elaborate on how games are a different and useful method of teaching listening, speaking and grammar skills compared to direct teaching method

EXIT QUESTIONS

y) What are your last words about: Assessment of learners' English language proficiency skills?

z) The use of games in the assessment process?

6.2 ANNEXURE B: LESSON OBSERVATION SHEET

The purpose of the observation is to record teachers' use of game-based learning as assessment tools during lessons.

Date:	Province:	District:
Grade:	LoLT:	
Lesson Topic:		
Duration of the lesson:	Start time:	End time:
English Access Microscholarship Program Group:		
Name of Teacher:		
Name of Observer:		

- i. Ask for a copy of the **lesson plan** that the teacher plans to use.
- ii. Ask to take pictures of the board games to be used during the lesson.

Attach copy of lesson plan

Copy of lesson plan attached	Yes	No
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Description of the classroom context.

Description	Y, N or N/A & Comment
iii. Number of learners	
iv. Classroom walls have relevant wall charts, pictures, etc.	
v. Class has a data projector	
vi. Any other information	

BEGINNING OF LESSON: RULES OF THE GAMES

1. Record how the teacher started the lesson. Observe whether the teacher linked it to previous lessons or learner's previous experience. Did the teacher take learners through the rules of each game? How did learners respond?

2. Does the teacher introduce the lesson objective?	Yes	No	3. Does the teacher elaborate on which skills will be assessed?	Yes	No
If YES, please write the Learning objective using the <u>EXACT</u> words of the teacher			4. use Assessment Criteria in the introduction If YES, please write how the teacher aims at assessing each skill using the <u>EXACT</u> words of the teacher		

Please indicate if you found any evidence for the activities listed below, and mark: either ‘Seen’, ‘Not Seen’, ‘Often’, or ‘Sometimes’.

5. Formative Assessment						
a) Teacher uses words <u>We are Learning To (WALT)</u> when introducing the Lesson objective (LO)	Seen	Not Seen				
b) The LO are:	Presented orally	Written on the board	Written on chart	Provided in a hand-out	Other:	
a) Teacher uses words. <u>What I’m Looking for (WILF)</u> when introducing the Assessment Criteria (AC)						
b) The AC are:	Presented orally	Written on the board	Written on chart	Provided in a hand-out	Other:	

DURING THE LESSON

6. When in the lesson does assessment take place? How does the teacher encourage participation? What kind of questions did the teacher ask? Did teacher invite answers from the learners? Specific evidence of learner-learner interaction in the classroom? Are learners given a chance for discussions? What challenges did the teacher encounter? How did the teacher overcome the challenges?
--

7. Oral Feedback		
a) After giving learners the board games, the teacher walks around to check how learners are doing.	Seen	Not Seen
b) When checking learners’ participation, teacher gives guidance or makes comments.	Seen	Not Seen

END OF LESSON

8. Indicate how teacher ends his/her lesson. How does the teacher sum up/conclude the lesson? Does the teacher refer to the lesson objectives?

a) Did the teacher complete the lesson?	Yes	No
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b) Teacher checks whether the Learning objectives have been completed.	Seen	Not Seen
--	------	----------

c) Teacher checks whether Assessment Criteria have been met.	Seen	Not Seen
--	------	----------

d) Please note any other interesting observations you made in this lesson.

6.3 ANNEXURE C: CONSENT FORMS FOR TEACHERS



Consent Letter for Teachers

Dear Mr/Ms

My name is Thandeka Maseko and I am working on a project titled: **Game-based learning as a tool to assess English Proficiency: Teacher experiences.**

The qualitative study aims at exploring the extent to which English Activate games can be used as assessment tools.

I invite you to share your experiences and insight during a semi-structured interview. During the interview, I will ask about your experiences of using gamification as a tool to assess English language proficiency skills. I would also like to ask you about how learners' English language acquisition skills are assessed and how the use of game-based learning can assist teachers to formatively assess language acquisition skills. The interview will take place at a time and place suitable for you, it will require approximately 1 hour of your time. If you prefer, we can conduct the interview telephonically. I will audio-record the interview for research purposes and only myself and my supervisors will have access to the recordings.

The information obtained during this research project will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for this research only. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the school and yours. All information collected will be securely stored in line with the University of Pretoria's regulations. There are no risks involved in participation. The benefits lie in our further understanding of the extent to which language games can be used as assessment tools to assess English language proficiency skills.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,
Thando Maseko
0798600682

6.4 ANNEXURE D: CONSENT FORMS FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS



Parental Consent Form

University of Pretoria

Faculty of Education

Department of Science, Maths and Technology, 012 420 5680/4175

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Thandeka Maseko and I am a Masters student at the University of Pretoria. I am asking your permission to observe your child during the English Access Program classes at your child's school. The observations will assist me in understanding the effectiveness of using games in teaching and assessing learners' English grammar skills and listening and speaking skills.

Your child's identity will be anonymous and no identifiable information will be used. Your consent and your child's participation are completely voluntary. There is no reward for participating or consequence for not participating. We will also seek your child's assent to participate before he or she begins the study. The study will only entail the researcher making notes regarding the teaching and learning taking place. There will be no recording or photos taken.

For further information on this research please contact Thandeka Maseko at 079 8600682 and maseko.thando10@gmail.com. If you have any questions please feel free to contact the supervisors, details are provided. There are two copies of this letter. After signing them, keep one copy for your records and return the other one to your child's school.

By signing below, I agree that a lesson may be observed in which my child is present.

Signature: _____

Name (please print): _____

Date: _____

Contact details of supervisors:

Dr Celeste Combrinck (celeste.combrinck@up.ac.za)

Prof Surette van Staden (surette.vanstaden@up.ac.za)

6.5 APPENDIX E: LESSON PLAN (SCHOOL A)

Grade 8 & 9

English First Additional Language

Topic: Vocabulary building, tenses, responding to open-ended questions

Skills: Listening and Speaking, Language Structures and Conventions

Date: 05 & 06 April 2022

Practising English language skills through game-based learning

LESSON STRUCTURE:

- The duration of the lessons will be 120 minutes (2 lessons which will take 60 minutes each).
 - During lesson 1, the rules of the games will be thoroughly unpacked, learners will be tasked to write their profiles (interests, likes, dislikes) to prepare them for the games.
 - Learners will be divided into four groups.
 - Group leaders and scribes will be allocated to ensure proper 'turn-taking' and that all group members are actively involved.
 - Orientation of the games.
-
- During Lesson 2, the rules of the game will be reiterated, lesson objectives will be communicated.
 - Learners will play the games in groups.
 - The games will be rotated so that all groups are exposed to the different games.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- At the end of the lesson, learners should have gained basic vocabulary building skills.
- Learners will be able to use the correct tenses.
- Learners will be able to respond to open-ended questions.

Learning objectives will be achieved through game-based learning.

TEACHING RESOURCES: Activate games for teaching American English

TEACHER ACTIVITY:

- The teacher will take learners through the learning objectives.
- The teacher will unpack the rules of the games.
- The teacher will task learners to write down their profiles.
- The teacher will divide learners into groups and facilitate the allocation of group leaders and scribes.
- The teacher will orientate learners about the games by explaining to each group how a specific game is supposed to be played.

LEARNER ACTIVITY:

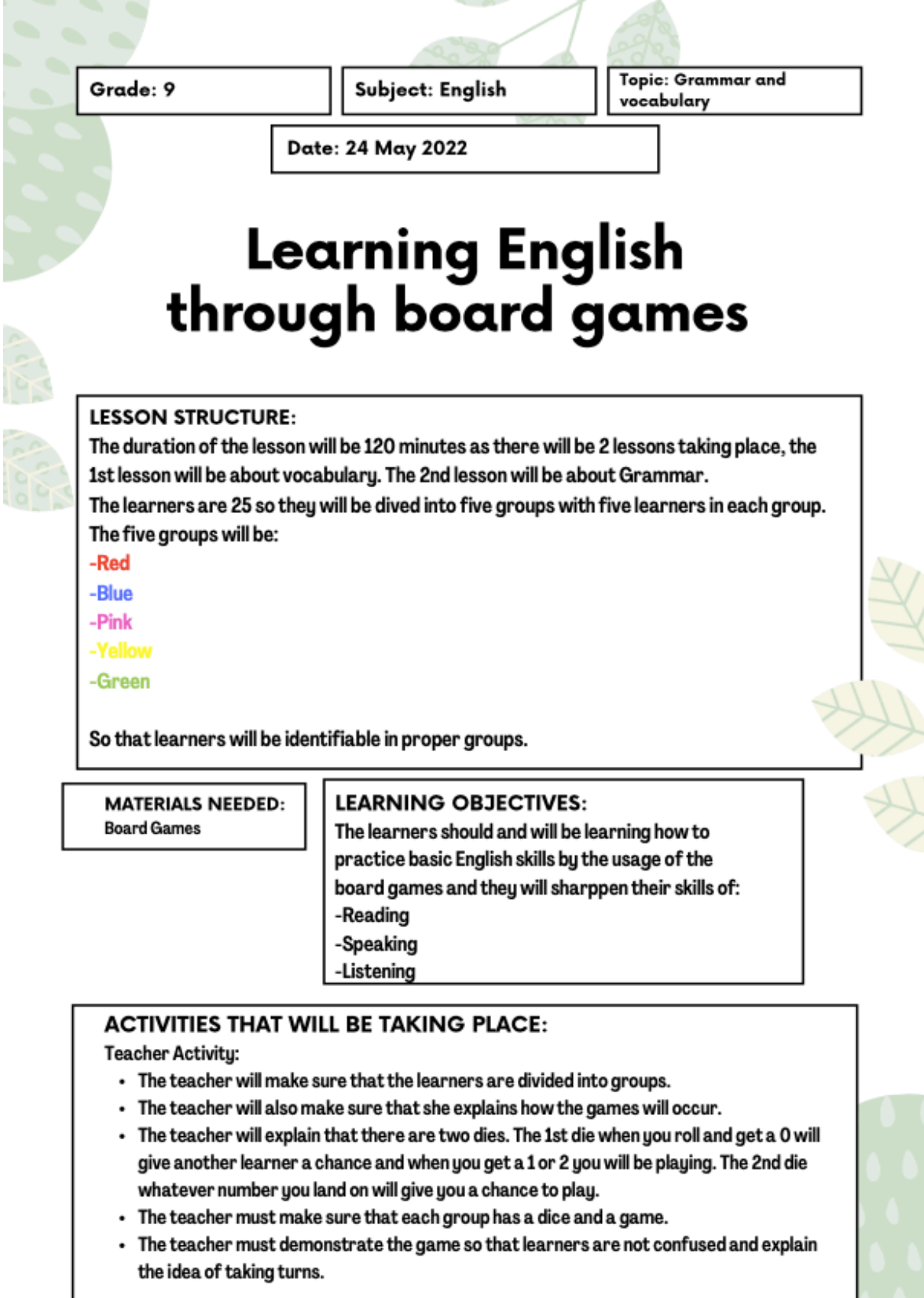
- Learners will note the learning objectives.
- Learners will take note of the rules of the games.
- Learners write down their profiles.
- Learners take part in the orientation and actual playing of the games.

<p>1st LESSON FOCUS Responding to open-ended questions</p>	<p>2nd LESSON FOCUS Vocabulary, tenses</p>
<p>Open-ended questions-</p>	<p>Vocabulary- Tenses-</p>
<p>Games that will be used:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which one would the world be better without... Why? 2. Have you ever, oh when? 3. What do I know? 4. Which one is different? Why? 5. What you might find? 	<p>Games that will be used:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use a word. 2. Name your favourite. 3. What someone does. 4. Have you ever, oh when? 5. Would you rather...?

CONCLUSION:

- Learners will reflect on what they have learnt in the games, which games they enjoyed and which parts of the games they liked the most.
- The teacher will reiterate the learning objectives to conclude the lesson.

6.6 ANNEXURE F: LESSON PLAN (SCHOOL B)



Grade: 9 **Subject: English** **Topic: Grammar and vocabulary**

Date: 24 May 2022

Learning English through board games

LESSON STRUCTURE:
The duration of the lesson will be 120 minutes as there will be 2 lessons taking place, the 1st lesson will be about vocabulary. The 2nd lesson will be about Grammar.
The learners are 25 so they will be divided into five groups with five learners in each group. The five groups will be:

- Red
- Blue
- Pink
- Yellow
- Green

So that learners will be identifiable in proper groups.

MATERIALS NEEDED:
Board Games

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
The learners should and will be learning how to practice basic English skills by the usage of the board games and they will sharpen their skills of:

- Reading
- Speaking
- Listening

ACTIVITIES THAT WILL BE TAKING PLACE:
Teacher Activity:

- The teacher will make sure that the learners are divided into groups.
- The teacher will also make sure that she explains how the games will occur.
- The teacher will explain that there are two dice. The 1st die when you roll and get a 0 will give another learner a chance and when you get a 1 or 2 you will be playing. The 2nd die whatever number you land on will give you a chance to play.
- The teacher must make sure that each group has a dice and a game.
- The teacher must demonstrate the game so that learners are not confused and explain the idea of taking turns.

Learner Activity:

- The learners will roll a dice and move a token, when they land on a certain question they need to answer that particular question.
- Every learner needs a turn when playing.

1st Lesson will be about vocabulary	2nd lesson will be about Grammar
Vocabulary- a body of words used in a particular language.	Grammar-Study of the way words are used to make sentences.
Games that will be used: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. About me 2. Name your favourite 3. What someone does 4. Which one would the world be better without...why? 5. Use a word. 	Games that will be used: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you ever, oh when? 2. What do I know? 3. Which one is different? Why? 4. What you might find? 5. Would you rather..?

CONCLUSION:

When concluding the lesson the teacher will ask each group what they have learnt and which game did enjoy the most.

1. When concluding the teacher should check if the learning objectives were achieved
2. That all the learners had a fair chance when they were playing.