



## Enhancing Teaching-Learning Activities Through Games: A Phenomenological Study

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### Abstract

*This study aims to analyze teaching-learning activities through games from phenomenological perspectives. Phenomenological study focuses on understanding and meaning-making of students' and teachers' lived experiences collected through in-depth interviews, follow-up interviews, and observations. Regarding this, students learn best when they enjoy teaching-learning activities. In games and/or game-like activities, students are stimulated to participate and work with heartfelt efforts. This study also focuses on learners' participation in games or game-like teaching-learning activities and how they are empowered to face challenges and try their best to achieve the goal. The paper explores which games and game-like activities are practiced in community schools and what benefits and challenges the activities pose in the sense-making of teachers' and students' experiences. Participants were purposively selected from conveniently chosen schools. The study has also found that students enjoy learning from games and want to play them again and again. However, teachers, though they sometimes use games and game-like activities in class, do so only for refreshment and experimentation, not as part of actual teaching. Moreover, such teaching has no significant role in assessment. Finally, it concludes that students learn more and better from games or game-like activities than from existing traditional teacher-centered teaching. This study suggests that the concerned authorities should encourage teachers to develop and implement game-based activities and assess students' learning achievements from them.*

**Keywords:** *Hermeneutic phenomenology, Gamification, Digital games, Game-based activities, Qualitative approach*

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## Introduction

Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. Almost everyone, regardless of age and profession, loves playing. A game is teamwork that activates its players, creates a funny environment with a competitive atmosphere, and encourages participants to achieve the goal. There is loss and win, sadness, and happiness associated with performance. So, participants always try their best to be victors. Alpar (2013) states that the term "playing" is derived from the Latin word "jocus," which signifies "joking, fooling around." Nobody wants to be a fool or a loser, so all participants try to perform their best. Similarly, Robert (2003) defines it as a "physical or mental activity purely gratuitous, which has, in the mind of the person who indulges in it no other purpose than the pleasure it gives."

Creating such an environment, language learners, who feel they are enjoying only, can be activated to work in the classroom for meaningful learning. Alpar (2013) concludes that practices of teaching realized through playing have a significantly more significant effect on the increase of the learning level than practices realized through traditional methods. As children are fond of games, this study attempts to explore how they are nurtured with games or game-like teaching-learning activities. The primary goal of this study is to investigate the use of games as a method for teaching-learning with a specific emphasis on understanding the experiences and perspectives of the teaching-learning activities.

## Review of Literature

The teaching-learning activities through games are assumed to be one of the qualitative techniques to enhance learning and knowledge sharing. Regarding this, various research studies have been conducted. Sarumaha (2021) examined how educators build learning with limited resources, utilizing interviews, learning experiences, documentation, and teacher/student observation sheets. The research showed that educators need training to facilitate learning. Some lesson plans and syllabuses are administered. Knowledge-based networks (KBN) used domino effects, leadership games, collaborative approaches, contextual learning tools, and school-wide media to help teachers construct this learning. Collaborative and contextual methods improved students' comprehension, commitment, perspectives, ability to apply material through new narratives and thought processes, school-based learning

media use, and instructor-student interaction.

Vilanova et al. (2021) examined professors' experiences on patient safety education in undergraduate health programs. The research question was investigated using multiple methods. The study included eleven southeastern Brazilian public university professors. Participant sampling was planned. Transcribed semi-structured interviews were thematically analyzed. Faculty taught interprofessional patient safety by sharing presentations and assignments. This study cited unfamiliarity with the national patient safety program, inadequate staffing, and a heavy academic workload as obstacles.

Nainggolan et al. (2020) examined how Team Games Tournament (TGT), a cooperative learning model, affects mechanical technique student engagement at SMKN (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan Negeri). The study used two classroom action research cycles. The study included tests, observations, student participation, and field notes. The study found student engagement and improvement in their grades. TGT and other cooperative learning models boost student engagement and performance, according to the research.

Souza (2022) highlighted that game-play improves children's physical, cognitive, motor, and social development. History and children's play are examined in this brief study. Theoretical analysis examines how ECE (Early Childhood Education) in ECE institutions promotes optimal child development. Many infant and toddler activities can be modified for older kids. This improves critical thinking, social awareness, and teaching and learning. A thorough bibliographic search of relevant topics clarified this process.

Chakkalathy and Mahamuni (2022) focused on language games, storytelling, activity-based learning, and specialized instruction are used in spelling classes. Researchers identify, plan, implement, and evaluate spelling-improvement activities and helped teachers. The researchers interpreted results using word breaks, word journals, personal dictionaries, and test score dictation. Comparing pre- and post-test scores helped researchers analyze data and found activities-based instruction improved English spelling and increased interest.

Wiersum (2012) created a theoretical framework for mathematics teachers' knowledge development. In the research, games and fun activities were started. The study shows students older than 10-years can only focus for 20 minutes in a

typical classroom lesson. That study finds that games improve learning activities. Azim et al. studied language teachers' motivation to teach and learn in 2020. In this phenomenological study information was collected from interviews and focus groups. That study found behavioral, emotional, and cognitive motivation indicators. Keeping eye contact, asking questions, requesting resources, showing love and respect for teachers, being punctual, efficiently completing classroom tasks, enjoying group activities, and suggesting topics to teacher's motivation. These signs caught most teachers' attention. This study's indicators can help teachers and researchers evaluate student motivation.

Hussein et al. (2021) used interpretive phenomenological analysis to study teachers' classroom survival strategies. The study included 10 teachers from two public secondary schools. Through extensive semi-structured interviews, data were compared frequently. The study links teacher burnout to student misbehavior, parental disengagement, classroom stress, and negative emotions. Knowing teaching and learning processes, being positive, considering individual factors, and having a strong support system can help you stay in teaching. This study found that training, salary increases, coping mechanisms, and strong support systems may reduce teacher burnout and retention.

Anwer and Abdullah (2023) found that 80% of faculty and 60% of students thought game-based learning improved nursing education. Over 72% of students and 80% of faculty said game-based learning improves critical thinking. Game-based nursing education engages students, research shows. Students and faculty agreed game-based learning improves critical thinking and academic performance.

Seralidou and Douligeris (2021) focused on good teaching and learning tools that build enthusiasm and engagement. Distance learning may benefit passive listeners. Games help distance learners learn object-oriented programming, says the study. Three Greek first-year gym classes studied informatics. Results show that remote game development and programming learning increases enjoyment and interest.

Sijabat and Grahita (2022) studied urban farming education with agriculture games. Urban farming protects green spaces and feeds people. Urbanization and rising food demands require the following from urbanites. Games teach beginners. Game mechanic repetition teaches strategy and pattern. An MDA (Multi-disciplinary Assessment) framework compared mechanisms in several farming games, and a

qualitative literature review examined relevant theories. This study explores how gaming can teach urban farming to different ages.

Wibowo et al. (2023) examined adolescent interest in Javanese culture and games, specifically Wayang Kulit in Yogyakarta's Special Region. The study found that adolescents' traditional game interest (34,946 "high") and engagement (32,686 "medium") varied. 22,069 "low" and 32,686 "medium" Javanese cultural interest responses correlated with Wayang Kulit performance. The government, educators, and parents should teach Javanese games and culture, says that study and Javanese sports need new ideas to stay interesting.

Fatima and Ali (2021) examined brain-based learning's philosophical and biological roots using phenomenology. Researchers were subjective. Twelve instructors had semi-structured interviews. Constructivism with a brain-oriented learning approach correlated with authenticity, optimism, realism, dualism, naturalism, and the cognizant and oblivious cerebrum in two subjects. Because brain research in education is new, educators' brain knowledge is incomplete. Instructors have used cerebral-based learning without explanation. Brain-based learning works in education.

Yin (2019) examined mobile phone harm and how educators use it to improve instruction. Online communication and gaming are expanding on smart phones. Smart phones have changed after-school and classroom learning. Zakaria (2021) examined Desa Inggris Singosari English teachers' warm-up games. Three trainers and twelve Smart Holiday English Campers were participated. Identity cards, word arrangement, body gestures, professional mentions, guessing games, and "do you love me?" were used by trainers. Games required sentence guessing and word placement. The data came from interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Elementary students' English proficiency started with games. Student English comprehension, self-confidence, and motivation improved. Student disregard for game instructions caused unfair play.

## **Research Methodology**

Following the hermeneutic phenomenology as the research design, the study explores teachers' use of games in teaching basic level students from community schools. The information in the study was collected from in-depth interviews, observation, and follow-up interview with the students studying in grade seven and eight and the teachers teaching them. The researchers have communicated with the

participants using both face to face and online communication. They were also asked to write about their experiences.

They were assured of confidentiality and secrecy so that they could express what they really experienced. No participant was forced to work as a participant. They were informed about the process of the study before selecting them as participants. Even after they work as a participant, they could quit the work if they feel some sort of uneasiness. For creating friendly and comfortable situation for the participants, the researcher stayed involving in different curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities in the school.

Because of the increasing interest of children with creative enthusiasm, much is expected from concern authority particularly, from the teachers. The educator who will teach a foreign language should be tactful and logical with diversity. Furthermore, they should be trained with a system through which children learn languages in a way physically and mentally different than adults do. We need games to activate the inactive, to promote mutual understanding, to help them build relationship and feel equal, to create friendly and positive atmosphere, to fulfill their need to be exposed to the language in a variety of situations, to provide equal opportunities to every one of the participants and promote their confidence and creativity.

The teachers who have made use of games in teaching have increased students' participation, motivated them to face challenges and take risks, promoted students' collaborative effort to achieve the goal, and nurtured them with critical awareness. However, the education policy in Nepal has not empowered such provision to motivate the teachers for cultivating such practices both in teaching learning and assessment. All the game-based learning activities are categorized in three types: real games, gamification, and digital games. Real games are natural events which are played for the sake of games and entertainment. Sports week and Mayor cup competition are examples of events for real games. They have no contribution for assessing students' achievement and upgrading them.

Schools have different programs and events for games. They are organized and closed when their utility is over. The real games which are outside the assessment can be made learning-centered. Dividing the students in different groups and giving them different roles, learning habits can be developed in students. Some work as a reporter, some as a volunteer, some as an official, and some as player and reflective writer can

contribute their roles and prepare the report. For example, the group whose duty is to prepare the report include the details of the event from the beginning to the end. But the group whose role is to analyze the programs critically mentions strong and weak points of the program they find and so on.

The next is gamification in education which makes learning more exciting and engaging. The educators or the teachers integrate learning content with learner-friendly game-like activities and make learning student-friendly and goal-oriented. The students are always excited but never tired of such game-like learning activities.

Though computer games were first developed in the 1960s, they have been used in learning since 1970s (Dhiyaneshwari & Chinnasamy, 2022). In this ICT dominant 21<sup>st</sup> century world, digital games are highly beneficial for both the teachers and the students in teaching and learning because such games are highly motivating to enhance students' distinct self-efficacy. Through the use of Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL), teachers can promote students' enthusiasm and lead them ahead in engaged-learning. The students enjoy learning and get empowered to face the challenges that are likely to appear in the examination. However, the existing school curriculum has not promoted Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL). It is still teacher-centered, theory-based, and interested-neglected.

As a result, the students are reluctant with the classroom teaching. They are frustrated with the textbook, and are afraid of examination. In order to create and promote students' energetic effort in learning, digital games which are also known as computer games are highly influential. Digital games must be integrated and used as a part of the teaching and learning process by the ministry of education, curriculum designers, administrators, and teachers themselves (Dhiyaneshwari & Chinnasamy, 2022). They have emphasized the importance of DGBL that digital games must be integrated and used as part of teaching and learning process by the ministry of education, curriculum designers, administrators, and teachers themselves. However, the schools are still dominated by the traditional top-down model of education. The concerned authorities have not empowered the school administrator and teachers with digital technology. Chen (20017) argues that digital game-based instruction could enhance students' learning motivation and learning achievement. Digital educational games like *Dragon Box* and *iCivics* are one of the best options to discourage traditional teaching learning trends. DGBL, which entertains the learners, makes them engaged,

and motivates them to thrive towards the goal, is one of the most learner-friendly breakthroughs in teaching learning.

## **Results and Discussion**

In order to promote relationships among the students in the class, pair work or group work works a lot. It helps them to share their thoughts and ideas. If we want some information about a student, we usually ask him/ her directly. But if we ask the same question to another student to say, they will get a chance to communicate so that they will share first and then tell others. In order to play this game, the class is divided into pair groups and they are asked to exchange information so that they can introduce their pair friend or tell other friend the information about their pair friend turn by turn. It is applicable in any class. Let them use any language (Nepali or English). In addition to student's personal information, we can ask them to explain his/ her friend's village, family, and any other appropriate information. For example:

Harry: He is Ram. His father is a teacher. He is tall and fat.....

Ram: He is Harry. His father is a driver. He is short and fat.....

This game is useful at the beginning of an academic year. However, the teachers have used it to promote dialogical activities in the classroom such as the communicative practices between a shopkeeper and a customer.

## **Gamification with Picture**

This is a simple game for learning from practice. Playing this game, students learn to describe a picture. Before starting this game, the teacher asks students to collect information on the topic they must describe while playing. When students learn to describe the picture given, they are ready to play. Picture and key information about the picture related to the topic are put on the wall which can be easily seen from the place to play. Playing should be designed in such a way that students can read the sentence on the wall and keep in mind to say before going across the bar. While walking or moving, they are encouraged to say a sentence and move ahead from the bar. They are not allowed to go across the bar without saying a sentence about the picture.

Firstly, the teacher asks all students to stand in a line or circle and asks them to say something (one sentence) about the picture (animal/place....) before they move



ahead crossing the bar. While playing one who cannot make sentence will be stopped at the bar and will be out from the game. The teachers have shown a cartoon or a picture of an animal/ a place or a common thing and have asked students to say something about it. The students are asked not to repeat the sentences already said. When all of the students finish describing the picture, they continue moving ahead describing it. The one who cannot describe the picture in his or her turn will be out from the game. The teacher has also been a participant like his/ her students in the game.

### **Balloon Game**

Balloon game is a simple kind of fun game in which children play and learn vocabulary, sentences and other language enhancing aspects. In this game, teacher is a manager, motivator and facilitator. Before playing this game, the students are asked to collect the words relating to a particular topic. The words will be written on a chart paper to hang on the wall so that students can see and memorize them when necessary. The teacher will set the rules of the games as per the need and throws the balloon up and starts the games. Students are asked to bang the balloon up before it touches the ground. At every fall, pupil will bang the balloon up saying a word and variation is compulsory; that is to say, the word formerly said should not be repeated. In the first step, the teachers have divided the class into many groups with five or six participants in each group. Then, they asked the students to write the names of people, place or things in a chart paper and asked them to put it on the wall in front of the class. The game can be played individually, in pairs, or in groups.

More and more names were collected but no names were repeated in the chart. After that, the teacher throws the balloon in the sky and asks them to call a name of people, places or things from the chart and hit the balloon up in the sky. During the play, they are asked to do it in their turn and not repeat the name already said. In the game, the one who hits the balloon without saying a word will be out. As per the need and interest of the students, the game is repeated among the students from different groups. For example, the students who became first from each group are kept in a group and asked to play. English teachers have used this game to teach sentence structure as well. In this practice, some clues are given and students are asked to make sentences with the clues and hit the ball up. For example: Horse /stable – The horse lives in a stable. Dog/cannel, Tiger/den etc. The social studies teachers also have used it to practice quiz

contest. Similarly, Mathematics teachers have used it in teaching multiplication table, social studies teachers to teach names of districts, places, hills, and rivers.

### **Guessing Game**

It is a fun game which helps students to promote confidence level and enhance their communicative skill. It also avoids students' shyness, nervousness and hesitation. In this game, every student in their turn is called to run at least a game. In order to play this game, each of the students will write some clues on a piece of paper, fold it, write a number or their name outside of it and drop it into the bucket. When all the students finish dropping a folded paper into the bucket, the teacher starts the game. The teacher does nothing but takes a folded paper out of the bucket and calls the name or number written on it. The student with the number or name written on it starts the game. Firstly, the student who conducts the game asks students to sit/stand in a circle. Then, he/she calls one of the students to the center of the circle and covers his/her eyes with a handkerchief or cloth. After that, s/he calls another student from the circle and asks him or her to catch his/her (the one whose eyes are covered) hand. In the next step, s/he asks the student (whose eyes are covered with handkerchief) to guess who he/she is. When the student whose eyes are covered makes a guess with no clue given, s/he is likely to be wrong. If s/he is correct, s/he gets claps from the students in the circle, otherwise, s/he is given a clue and asked to guess. In case, s/he is correct in guessing, s/he gets claps otherwise, he is given another clue(s). In the last step, result comes out. If he/she can guess correctly, s/he asks others to clap. The student is also asked how he/she guessed that. If the student cannot guess or have no idea to guess, the teacher gives some clues again and asks him/her to guess again. This game is used to empower students to solve the problem with a clue(s).

### **Listen and Say Game**

It is an outstanding game to teach listening skill. In this motivating game/activity, the students have access to authentic material. and respond immediately. The students are given exposure of minimal pairs, they will listen and pronounce. It can be done with the help of record player or computer in the class. If the class has internet facility, the teacher can make better use of laptop. At the beginning, teacher writes a word on the board, asks students to listen the authentic pronunciation and try to

pronounce the same. This game is more interesting when the teacher asks students to listen and follow activity. For example, the students raise their hand following the teachers order 'Raise your hand'. By extending this game, the teacher asks the students to listen a song, comedy, lecture etc. and perform it in the class. The students, particularly those who are weak in study but good at dancing can learn a lot from the song.

In recent days, digital games have been popular among children. For children, "playing with digital games, joining digital game forum or connecting to school networks with embedded games are ordinary activities of daily life" (Zawawi & Zainon, 2013). However, in case of children in Nepal, the schools have not utilized digital games in teaching learning. The children are found to be quite enthusiastic in digital games, but they are prohibited to play games in computer even in the computer class. The students if empowered with ICT (Information Communication Technology) connected learning activities, can learn with their heartfelt effort. Students empowered with ICT skills can enjoy the 21<sup>st</sup> century opportunities around the globe. Nurturing the students with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills is a must in schools. 21<sup>st</sup> century skills include learning and innovative skills; information, media, and technology skills; and life and career skills (Fadel, 2008).

In order to educate students with these skills and empower them with the knowledge and skills needed for the competitive digital world, the community schools should focus on digital games or game like activities along with other learner-engaged activities. In such games or game-like activities, the students were found to be more enthusiasm and ready to work more as a part of preparation for the game. This is one of the most student-friendly activities to lead the students from the area of their interest and talent to the target, the target is learning objectives. However, such activities have no significant role in assessment.

### **Conclusion and Implication**

Games or game-like learning activities are student-friendly and contain learning content are learner-engaged. They lead the students towards the goal with heartfelt effort. Well-designed learning activities motivate the students to work on them even outside classroom activities. The students' effortful work as a part of preparation for the game reflects the utopian learning world where the students work hard collaboratively

and complete all the required tasks. However, the teachers are reluctant to develop and implement the learning games because they require additional effort and expense as well. In order to develop and continue implementing such games, the teachers have no incentive at all. Instead, they are blamed for making noise and breaking student discipline. Therefore, the concern authority should provide for developing such game-like learning activities from policy making to assessment.

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