Using Multiple Language Games to Improve English Language Fluency: An Action Research of "Form One General Arts" Students at Sunyani Senior High School, Ghana

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Abstract

In Ghana, competence in English language, particularly speaking and listening skills, has become increasingly important for students' employment prospects. Yet, assessment techniques particularly emphasise reading and writing skills. This study therefore utilises action research methods to examine and improve the English fluency speaking skills of High School Students in Ghana. Specifically, the research adopts multiple language games, touted to increase fluency in language learning. Focusing on "Form One General Arts" students at Sunyani Senior High School, the research utilised language games as classroom interventions, together with classroom observations and interviews. Twenty students were randomly sampled for analysis, together with four selected English teachers. Findings at the pre-intervention stage show that most students had pronunciation and oral fluency difficulties which stemmed from disinterest in class and unwillingness of teachers to use other innovative teaching approaches. The intervention stage entailed four language games to improve students' oral fluency and pronunciation. The post-intervention analysis showed that students' concord errors reduced by 71%, their pronunciation errors reduced by 20% and speaking fluency rates increased by 40%. In effect, the research contributes to the usefulness of combining multiple language games in education action research, in contrast to existing research that highlights individual language games.

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1. Introduction

English is the third widely spoken language and the most widely learned second language globally (Simons and Fennig, 2017). It forms part of the official language(s) of almost sixty sovereign states including Ghana (Crystal 2003). Despite the noticeable global variations in accents, phonetics, phonology and sometimes vocabulary, grammar and spelling, English speakers are able to cross-communicate with relative ease (Pennyhook, 2017).

Despite its colonial origins, English is deemed a 'common tongue' among the over 79 indigenous languages in Ghana (Simons and Fennig, 2017), although this notion faces some contention.[1] In general, student-assessment techniques particularly place emphasis on what is written rather than spoken (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Foote et al., 2016). This produces students whose competence is in writing skills.

Ghana's education system similarly disproportionately prioritises excellent writing and reading skills from students (through in-school test assessments) with limited attention to speaking and listening skills. Conversely, the requirements and barriers to entry in Ghana's employment market increasingly require not just written test scores but general English competence including speaking abilities (Gyasi, 1991). Hence, the disparity between required excellent English writing-skills and general language requirements (including fluency in the job market) motivated this research.

Specifically, the research examines the extent to which language games can assist students to communicate fluently in English. The emphasis on language games as a teaching method is to go beyond existing teaching practices in Ghana's High Schools, which emphasise more traditional teaching strategies (Poku, 2008). Language games have been touted to increase fluency and teaching methods (Puta Wulantari et al, 2023). The study thus examines three questions; What factors contribute towards students` inability to speak English fluently? What language games can teachers employ for students to speak English fluently? To what extent can the use of language games improve students' English speaking skills?

The study is situated in the Sunyani Senior High School in the Bono Region of Ghana, focusing on "Form One General Arts Class" students together with school teachers. The research uses three-stage action intervention stages; pre-intervention, intervention and post-intervention (PRE-INT, INT and POST-INT). These stages entail classroom observations and interviews of students and teachers.

Findings from the PRE-INT showed that although teachers have knowledge of language games and its efficacy as a teaching method, they deem it as a non-serious teaching approach that wastes time. However, over

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[1] Some argue that the notion of English as a linguistic unifier in Ghana might be exaggerated, arguing that it only unifies those with formal education (Obeng, 1997).

half of the "Form One General Arts" students interviewed have difficulty speaking English in class. The students also do not read outside the classroom and do not speak to peers in the English language. Students attribute this difficulty to the 'boring' teaching approaches, lack of interactive feedback from teachers and students' consequent disinterest in using available resources. Hence the intervention (INT) was initiated by the researcher using four language games to improve students' English speaking levels. The INT entailed a recap of 'Subject-Verb Agreement' as well as the use of the 'Odd One Out', 'Rhyming Pair Word' and 'Readers Theatre' games. The POST-INT findings showed that students' concord errors reduced by 71% and pronunciation errors reduced by 20%. Students with high speaking fluency rates increased by 40%, representing a significant improvement.

Existing research highlights some positive outcomes of individual language games to improve students confidence, creativity, collective learning, improvisation, expressiveness and enabling conditions for fluency as well as to improve teachers' overall instructional strategies (Guillot, 1999; Keehn, 2003; Inkelas, 2003; Mountford, 2007; Young & Rasinski, 2009; Mendes, 2012; Fraser, 2012; Uribe, 2013; Myrset, 2014; Næss, 2016; Icheku, 2017; Chambers and Yunus, 2017; Abimanyu, 2018; Sasanti, 2019).

The findings of this research however highlights the importance of combining multiple language games ('Odd One Out', 'Rhyming Pair Word', 'Readers Theatre') to in-classroom lessons, thus contributing fresh insights. By focusing on multiple language games, this action research focuses on a more comprehensive approach to improving students' fluency. The multiple games help students to play an active role in the conscious acquisition of the language knowledge through different multi-sensory learning practices (Puta Wulantari et al, 2023; Chambers & Yunus, 2017; Krashen, 2003). The findings therefore highlight the usefulness of language games for enhancing different forms of fluency including oral fluency (Guillot, 1999; Rasinski & Farstrup, 2006).

In the Ghanaian context, the findings contribute to research aimed at improving students' language proficiency skills (Naafan, 2018). It adds practical insights to proof-of-concept research on the potential of language games in Ghana's Education system (Fredericks, 2008), and responds to calls for listening and oral skills competences in English-Language among teacher-trainees in Ghana (Poku, 2008). The study will show how teachers can effectively stimulate interest and speaking-fluency among students through various game techniques. At the institutional level, the study will draw the attention of the Ghana Education Service to place emphasis on speaking skills which is currently poorly taught and rarely tested yet increasingly in high demand within the employment sector.

The rest of the paper is thus organised as follows. Section 2 delves into the literature focusing on the relationship between fluency and language games. The case study is briefly discussed in section 3 and the methodology in section 4. Section 5 provides the analysis and findings. Section 6 discusses the findings with conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Fluency

Fluency refers to the state of expressing oneself quickly and easily (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). It entails responding without difficulty in dialogue and includes a reasonably fast speed of language use. According to the National Centre for Voice and Speech, the average person speaks between 125-150 words per minute (National Centre for Voice and Speech, n.d.). Language fluency therefore broadly denotes a high level of proficiency and narrowly highlights fluid language use, usually of a second language. In the narrow sense, fluency is necessary but not sufficient for language proficiency. For instance, fluent speakers may have narrow vocabularies, limited discourse strategies, and inaccurate word use. There are four main types of fluency; reading, oral, oral-reading, and written/compositional (Guillot, 1999; Rasinski & Farstrup, 2006). These are often interrelated but may not necessarily germinate in tandem within language use. One may develop strengths and weaknesses in some and not others. For the purposes of this article which addresses students' ability to speak, the researcher focuses on oral fluency.

Oral Fluency is a construct with many definitions and is applied to reading, writing, and listening as well as speaking. In oral production, its relationship to specific aspects of speech production (pronunciation, intonation, hesitation) is dependent on different interpretations of what is considered oral fluency. Koponen and Riggenbach (2000) identify four major views of fluency. The first involves "smoothness of speech" which is dependent upon the "temporal, phonetic, and acoustical features" of speech (Koponen and Riggenbach, 2000: 8). This conception of fluency is deemed to underlie the oral criteria within, for instance, SPEAK tests. This approach is similarly adopted by Derwing and Rossiter (2003) who assign fluency to temporal factors, specifically "rate of speech and hesitation phenomenon" (Derwing and Rossiter, 2003: 8). The second involves "fluency as proficiency or as a component of proficiency" (Koponen and Riggenbach, 2000: 13). Here, smoothness becomes just one component of overall fluency. The third view relates to "fluency as automaticity of psychological processes" (Koponen and Riggenbach, 2000: 16). This is concerned with how fluency is acquired or developed through various "psychological learning mechanisms" (Koponen and Riggenbach, 2000: 16). The final view relates to "fluency as opposed to accuracy" (Koponen and Riggenbach, 2000: 17). This view was popularised by Brumfit (2001)

highlighting the distinction between accurate speech (i.e., learner is focused on the language activity itself) and fluent speech (i.e., learner is focused upon communicating).

For Brumfit (2001), fluency is natural language use, whether or not it results in native-speaker-like language comprehension or production. Here, the learners have to operate in the same way as they do in natural, mother-tongue use (Brumfit, 2001). In contrast to the accuracy-versus-fluency dichotomy, others take a more relational approach, arguing that although the focus of ESL (English as Second Language) pronunciation-lessons is generally on accuracy (i.e., on getting students to produce target-like sounds, rhythms, and intonation patterns), fluency and accuracy are interconnected to the extent that students' fluency levels will almost certainly be affected by their accuracy, and vice versa (Hedge, 1993; Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Foote et al, 2016). This interaction has caused many classroom practitioners to question the scope of pronunciation instruction and assessment, which has traditionally been defined as the accurate production of the sounds, rhythms, and intonation patterns of a language (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Foote et al., 2016). Using class observation and oral interviews, this research on the "Form One General Arts" students evaluates fluency-in-action without taxonomizing fluency into standardised assessment outcomes. In other words, the research examines smoothness and automaticity of speech without limiting fluency to proficiency assessments. Although some suggest smoothness and speech-rate forms of fluency is of a lower-order than that which deals with global proficiency (Lennon, 2000), adopting fluency games means adopting a less regimented strategy to garner fluency. The aim here is to garner natural language use (Brumfit, 2001) which is "useful in reference to teaching methodology, but not in reference to oral performance evaluation criteria" (Koponen and Riggenbach, 2000: 17).

2.2 Speech and Fluency

Speech is human vocal communication using language. Each language uses phonetic combinations of vowel and consonant sounds that form the word-sounds. These words are then used in their semantic character according to the syntactic constraints that govern lexical words' function in a sentence (American Heritage Dictionary, 2020). Success in speech is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language. Speaking in a second language is very demanding as learners do not have the luxury of subconscious acquisition. When attempting to speak, learners must muster their thoughts and encode those ideas in the vocabulary and syntactic structures of the target language. Therein lies fluency. Speech and fluency are both linked to communication but are mutually exclusive. For example, in conversation, a speaker can make a grammatical error, such as "Ernest eat every day" (instead of "eats") but the learner can still speak the sentence with some fluency (Crowther et al, 2015). Speaking fluency enables the speaker to speak without pausing to search for words. Hence, some define speech as the "automaticity and speed of speech production" (Brand and Gotz, 2011: 256). In effect, an overemphasis on quantified assessment criteria for speech may result in a rigid acting process (akin to a stage-speech), hence losing the automaticity that fluency requires.

However, automaticity and speed of speech production may not always make a speech comprehensible, the latter deemed as "a measure of listeners' perceived ease or difficulty of understanding second language speech" (Crowther et al, 2015: 81). In other words, even though a grammatical error may not hinder communication, certain grammatical errors can be distracting, and by so doing, can detract from fluency. In the following extract from the fieldwork at Sunyani Secondary School (in the pre-intervention stage), a student stated rapidly: "Is come here to see if friend has two pens". Here, the student intends to say, "I am here to see if my friend has two pens". However, the sentence construction may not be very comprehensible to the listener. This goes to show that "accuracy and fluency do not operate in complete independence from each other" (Housen and Kuiken, 2009: 469), reverting to the accuracy-versus-fluency dichotomy (Koponen and Riggenbach, 2000; Brumfit, 2001). Using language games in this research therefore evaluates the conversational competence of students rather than, for instance, their mere competence in rehearsed speech.

2.3 Using Language Games to Improve Speaking Fluency

Adhering to various communicative approaches, language games in teaching and learning hold numerous advantages in enhancing an ESL learner's fluency and language skills. It creates an enjoyable environment for an effective learning process. Goodman and Goodman (2014: 197) state that "children learn language best in an environment rich with opportunities to explore interesting objects and ideas". Language games provide a platform for learners to communicate using target grammar forms in a more interesting and authentic manner. A study of 40 Iranian teachers of English showed that the experienced teachers use games to teach grammar, a topic they deem boring otherwise (Alijanian, 2012). As the research findings will show, the "Form One General Arts" students blame 'boring' teaching approaches for their disinterest in reading outside the classroom and speaking to peers in English. Grammar should be taught with the willingness to engage learners in interaction using grammar games.

According to Krashen (2003), learning a second language entails two independent systems: the acquired system and the learned system. The acquired system requires a natural communication or meaningful interaction

in the target language, while the learned system is the product of a conscious process resulting in the knowledge of the language, for example grammar rules. Language games help learners to play an active role in the conscious acquisition of language knowledge. Adeng and Shah (2012) state that "grammar teaching that is too dependent on rules and memorisation makes learners lose their interest and motivation" and that "games are the most suitable to learn the grammar of a second language" (Adeng & Shah, 2012 :23). For instance, Duolingo has gamified conscious learning of second languages.

Learning grammar provides learners with a proper and deeper understanding of the English language especially when it is learned unconsciously through practices (Chambers & Yunus, 2017). Equally, ESL learners must use the language actively through communication with others in order to progress in a game providing room for improvement in fluency (Adeng & Shah, 2012). Godwin-Jones (2014) further explains that "learners are using language in real and meaningful ways to accomplish a task through games", adding that "they are exposed to cultural and linguistic knowledge that they are unlikely to have encountered in a textbook or in the classroom" (Godwin-Jones, 2014:10).

Equally, Adeng and Shah (2012: 28) from their research on the use of games in teaching grammar opine that "grammar games encourage, entertain and promote fluency". This is opposed to the traditional language learning that stresses grammar drills and limits the overall practice of using the English language through interaction. Language games also allow ESL learners to work with partners and in groups, giving them more opportunities to use the language themselves (Willis & Willis, 2013). ESL learners experiment, explore and cooperate through playing games. Such learners develop language skills by interacting with others and learning from mistakes. Hence, language games promote learner-centredness as a teaching and learning strategy. It focuses on independent learning to replace traditional teaching methods and develop ESL learners' fluency (Adeng & Shah, 2012). Learners are able to lessen anxiety, build self-confidence and portray positive emotions and behaviours as they are unafraid of using the target language interactively (Adeng & Shah, 2012).

Examples abound regarding the use of language games in improving various aspects of ESL. For instance, Chambers and Yunus (2017) use a 'Wheel of Grammar' game focusing on 15 Form Five students in Malaysia to improve students' confidence in using subject-verb agreement in sentence construction. This resulted in reduced student-stress linked to the creative learning process. Equally, Guillot (1999) posits the advantages of the 'Lego Game' as a communicative activity where some student groups build a Lego model and other students communicate the building process for other groups to duplicate. The 'Lego Game' hones students' skills in negotiation, communication, observation and complementing resources to build collectively. Another is the 'Intruder Game' where students are encouraged to pay attention to different group discussions within a short time to enable selective listening while providing skills in multi-participant exchanges (Guillot, 1999). Additionally, Sasanti (2019) used the 'Odd One Out Game' as part of an action research on "Second Grade" Indonesian students, improving their pronunciation from 53.3% to 80%. Similar action research by Abimanyu (2018) focusing on 20 Indonesian students of comparable grade used the 'Odd One Out Game' to improve students' mean English test scores (10.7) compared to a control group (5.7).

Furthermore, 'Rhyming Pair Word' games such as 'J's game' focuses on reduplicating words partially or totally, and integrating a consonant at the beginning; example "ant – bant", "towel – bowel", "blanket – planket" etc. (Inkelas, 2003). Through a two-year longitudinal study of a 2.5 year old child, Inkelas (2003) uses the 'J's game' to demonstrate the importance of prosodic structure in child language, improving their familiarity with metrical feet, syllables, and syllable-internal structure.

Other language games like the 'Readers Theatre' are also highly popular, with extensive empirical action research available. It is touted to motivate students through tension-building to think on their feet and speak in front of peers. It also helps them build sensory and motor skills, improves literary comprehension, listening, oral, creative writing skills and personal growth (Young & Rasinski, 2009). 'Readers Theatre' has therefore been used in action research to improve oral fluency of Second Graders in Texas (Young and Rasinki, 2009), Title I students in San Diego (Mendes, 2012) as well as fluency and comprehension of Social Studies Students in rural Northern California (Fraser, 2012), among others. It has also been used to improve pronunciation, word recognition and reading fluency in a Norwegian Sixth Grade English Class and to help Tenth Grade Learners of minority backgrounds in Norway (Myrset, 2014; Næss, 2016). In a 2017 study of High Schools in Ibadan, students who were taken through 'Readers Theatre' had the highest post-test achievement mean score (48.25) in prose literature-in-English, significantly higher than the control group score of 19.40 (Icheku, 2017).

In another study, repeated 'Readers Theatre' games improved the oral reading fluency of Fourth and Fifth Grade students with learning disabilities in a suburban metropolis outside Chicago (Mountford, 2007). Keehn (2003) also shows that 'Readers Theatre' made significant gains in the reading rate, retelling, and expressiveness of "low achievement" Second Graders in Central Texas, while also improving the general reading ability of the rest of the class. It also improved the overall instructional strategies for Fifth Grade teachers in a South Florida school district (Uribe, 2013).

These cited empirical works highlight the importance of using various language games to improve students'

confidence, creativity, collective learning, improvisation, expressiveness and enabling conditions for fluency. It also improved teachers' overall instructional strategies. However, such works focus on individual language games highlighting one or two of such positive outcomes. By focusing on multiple language games, this action research "Form One General Arts" students at Sunyani Secondary School focuses on a more comprehensive approach to improving students' fluency. The research uses the Ghanaian case to contribute to existing empirical works.

3. English Fluency and High School Education in Ghana

Language education policies in Ghana have been ridden with inconsistencies since the 16th century (Yuvedey, 2017). Ghana had two education eras from the 16th to the early 20th century. The first was the colonial missionary schools which emphasised a bilingual linguistic approach (Ghanaian languages and English) to train local Christian missionaries. This was followed by a 'Castle Schools' system set up by colonial administrators to train local bureaucrats through English-only education (Yuvedey, 2017). Since Ghana's independence in 1957, language policies in Ghanaian schools have remained bifurcated, consisting of English-only schools vis-à-vis bilingual schools (Yuvedey, 2017). Yet English education has remained a pivotal aspect of student assessment and increasingly a focus of employment prospects. Most Ghanaian students study English for 8-10 years before entering the three-year Senior High School system. High School education in Ghana aims to introduce students to knowledge including technical know-how and training for universities and for the job market (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016).

A closer look, however, reveals that the spoken aspect of the language is on a steady decline. A study of the reading habits of Koforidua Polytechnic students in Ghana revealed that 75% of the respondents were motivated to read English just to pass examinations (Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014).

In the Ghanaian context of learning English as a Second Language (ESL), instructors regularly ask why the majority of undergraduate students are unable to speak English confidently. According to Trent (2009), one reason among many is the lack of confidence and student anxiety about making errors.

Aside from the use of English as a 'common tongue' among different ethnicities in Ghana, there is an increasing emphasis on English oral fluency requirements and barriers to entry in Ghana's employment market. As argued by Gyasi (1991: 28) "ethnic feelings, educational and job requirements and its present importance as a world language guarantee that English is not about to be legislated out of Ghana". For instance, job interviews in Ghana's formal sector usually are conducted in English.

Despite these developments, existing action research in Ghana has not directly engaged with the focus of this research, i.e., oral fluency of students. For instance, Naafan (2018) adopts the syllabic method as an action research strategy to improve the (English) reading proficiency of 97 Fourth to Sixth Grade students in Northern Ghana. Additionally, there are no discernible action studies employing the 'Odd One Out', 'Rhyming Pair Word' and the 'Readers Theatre' games individually or combined. Fredericks (2008) details how Ghanaian folktales such as "Ananse the cunning-spider" can be integrated into a 'Readers Theatre'; yet it only remains a proof-of-concept in terms of action research in Ghana. Poku (2008) highlights how poor English competence of teacher-trainees in Ghana's Wesley Teacher Training School was attributed to, among others, lack of visual and audio teaching aids in the training schools. The research recommended that "there is the need to devote more resources for listening and oral skills [of teachers] since they are fundamental skills to be established before the rest of the skills can follow" (Poku, 2008: 81-82). The study showed that the lack of audio-visual aids stifles teachers' competence to foster students' oral English fluency skills through language games and other engaging teaching aids.

In effect, this research on the "Form One General Arts" students at Sunyani Senior High School in Ghana is a complement to such Ghanaian and global empirical insights looking at how student fluency is motivated using language games. The methodology gives further details of the research design.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Approach

Action Research was employed for this study. Action research involves actively participating in a change situation often via an existing organisation, whilst simultaneously conducting research (Johnson, 2012). Action research offers benefits for educators committed to a critical and investigative process of improving educational practice, policy or culture. It helps practitioners connect theory and practice (Johnson, 2012), and to develop new knowledge directly related to the classroom (Hensen, 1996). Based on these benefits, the study used language games as action research to improve the speaking skills of "Form One General Arts" students at Sunyani Senior High School. The action research was conducted through two cycles, each consisting of four steps:

- Planning: The researcher identifies the problem through pilot studies with the "Form One General Arts" students. This began in September 2019 and lasted for a month. The pilot study highlighted that confidence issues hinder students' willingness to speak. The students found it difficult to pronounce certain sounds and to string together accurate grammatical sentences. They also spoke at an extremely slow pace which indicated poor speaking skills. These initial responses provided insights for the

intervention stages of the action research.

- Acting: The researcher identifies the specific interventions to ameliorate the problem.
- Observing: The researcher elaborates on the kinds of data to be collected, the procedure and instrument for collecting such data. The kinds of data included quantitative (students' progress / scores) and qualitative data (students' interest and class management). The procedure and instruments included interviews and observation of classroom activities.
- Reflecting: The researcher critically evaluates the progress or change within students, classes and the teacher. In other words, the researcher ascertains whether there has been an improvement in the English speaking abilities of the students.

4.2 Sampling procedure

There are an estimated 1 million Senior High School students in Ghana (Prempeh, 2018). In Sunyani Senior High School alone, there are over 2000 students (SUSEC, 2019). Hence purposive sampling was used for this research by focusing on Sunyani Senior High School, where the researcher undertook a 3-month internship from September to December 2019. This sample is therefore not representative of all Senior High School students in Ghana but offers more student-focused findings that provide insights into the state of English language fluency in Ghana. The "Form One General Arts" students were selected because Ghanaian students enrolled in a High School "General Arts" programme usually take courses that are English-language intensive. These courses include English Literature, Geography, Government, Social Studies, Economics etc. (with the exception of local language classes and French). Hence English is pivotal for the in-classroom reading, writing, speaking and comprehension of "General Arts" Students in Ghana. This differs from students in "General Science" programmes where Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Elective Mathematics require less intensive English language skills.

At Sunyani Senior High School, the initial sample frame of the study consisted of all 80 "Form One General Arts" students (SUSEC, 2019). From this, a sample of 20 students were selected at random. This was done by writing the names of the class population on pieces of paper, putting the names in a box and randomly picking them. The resulting twenty consisted of eleven male and nine female students. Random sampling was used to enable unbiased selection, representativeness and to competently undertake the fieldwork with limited resources (Knoke et al., 2002).

4.3 Research Instruments

Observations and interviews were used for the action research. These were administered on the twenty students sampled. Observations were conducted on classroom activities. Students were observed for a total of 5 hours each week stretching over 2 weeks. This happened in September 2019 as part of the three-stage interventions. The researcher used note-taking as the primary source of recording. Pictures were also taken during the lessons to add further information.

Interviews were also conducted, each lasting 8 minutes on average. Interviews were done from mid to end of September using questionnaires as part of the three-stage interventions. The structure of the interview questions consisted of a combination of open-ended, close-ended and probing questions. The questions were logically ordered to enable ease of comprehension for interviewees. Questions were asked in a clear and unambiguous manner. The pilot testing ensured internal consistency and relevance to research questions.

4.4 Three Stage Interventions

The three-stage interventions consisted of pre-intervention, intervention and post-intervention activities (henceforth labelled PRE-INT, INT and POST-INT respectively).

At the PRE-INT stage, the researcher used classroom observations and interviews to ascertain the existence of an identified problem and to collect data for analysis. PRE-INT-observation consisted of observing both teachers and students. This helped the researcher ascertain classroom teaching techniques and students' behaviour. It was also to compare students' in-classroom speaking skills to their outside-classroom speaking skills. PRE-INT-interviews were conducted to find out students' involvement and contribution during English Language lessons and the availability of reading materials to them. The interview interactions also gave the researcher a first-hand look at students' speaking skills.

At the intervention (INT) stage, the researcher implemented language games that will help curb or solve the problem identified. These games aimed to improve students' skills in subject-verb agreement and tenses, to practise pronunciation and to improve fluency. Four INT language games were undertaken. First, the researcher took the students through a short recap of 'Subject-Verb Agreement' lessons in order to improve their use of tenses. This was followed by the 'Odd One Out' game, which aimed to improve students' pronunciation. Thirdly, the 'Rhyming Pair Word Game' was employed to also practise pronunciation with students. The final INT game was 'Readers Theatre', to aid students in improving their fluency. Details of these four games are provided in the analysis section.

At the post – intervention (POST-INT) stage, the researcher took students through a series of activities to

ascertain the effectiveness of the intervention. It entailed a POST-INT-interview focusing on similar PRE-INT questions. As the findings will show, the POST-INT-interview showed remarkable improvement in students' speaking skills. Their tenses were well structured; the words were well-pronounced, and their fluency had improved. The errors identified were also appreciably insignificant. Although some of the findings are quantified as percentages (see Hieke, 1985), this is to synthesise the research findings on natural language use (Brumfit, 2001) rather than to elaborate a standardised-test approach to oral fluency.

5. Analysis and Findings

5.1 Pre-Intervention Results

During the PRE-INT-observation, the researcher observed classroom English lessons and non-classroom activities from the "Form One General Arts" students. The aim was to gain insights on students' English fluency issues, how they responded to the lessons and their level of participation. It was observed that students preferred other aspects of English lessons such as reading comprehension which they thought was easier to undertake than speaking. Findings also showed that despite the students' lack of confidence in speaking, none of the four teachers used language game approaches in their classes, regardless of the latter's knowledge of them. The teachers rather relied on traditional teaching approaches such as direct one-way instructions. The initial findings from the observations showed that these teaching approaches made the observed class activities difficult and at times boring for the students. Findings showed that 75% of the students never find the English language lessons interesting (Author's Fieldwork, 2019). The traditional teaching approaches adopted by teachers have the propensity to result in poor speaking skills among students and limited desire and interest to improve. These traditional approaches, without the input of language games, become less interactive, as 60% of the students reported not being allowed to contribute during English language classes (Author's Fieldwork, 2019).

To gain more relevant and an in-depth baseline understanding of their speaking skills , the 20 students were interviewed as part of PRE-INT. Table 1 below examines whether and how students talk in class. It also examines ease of speaking in class and the level of feedback given by teachers after speaking in class. The interview was set up in a conversational manner to examine natural language use (Brumfit, 2001) but also was based on questions that were deemed pertinent to the study.

Table 1. Talking in Class

Do you talk in class often?		How easy is it for you to talk in class?		Do you get feedback from your teachers after speaking in class?	
Response	Number of Students (%)	Response	Number of Students (%)	Response	Number of Students (%)
		Very easy	2 (10%)	Yes	2 (10%)
Yes	9 (45%)	Somewhat easy	3 (15%)	Sometimes	5 (25%)
No	11 (55%)	Difficult	15 (75%)	No	13 (65%)
Total	20 (100%)	Total	20 (100%)	Total	20 (100%)

Source: Field data (2019)

Table 1 shows that 55% of the students did not talk in class often. An average of 20-35 words per minute of student speech was recorded during the field observations. This is low considering that the average person speaks between 125-150 words per minute (National Centre for Voice and Speech, n.d.). During interviews, the students also made forms of concord errors (subject – verb disagreement) and/or pronunciation mistakes (lack of or wrong punctuation) when answering this question. They also spoke slowly. Similarly, 75% of the students reported finding it difficult to talk in class. Such students also made concord and pronunciation errors when answering questions. When asked if they receive feedback from teachers after speaking in class, a majority (65%) of the students responded in the negative. The lack of teacher-feedback stifles students' confidence to speak regardless of mistakes, and it restricts opportunities for correction.

Table 2 below examined whether or not students found it easy to speak English fluently outside the classroom. Here, interview questions focused on reading and speaking in mostly non-class and informal settings including speaking to peers.

Table 2. Reading and Speaking outside the Classroom

How often do you read outside the classroom?		Do you speak to your peers in the English Language?	
Response	**Number of Students (%)**	**Response**	**Number of Students (%)**
Very often	2 (10%)	Always	5 (25%)
Sometimes	5 (25%)	Occasionally	2 (10%)
Not at all	13 (65%)	Not at all	13 (65%)
Total	**20 (100%)**	**Total**	**20 (100%)**

Source: Field data (2019)

Table 2 showed that 65% of the students reported never reading anything outside the classroom. Additionally,

the majority of students do not speak to each other in English. This meant that students do not practise speaking the language outside of the classroom, even though peer to peer conversation is known to be one of the greatest enhancers of fluency and speaking skills. This therefore caused a major damp on the ability of students to be fluent.

Additional set of PRE-INT questions focused on the English language learning resources available to students at the school.

Table 3. English Language Learning Resources

	Do you have enough reading materials in your school library?	Do you read the items available in the library?
Response	Number of Students (%)	Number of Students (%)
Always	14 (70%)	2 (10%)
Occasionally	3 (15%)	6 (30%)
Not at all	3 (15%)	12 (60%)
Total	**20 (100%)**	**20 (100%)**

Source: Field data (2019)

Table 3 shows that the library at Sunyani Senior High School has enough reading materials as affirmed by the majority (70%) of the class. Multiple visits to the school library by the researcher confirmed that all the books needed for the syllabus were in stock. This ranged from literature, grammar, comprehension, drama, prose and poetry books. Samples include Buchi Emecheta's 'Second Class Citizen', William Shakespeare's 'Mid Summer's Night Dream' and Jacob Yabuni Yibana's 'Who Killed the Judges', a graphic account of the gruesome murder of four Ghanaian Supreme Court judges in 1982. There was also a variety of books that contained both African and Non-African poems. However, 60% of the students interviewed never read the materials at the school library. Despite students having these reading materials at their disposal, they do not read them. This therefore goes a long way to affect their speaking skills. There is a gap between availability of such materials and their integration into teaching approaches by students and their subsequent learning interest. This gap therefore prompted the need to interview teachers.

Hence, four English Language teachers were interviewed through questionnaires to examine their (potential) use of language games to improve students' learning outcomes. Table 4 below examines teachers' knowledge, opinion and potential use of language games as teaching approaches.

Table 4. Use of Language Games in Teaching

	Do you know the Language Games Approach?	Would you say Language Games is an effective approach to teaching?	Do you implement it in teaching?	Do you give your students the chance to contribute during class?
Response	Number of Teachers (%)	Number of Teachers (%)	Number of Teachers (%)	Number of Teachers (%)
Yes	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)
No	0	0	3 (75%)	2 (50%)
Total	**4 (100%)**	**4 (100%)**	**4 (100%)**	**4 (100%)**

Source: Field data (2019)

The teachers interviewed had knowledge of various language games such as 'Charades', 'Letter Scramble', 'Chalkboard Acronym' among others. They all agreed that language games are effective approaches to teaching. However, the majority of the teachers (75%) refuse to use it in teaching, citing that it is not a serious approach to use and is time-consuming to adopt. Teachers' emphasis on time-efficacy rather than stimulating student interaction through such games is also evident in 50% of the teachers not giving students the chance to contribute in class (Table 3).

The PRE-INT stage therefore showed that although teachers have knowledge of language games and its efficacy as a teaching method, they deem it as a non-serious and time-wasting teaching approach. However, as already mentioned, 65-75% of the students have difficulty speaking English in class, do not read outside the classroom and do not speak to peers in the English language (Tables 1 and 2). Students attribute this to the 'boring' teaching approaches, lack of interactive feedback from teachers and students' consequent disinterest in using available resources. Hence the researcher intervened by implementing language games to improve students' English speaking levels.

5.2 Intervention and Post-Intervention Results

At the intervention stage (INT), four language games were undertaken to improve students' English language fluency. First, the researcher took the students through a short recap lesson on 'Subject-Verb Agreement' in order to improve their use of tenses during speech.

Secondly, the researcher used the 'Odd One Out Game', which aims to teach and practice pronunciation with

the students. Here, the researcher prepared a list with three to four sets of words with each having the same vowel sound, except one. For example, 'cut', 'but' 'nut' and 'put'. The class was then divided into two teams and formed two lines at the back of the classroom. The four sets of words were written on the board. The student at the front of the line would read aloud the set of words, and then race to the board to identify the odd word out and then circle it. The first student to circle the word would win a point for her/his team. The 'Odd One Out' game was aimed at improving students' pronunciation of vowel sounds.

Thirdly, the 'Rhyming Pair Word' game was employed. This was also to practise pronunciation with students. Here, a random word was pronounced by the researcher, and students had a set number of seconds to find three words that rhyme with that word. Points were awarded for correct pronunciation of words found.

The final game in the INT stage was the 'Readers Theatre Game'. This was aimed at aiding students to improve their general speaking fluency. Here, students rehearsed and performed a play for peers. They read scripts and book chapters rich in dialogue. Students played characters who speak lines or narrators who share necessary background information. This provided students with a legitimate reason to reread texts and to practise fluency. It also helped promote students' collaboration and interaction with peers and improve speaking skills in general.

After implementing these language games, the researcher interviewed students at the post-intervention stage (POST-INT) to help measure the effectiveness of such games as a corrective procedure. Table 5 below highlights students' fluency rates (encompassing concord and pronunciation errors) before and after the intervention of language games.

Table 5. Performance of students before and after intervention

Student	Concord Errors (Before)	Concord Errors (After)	Pronunciation Errors (Before)	Pronunciation Errors (After)	Fluency Rate (Before)	Fluency Rate (After)
1	13	5	7	8	Low	Average
2	10	3	5	7	High	High
3	9	5	6	6	Average	High
4	18	6	11	7	High	High
5	10	4	5	3	Average	High
6	5	0	1	0	High	High
7	0	0	1	0	High	High
8	19	4	12	6	Low	Average
9	1	0	0	0	High	High
10	17	6	10	5	Low	Average
11	8	3	5	4	Average	High
12	10	3	8	4	Average	Average
13	11	7	6	6	Average	Average
14	18	3	9	6	Low	High
15	19	4	11	8	Low	Average
16	17	6	9	5	Low	Low
17	19	6	3	4	Low	High
18	17	3	1	6	Low	High
19	19	2	8	5	Low	High
20	11	3	5	8	Average	Average
Total Errors	251	73 (71% reduction)	123	98 (20% reduction)	Low = 9 Average = 6 High = 5	Low = 1 Average = 7 High = 12

Source: Field data (2019)

The table above illustrates the outcome of the class-interview administered to students before and after intervention. Fluency rate was measured by average words per minute (wpm). An average of 120-150 wpm was considered high, 75-120 wpm considered average and a wpm rating of below 75, low. This criterion was used by the researcher by calculating the mid-range of what is deemed as a high average speech rate of 150 wpm (National Centre for Voice and Speech, n.d.). After taking the 20 students through the four language games, the cumulative concord errors reduced by 71%. Before the intervention, a whopping 95% of the students made concord errors. This reduced to 85% of the students, with error frequencies reducing for all 20 students. Similar reductions were seen for pronunciation errors. Also, only 25% of the students had high fluency rates before, indicating the existence of speaking and fluency issues. After the intervention of language games, 60% of the students became more fluent, representing a significant improvement in general fluency rates. This shows a tremendous improvement in students' speaking skills after the application of the intervention.

At the PRE-INT stage, students had a negative attitude towards English language which affected their

speaking skills. The problem reduced remarkably in the POST-INT stage after the application of language games in the INT stage. The research thus shows the effectiveness in using language games to improve students' speaking skills.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Using the three-stage intervention approach, the research aimed to examine three areas. First, it examined the factors that contribute towards students` inability to speak fluently in the English language. Here, the research revealed at the PRE-INT stage that students of the "Form One General Arts" Class did not have any interest in English Language due to the boring nature of lesson instructions and delivery. The issues regarding speaking skills for the students are not incorrigible. The readiness of teachers to strategically address it using the right approach can permanently change the situation for the better. The practice of speaking fluently is not in conflict with the form-focused instruction that the teachers use. However, teachers' emphasis on accuracy sometimes restricts their instructional methods to assessment-type reading, writing and comprehension skills in English and to the neglect of oral fluency.

Hence, the second and third areas of the research examined the language games that teachers can employ for students to speak English fluently and the extent to which such games can improve fluency. Existing empirical works highlight the importance of using various language games to improve students' confidence, creativity, collective learning, improvisation, expressiveness and enabling conditions for fluency. It also outlines the import of language games for improving teachers' overall instructional strategies (Guillot, 1999; Keehn, 2003; Inkelas, 2003; Mountford, 2007; Young & Rasinski, 2009; Mendes, 2012; Fraser, 2012; Uribe, 2013; Myrset, 2014; Næss, 2016; Icheku, 2017; Chambers and Yunus, 2017; Abimanyu, 2018; Sasanti, 2019). However, such works focus on individual language games highlighting one or two of such positive outcomes.

This research however focuses on a more comprehensive approach to improving students' fluency. The research contributes to existing empirical works by outlining the usefulness of combining multiple language games. The researcher, at the INT stage, assisted the "Form One" students to improve upon the way they constructed sentences, pronounced words and their fluency through language games. The POST-INT result showed that, as compared to students' previous speaking habits, the language games approach helped students to exhibit better speaking skills. Students enjoyed this approach because the class was interesting especially during the implementation of the games. The activities also pushed students to think on their feet and provided friendly competition for fostering learning outcomes. In speaking, students performed different intentional speech acts (e.g., informing, declaring, asking, persuading, directing) and could use enunciation, intonation, degrees of loudness, tempo, and other non-representational or paralinguistic aspects of vocalisation to convey meaning. They also unintentionally communicated many aspects of their social position such as gender, age, place of origin (through accent), physical states (alertness and sleepiness, vigour or weakness, health or illness), psychic states (emotions or moods), physico-psychic states (sobriety or otherwise, normal consciousness and trance states), education or experience, and the like.

In conclusion, the research recommends that English language teachers must do well to show interest in improving students' vocabulary and pay attention to their speech. This will help the students to know when they are wrong or mispronouncing words. English Language teachers should also introduce and guide students through language games as it is a truly effective way of improving speaking skills. The games add variety to students' learning activities, by changing the pace and interactivity and removing inhibitions.

Furthermore, school libraries should ensure that there are adequate books for students to go and peruse in their leisure time. The library should also be made available to all students. Curriculum developers should also pay attention to the language games approach in the syllabus and recommend it to teachers and students. Finally, there should be adequate funds and the needed resources for research on language games. This will improve the effectiveness of various language teaching strategies as a whole. The researcher hereby suggests that such action research is extended to other schools in the country to further test its effectiveness as a remedy for students' speaking difficulties.

In the Ghanaian context, the findings also contribute to research aimed at improving students' language proficiency skills (Naafan, 2018). It adds practical insights to proof-of-concept research on the potential of language games in Ghana's Education system (Fredericks, 2008), and responds to calls for listening and oral skills competences in English-Language among teacher-trainees in Ghana (Poku, 2008). Future research could examine the use of language games for teaching and learning local Ghanaian languages. Others can also evaluate the extent to which gamified language learning technologies (such as Duolingo) are utilised in Ghana's high schools. Such research would bring original insights regarding the use of games and gamification within language learning.

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