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Pieces in action: building board games in English through Project- and Game-Based Learning

Peças em ação: construindo tabuleiros em inglês mediante Aprendizagem Baseada em Projetos e em Jogos

Piezas en acción: construyendo juegos de mesa en inglés mediante el Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos y en Juegos

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Abstract: This study investigated how the creation and use of board games, within an approach that integrates Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning, can foster the functional use of English by high school students. The qualitative and exploratory study was conducted with a third-year class at a private school in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, comprising thirteen students with varying levels of proficiency. It integrated the teaching of the Simple Past tense with the theme of tourism, encouraging the collaborative construction of games and interaction with peers' productions. Data were generated through two open-ended questionnaires administered after the construction phase and after the gameplay of the games. The analysis indicated that the students developed skills in planning, decision-making, collaboration, reflective agency, and functional language use in contexts close to real-life situations. In addition, the playful dimension stimulated motivation, engagement, and contextualized learning. The findings suggest that integrating Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning through the creation and use of board games provides more dynamic, participatory, and contextualized educational experiences, expanding opportunities for English language use and reinforcing students' active role in the learning process.

Keywords: project-based learning; game-based learning; language teaching; board games.

Resumo: Este estudo investigou de que forma a criação e utilização de jogos de tabuleiro, em uma proposta que articula a Aprendizagem Baseada em Projetos e a Aprendizagem Baseada em Jogos, pode favorecer o uso funcional da Língua Inglesa no Ensino Médio. A pesquisa, de caráter qualitativo e exploratório, foi realizada com uma turma do 3º ano de uma escola particular em Foz do Iguaçu, composta por treze estudantes

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com níveis variados de proficiência, e integrou o ensino do tempo verbal Simple Past ao tema do turismo, incentivando a construção colaborativa de jogos e a interação com produções de colegas. Dados foram gerados por meio de dois questionários com questões abertas, aplicados após a fase de construção e após a jogabilidade dos jogos. A análise indicou o desenvolvimento de habilidades de planejamento, tomada de decisão, colaboração, protagonismo reflexivo e uso funcional do idioma em contextos próximos à realidade. Além disso, a ludicidade estimulou a motivação, o engajamento e a aprendizagem contextualizada. Os resultados sugerem que a integração entre a Aprendizagem Baseada em Projetos e a Aprendizagem Baseada em Jogos por meio da construção e utilização de jogos de tabuleiro proporciona experiências educativas mais dinâmicas, participativas e contextualizadas, ampliando as oportunidades de uso da Língua Inglesa e reforçando o papel ativo dos estudantes no processo de aprendizagem.

Palavras-chave: aprendizagem baseada em projetos; aprendizagem baseada em jogos; ensino de línguas; jogos de tabuleiro.

Resumen: Este estudio investigó de qué manera la creación y utilización de juegos de mesa, en una propuesta que articula el Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos y el Aprendizaje Basado en Juegos, puede favorecer el uso funcional de la Lengua Inglesa por parte de estudiantes de Educación Secundaria. La investigación, de carácter cualitativo y exploratorio, se llevó a cabo con un grupo de tercer año de una escuela privada de Foz do Iguaçu, Brasil, compuesto por trece estudiantes con diferentes niveles de dominio del idioma, e integró la enseñanza del tiempo verbal Simple Past con el tema del turismo, fomentando la construcción colaborativa de juegos y la interacción con las producciones de los compañeros. Los datos se generaron mediante dos cuestionarios con preguntas abiertas, aplicados después de la fase de construcción y después de la jugabilidad de los juegos. El análisis indicó que los estudiantes desarrollaron habilidades de planificación, toma de decisiones, colaboración, protagonismo reflexivo y uso funcional del idioma en contextos cercanos a situaciones reales. Además, la dimensión lúdica estimuló la motivación, el compromiso y el aprendizaje contextualizado. Los resultados sugieren que la integración entre el Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos y el Aprendizaje Basado en Juegos, mediante la construcción y utilización de juegos de mesa, proporciona experiencias educativas más dinámicas, participativas y contextualizadas, ampliando las oportunidades de uso de la Lengua Inglesa y reforzando el papel activo de los estudiantes en el proceso de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje basado en proyectos; aprendizaje basado en juegos; enseñanza de lenguas; juegos de mesa.

1 Introduction

English language teaching in the school context presents challenges that may influence student engagement and learning, such as limited class time and heterogeneous levels of knowledge within the same class. In addition, pedagogical practices centered on grammatical content can be observed, not always articulated with real-life situations of language use, which have been associated by Freitas (2024) with different levels of motivation and feelings of insecurity throughout the learning process. In this context, approaches characterized as traditional tend to encourage a passive stance among students, with activities restricted to question-and-answer exercises, thereby reducing opportunities for interaction and contextualized language use.

In high school, this scenario becomes more complex, considering the increased academic workload and the pressure to perform well in internal and external assessments, such as examinations and university entrance tests. Added to this is the need to make decisions regarding academic and professional futures, which may intensify levels of stress and anxiety. In view of these demands, it is relevant to adopt mediating resources that strengthen engagement, active participation, and student agency, while also providing relief from constant demands and responding to students' needs without disregarding educational objectives.

From the perspective of Vygotsky's (1991) cultural-historical approach, mediation refers to the

process through which learning is made possible through social interaction and the use of tools and signs — such as language, games, and other cultural tools — that act as intermediaries between the individual and knowledge. From this perspective, learning does not occur in isolation, but it is socially constructed and enhanced by the action of mediating elements in the educational process. Such resources not only assist in understanding content but also contribute to the development of cognitive skills.

Based on this understanding, Active Learning Methodologies can be understood as pedagogical approaches that are implemented through mediation in educational contexts, fostering interaction and students' effective participation in the learning process (Mendes, 2025). In addition, they expand possibilities for applying knowledge by encouraging its contextualized use and contribute to the development of socio-emotional skills, such as autonomy, self-regulation, and motivation, making the educational environment more dynamic (Rosa; Ghiggi; Mota, 2021). When combined with elements of cooperation and, to some extent, competition, they can engage with characteristics of high school students' age group, such as the desire for social recognition, thereby stimulating their involvement (Mendes, 2025).

Among the possibilities associated with Active Learning Methodologies is Project-Based Learning, which organizes teaching around activities structured on the basis of real-world problems or questions, as it “enables student agency through the development of projects related to everyday life” (Batouli-Santos *et al.*, 2024, p. 180), providing students with opportunities to plan, experiment, and make decisions, which contributes to greater engagement. Unlike isolated activities, a project provides a continuous path of knowledge construction in which the final product serves as evidence of learning rather than as its primary objective.

In English language teaching, by integrating collaboration, communication, and practical application, Project-Based Learning can contribute to the construction of an environment in which students can explore, create, and interact in the language in a contextualized manner, using it to carry out tasks and develop products (Vanegas; Borbor, 2026). Thus, the articulation of projects, playful resources, and language learning encourages language use in communicative situations.

In this regard, games can be incorporated into Project-Based Learning not merely as the outcome of a task or as entertainment, but as a constitutive element of the learning experience itself (Carvalho, 2015). It is within this conception that Game-Based Learning is grounded, understood as “a pedagogical methodology that focuses on the design, development, use, and application of games in education and training” (Carvalho, 2015, p. 176).

From this perspective, the game is designed in alignment with educational objectives, so that its challenges, instructions, decisions, and interactions contribute to what students are expected to learn (Plass; Homer; Kinzer, 2015). By engaging in this experience, students are involved in situations that require problem-solving and the application of concepts in practical contexts, while also enabling teamwork and respectful peer learning in collaborative activities, with motivation remaining part of the dynamics (Carvalho, 2015).

Board games represent one possible approach, as they facilitate interaction and teamwork. By requiring participants to follow rules, plan actions, and negotiate, they promote more active dynamics, shifting the focus from memorization to the functional application of content. In addition, they create more supportive learning environments in which unsuccessful attempts are understood as part of the process. Thus, in language classes, “when the environment is less threatening, learners tend to feel more confident in using the target language, even when making mistakes” (Krashen, 1982, p. 32).

It is therefore relevant to investigate pedagogical practices that move beyond traditional approaches and promote the functional use of English in cooperative and challenging environments. Accordingly, this study aims to examine how the construction and use of board games, within an approach that combines Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning, foster English language practice among high school students.

To this end, the research was conducted with a third-year high school class at a private school in Foz do Iguaçu, Paraná, Brazil, involving the collaborative construction and gameplay of the board games developed. The *Simple Past* tense was addressed, with tourism as the thematic focus, selected because of its proximity to the students’ sociocultural context.

For data generation, two questionnaires containing open-ended questions were administered at different points, addressing the construction stage and the gameplay experience. This procedure made it possible to analyze aspects related to collaborative work, student agency, engagement, contextualized English language learning, and student motivation.

The article is structured as follows. First, the research context is presented, and the relevance of Active Learning Methodologies in English language teaching as a social and communicative practice is discussed, with emphasis on Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning. Next, the research methodology is presented, including the setting, participants, organization of the proposal, and ethical procedures for data production and analysis. Subsequently, the development of the activities is described, detailing the stages carried out in the classroom. The data obtained through the questionnaires are then analyzed and discussed, organized into thematic axes. Finally, the concluding remarks are presented, revisiting the main findings, contributions, and limitations of the study, as well as its implications for English language teaching.

2 Theoretical Framework

Understanding English language teaching beyond the transmission of grammatical structures entails considering language in terms of its uses and its relationship with the contexts in which students are situated. From this perspective, language constitutes a situated practice through which individuals interact, construct meanings, and act in different communicative situations. This understanding is aligned with the assumptions of Applied Linguistics, which addresses issues related to language use in concrete social contexts, including educational settings, while taking into account the conditions and

needs that permeate language teaching and learning processes (Moita Lopes, 2006). Therefore, language teaching involves not only knowledge of linguistic aspects but also the possibility of using the language in different interactional situations (Richards; Rodgers, 2022).

The interactionist approach to language, inspired by Bakhtin (2003) and developed by Schneuwly and Dolz (2016), reinforces the understanding that language is constituted through social interactions. Accordingly, English language teaching should encompass practices that are close to real-life situations, integrating speaking and writing skills. Zorrilla Esparza *et al.* (2025) highlight that Active Learning Methodologies enable the organization of contexts involving interaction and decision-making, using the language as a means of action. Thus, understanding language as a social practice entails recognizing students as active agents and fostering experiences aligned with their contexts and the development of linguistic and social competences (Richards; Rodgers, 2022).

Against this background, Active Learning Methodologies can reorganize the teaching environment, making it more dynamic, participatory, and student-centered (Bacich; Moran, 2018). Diesel, Baldez, and Martins (2017) emphasize that these methodologies are grounded in principles such as student agency, autonomy, problematization of reality, and encouragement of innovation, redirecting transmissive teaching toward the collective construction of knowledge.

In English language teaching, the integration of active learning and collaboration facilitates the development of linguistic competences in both oral and written production (Diesel; Baldez; Martins, 2017). From this perspective, Bacich and Moran (2018, p. 23) emphasize that “we learn more deeply when we participate actively, experiment, make mistakes, reflect, and try again,” highlighting the importance of student participation. In addition, this approach contributes to the development of socio-emotional aspects, such as confidence, cooperation, and security when expressing oneself in a foreign language (León-García *et al.*, 2026).

Considering this, approaches that integrate active participation and collaborative work show promise, particularly when combined with interaction and problem-solving. In this context, board games stand out for engaging these elements by requiring planning, negotiation, and language use in simulated situations. More than playful activities, they function as mediating resources, providing more dynamic and contextualized learning experiences.

2.1 Project-Based Learning with Board Games

Project-Based Learning proposes that students learn through investigation and the resolution of challenges, organizing teaching around a project. In this process, learning takes place continuously, and the product constitutes a consequence of the investigative process (Bender, 2014). Sharing this product makes learning more visible and fosters engagement (Larmer; Mergendoller; Boss, 2015). This approach promotes the integration of areas of knowledge and the development of competences such as communication, creativity, collaboration, and autonomy, shifting the focus toward student

agency (Bell, 2010). The teacher, in turn, assumes the role of mediator, guiding investigations and supporting decision-making (Bender, 2014).

Among the challenges of Project-Based Learning is the time required for its development, which involves planning, experimentation, revision, and sharing. This process-oriented nature may conflict with limited class time and extensive curricula, requiring organization and flexibility (Wolters; Brady, 2021). Despite this, when integrated into English language teaching, this approach creates environments in which students investigate, create, and use the language in real-life situations, expanding opportunities for language use and prioritizing communication.

When combined with the construction of board games, Project-Based Learning enhances these aspects by involving students in processes of planning, creation, and interaction, in which the language is used with a defined purpose. Thus, it creates more dynamic, collaborative, and contextualized learning environments, justifying its adoption in this study.

2.2 Game-Based Learning in English Language Teaching

Game-Based Learning “allows for the creation and use of games for educational purposes” (Sylvestre *et al.*, 2024). Thus, the game is not used merely as a complementary resource or as a strategy to make the class more dynamic, but as part of the learning process, in which challenges, rules, decisions, and interactions are articulated with the intended learning outcomes. According to Plass, Homer, and Kinzer (2015), this articulation can mobilize different dimensions of learning, including cognitive, behavioral, affective, and sociocultural aspects.

In the specific context of English language teaching, characteristics inherent to games, such as the possibility of repetition and the presentation of content in contexts close to real-life situations, support the learning process. Thompson and von Gillern (2020) highlight that games can contribute to vocabulary learning, particularly because they provide recurring exposure to words in different contexts of use. Lin *et al.* (2020) emphasize the use of games in learning grammatical aspects when content is presented as an integral part of the game dynamics, allowing linguistic structures to be mobilized during the playing experience itself.

In addition, games can increase student engagement because they “are highly interactive and motivating products” (Carvalho, 2015, p. 176). By participating in an activity with defined objectives, procedures, and challenges, students are encouraged to respond to the proposed situation, negotiate with their peers, and use the language to achieve their objectives. In this sense, Neves and Freire (2020) highlight the potential of Game-Based Learning to arouse interest and engagement in learning.

In this context, board games present characteristics that make them relevant to Game-Based Learning in English language classes, as face-to-face interaction encourages communication among participants and active participation in the game dynamics. Thus, rather than merely serving as a resource to complement a lesson, they can create an environment conducive to interaction and the

mobilization of linguistic knowledge.

3 Method

The present study falls within the field of Applied Linguistics, as it is “a study of specific practices of language use in specific contexts” (Signorini, 1998, p. 101). It is characterized as a qualitative, exploratory investigation aimed at understanding processes and experiences in the classroom. It also presents characteristics of intervention research, as it was developed through the implementation of a pedagogical proposal that was planned and carried out in a school context (Pereira, 2019).

The proposal was structured based on Active Learning Methodologies, grounded in Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning, with a focus on student agency and the collaborative construction of knowledge. The content addressed was the *Simple Past* tense, articulated with the theme of tourism, which was selected due to its connection with the students’ reality, as they live in a tourist city located in a triple-border region characterized by the constant circulation of people, cultures, and languages.

The project centered on the construction and use of board games over a period of seven lessons, distributed across three stages: (1) introduction of the topic and language content; (2) collaborative development of the games and their manuals; and (3) interaction with the games produced by their peers.

3.1 Research Setting

The research was conducted at a private school located in the city of Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil. The institution adopts a pedagogical approach based on Active Learning Methodologies, encouraging participatory learning and the use of diverse teaching resources and strategies.

3.2 Participants

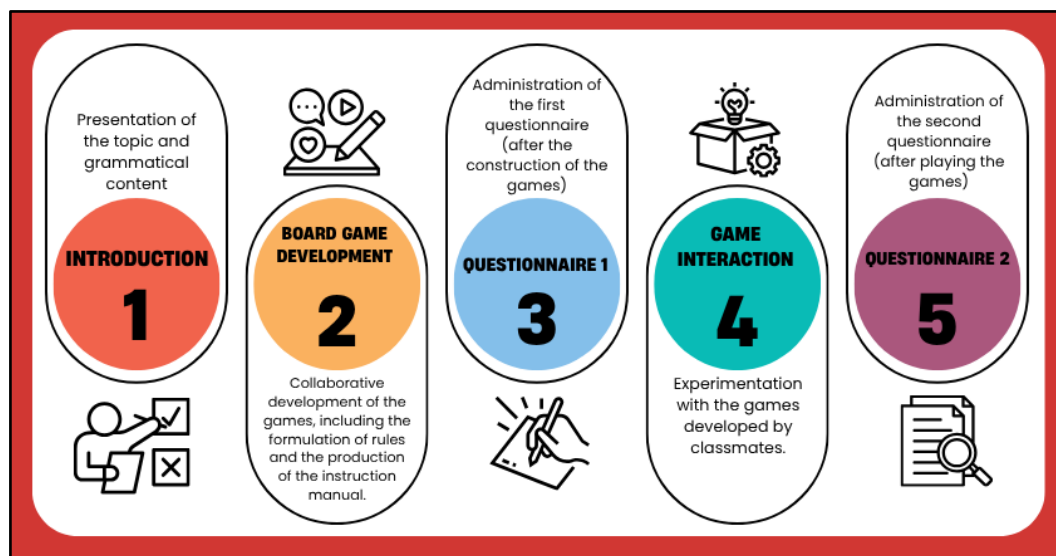
The third-year high school class that participated in the study consisted of 13 students, six male and seven female. As the students had heterogeneous levels of English language proficiency, the adoption of mediating resources aimed at promoting interaction and collaboration was considered appropriate. For this purpose, the class was organized into three groups, fostering mutual support, with students with higher levels of proficiency assisting those with lower levels of proficiency.

3.3 Ethical Procedures and Data Generation

The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the State University

of Western Paraná (Unioeste), under CAAE n°. 70783223.4.0000.0107 and Approval Report n°. 7.470.652, and received authorization from the school where the study was conducted. For data generation, two questionnaires containing open-ended questions were administered at different points: after the construction of the games and after the gameplay experience. Figure 1 visually illustrates this organization.

Figure 1 – Flowchart illustrating the project organization



Source: The authors (2026).

As observed, the first two stages — the introduction to the topic and the construction of the games — served as the basis for Questionnaire 1, which included the following questions:

1. How did you choose the tourism-related situations that would be part of the game?
2. During the creation of the game, was there any idea that you found interesting but decided not to use? Why?
3. Was there any moment when you needed to better organize the sequence of actions so that the game would make sense?
4. Did the group divide the tasks among its members? How was this division organized?
5. How did you decide when and how to use the *Simple Past* in the game?
6. What did you think about the experience of carrying out this work as a group?

The fourth stage of the project — interaction with the games created by their peers — was the focus of Questionnaire 2, which included the following questions:

1. How was it like to work as a team while playing a game created by another group? Were all group members able to contribute during the game?
2. During the game, were there moments when you ignored points that were not important in order to focus on what would actually help you win?
3. Did playing your peers' game make you think of anything you would like to improve in your own game?

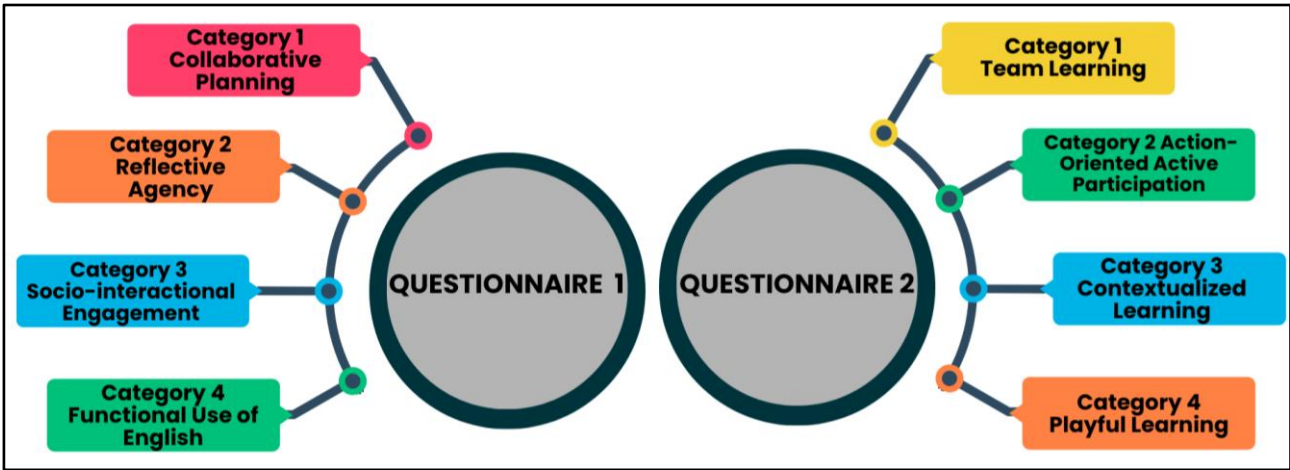
- Did playing while using the *Simple Past* help you better understand this language content? Explain.
- Did the game address the use of English in a contextualized way?
- How did the game help you use English in situations from your everyday life?

The analysis of the two questionnaires was conducted in accordance with current ethical principles. Accordingly, the students were not identified by name and were instead identified according to the groups in which they carried out the activity, designated by the abbreviations G1, G2, and G3.

3.4 Data Analysis

After analyzing the responses to the questionnaires, the data were organized into different analytical categories. Figure 2 presents a visual summary of this organization.

Figure 2 – Graphic organizer of the analytical categories by questionnaire



Source: The authors (2026).

As observed, the responses to Questionnaire 1 were categorized into four thematic categories to encompass different dimensions of the board game construction process. Category 1, Collaborative Planning, focuses on decision-making and the collective organization of ideas through the use of English. Category 2, Reflective Agency, highlights students’ involvement in evaluation, reformulation, and task distribution. Category 3, Socio-interactional Engagement, addresses students’ interactions and sense of belonging. Finally, Category 4, Functional Use of English, refers to the application of the language in the creation of the games and in gameplay situations related to students’ lived reality.

Regarding Questionnaire 2, the responses were grouped into four thematic categories reflecting central aspects of Active Learning Methodologies. Category 1, Team Learning, emphasizes the shared construction of knowledge. Category 2, Action-Oriented Active Participation, highlights students’ autonomy in decision-making and reflection. Category 3, Contextualized

Learning, emphasizes the use of English in situations related to students' reality. Finally, Category 4, Playful Learning, highlights the role of playfulness in engagement and the consolidation of learning.

3.5 Project Structure

The initial stage, lasting one class period, was preparatory in nature and focused on activating prior knowledge through a guided discussion, accompanied by the presentation of two dramatizations: one about communication difficulties when asking for directions⁴, and another, humorous, about travel-related risks caused by language failures⁵. Based on these situations, the students reflected on similar experiences in their local context and drew on English vocabulary and structures, with emphasis on the use of the *Simple Past*, explored in its affirmative, negative, and interrogative forms. This stage promoted active participation and contextualized language use (Richards; Rodgers, 2022), while also encouraging critical and investigative thinking, in line with Project-Based Learning (Larmer; Mergendoller; Boss, 2015).

In the following three class periods, the students, organized into groups, carried out the board game development project with a tourism-related theme, incorporating the target verb tense, as shown in Figure 3. The activity involved investigation, decision-making, and collaborative problem-solving, elements characteristic of Project-Based Learning, with the teacher acting as a mediator throughout the process.

Figure 3 – Students involved in the construction of the game board



Source: Research archive (2026).

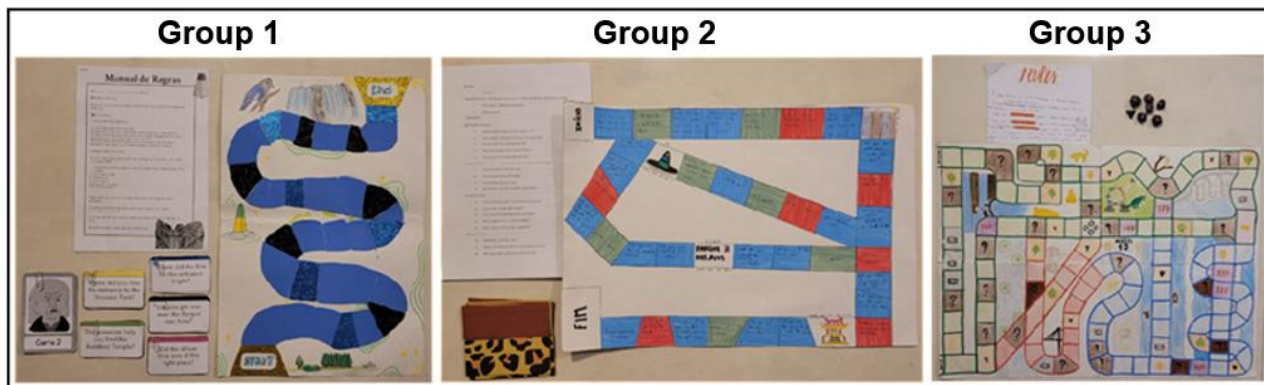
The materials developed by the groups varied in terms of organization, purposes, and visual resources, reflecting collectively constructed creative processes marked by student involvement. Decisions related to the design, rules, and dynamics contributed to increasing participation and

⁴ Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxUm-2x-2dM>>.

⁵ Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MzDA77sJk4>>.

encouraging the use of English, in line with principles of active learning (Freeman *et al.*, 2014). The products resulting from this process can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Photos of the game boards developed by the students



Source: Research archive (2026).

Once the construction was completed, the students spent one class period answering the first questionnaire. During the following class period, they played the games, taking on the role of evaluators, which reinforced the collaborative and reflective nature of the proposal. At this stage, the game combined its playful dimension with the learning objectives, leading students to use the language to understand and respond to the situations presented. They also drew on tourism-related vocabulary and the grammatical content addressed, while actively participating in interactions, in line with the principles of Game-Based Learning (Sylvestre *et al.*, 2024). To support communication in English, an *English Survival Guide* was collectively created on the board, containing useful expressions for the game dynamics, such as *Your turn* (your turn), *Roll the dice* (roll the dice), and *Go back two spaces* (go back two spaces).

The teacher monitored the activity, encouraging the use of English and observing aspects such as group cooperation and strategies. The students were observed to interact actively, drawing on prior knowledge and constructing new meanings, in alignment with Active Learning Methodologies (Moran, 2015), as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5 – Students experiencing the games using the game boards they developed



Source: Research archive (2026).

After this moment of interaction with the game and with their peers, the second questionnaire was administered during one class period, bringing the project development to an end.

4 Results and Discussion

The questionnaires administered made it possible to analyze the stages of board game construction and gameplay based on thematic categories. The analysis of Questionnaire 1, concerning the construction of the games, is presented first below.

4.1 Discussion of Questionnaire 1 Data: Game Board Construction Stage

Questionnaire 1 aimed to analyze the process of planning and developing the board games, as well as the use of English in this context. The responses reveal collaboration, decision-making, reflection, and contextualized language use, indicating the presence of principles of Active Learning Methodologies, particularly Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning, with functional use of the language.

4.1.1 Category 1: Collaborative Planning

Regarding the planning of the game boards, the groups demonstrated varied creative processes, collaboratively constructed and mediated through the use of English. Group 1 (hereafter referred to as G1) stated: “We chose to follow a path to the waterfalls because of the importance of this tourist attraction to Foz do Iguaçu.” Group 2 (G2) reported: “We chose seven tourist attractions, considering which ones are the best known in Foz.” Group 3 (G3), in turn, highlighted: “We chose funny tourism-related situations, such as getting lost during a trip. Then we chose the settings.”

The responses indicate collective decisions regarding the theme, storyline, and setting, demonstrating collaborative planning. This characteristic is attributed by Bender (2014, p. 15) to Project-Based Learning, as students “generally have some degree of choice regarding their group’s project and the methods to be used to develop it,” which gives them “much greater motivation to work diligently on problem solving.” In this sense, when the data point to choices resulting from discussions among group members, it becomes evident that the construction of the game boards was not limited to the performance of passive tasks but involved student agency throughout the definition of the elements that would constitute the product created.

Furthermore, by using English to discuss ideas and organize communicative situations, cooperation and active participation become evident, which are central principles of Active Learning Methodologies (Freeman *et al.*, 2014). The use of the language was linked to the communicative needs generated by the game planning process. These characteristics are consistent with Game-

Based Learning, since, according to Neves and Freire (2020, p. 140), “players remain engaged in tasks through intrinsic motivation — competition, curiosity, cooperation, challenge, involvement, recognition, etc.”

The analyzed accounts broaden this understanding by indicating that cooperation and engagement were not manifested only during the gameplay experience but also throughout the development of the game. Thus, the construction of the game board constituted a space for shared planning, in which participants needed to negotiate, interact, and use English both as a means and an end to enable decision-making. In this way, the game was not configured merely as a product to be used later but as a mediating resource that, from the planning stage onward, provided opportunities for functional and contextualized language use.

The collective nature of the process is also evident in accounts such as that of G1: “At some points, we needed to stop, reassess, and simulate the game situation so that the gameplay would be clear enough. This process was carried out several times throughout the production.” Similarly, G3 stated: “After we managed to use all our ideas, we tested [the game] and made additions.” The recurring use of the plural in the responses suggests that the choices were made collectively, reinforcing group work, an aspect intrinsic to Project-Based Learning (Bell, 2010). The accounts, however, made it possible to understand this collaboration beyond the simple division of tasks, since group members revisited decisions, collectively evaluated the product, and made modifications based on the needs they identified.

This process also established a connection with Game-Based Learning. The fact that students identified areas for improvement, sought solutions, and refined their game boards demonstrates a reflective process in which English was used not only as content but also as a means of negotiating, testing hypotheses, and adjusting the logic of the game. This movement reinforces Plass, Homer, and Kinzer’s (2015) understanding of games as environments that articulate different dimensions of learning. The data from this study allow us to infer that the sociocultural and interactive dimension emerges as early as the game board creation stage. Thus, in the context analyzed, the game simultaneously constituted the product and the pedagogical learning context itself.

4.1.2 Category 2: Reflective Agency

Regarding the development of the game boards, the groups reported that some initial ideas had to be discarded or reformulated throughout the process. G1 mentioned: “At first, we had the idea of adding more challenge spaces, but this would make the game repetitive and time-consuming.” G2 stated: “We changed the format of the game board and the way of recording the points because it would be difficult to do this while playing.”

These accounts reveal moments of reflection, critical evaluation, and replanning, marked by the analysis of decisions made and adjustments to the product based on its functionality. This process is related to the reflective agency fostered by Project-Based Learning (Crawford; Carmona;

Kumar, 2024), in which students are directly involved in decision-making and problem-solving. This aspect also relates to Game-Based Learning, particularly when students take on the role of game creators. Hanghøj (2023) highlights that creating educational games requires constant decision-making to align the rules with learning objectives. In this sense, the groups' choices went beyond the aesthetics of the game boards, requiring them to consider how the rules would affect their peers' experience.

Student engagement was also manifested in the division of tasks among group members. When asked about the organization of roles, G1 explained: "Each class, one person would take on a role; we did not divide the tasks in a fixed way, but according to what each person wanted to do that day." G2 highlighted: "We divided the tasks so that everyone had a clearer understanding of what to do." G3 stated: "Each person had a role, and this helped us finish the project because everyone did their part."

The responses indicate that the groups were able to articulate individual agency and cooperation, adopting different strategies to organize their responsibilities and creating an environment in which they participated actively, engaged in dialogue, and used English in authentic interactions throughout the development of the project. This process corroborates the perspective of Larmer and Mergendoller (2015), according to which Project-Based Learning fosters collaborative contexts in which reflection and decision-making play a central role in the learning process.

In Game-Based Learning, this process takes on a practical dimension: when creating the game, students needed to anticipate how the rules and language used would affect the experience of the other players. The concern with "rethinking objectives" is consistent with the considerations of Neves and Freire (2020, p. 140), who present different principles to be considered when designing games for educational purposes. Thus, the corpus suggests that reflective agency was manifested in the students' ability to evaluate their own choices and improve them throughout the process.

4.1.3 Category 3: Socio-interactive Engagement

The accounts reveal socio-interactive engagement, marked by integration, collaboration, and positive emotional involvement. G1 highlighted: "The activity further strengthened the integration of the entire third-year class. It was a fun and relieving experience during our English classes," indicating that learning took place in a collaborative and emotionally positive environment. Similarly, G2 stated: "We found it very fun, a great way to be assessed. Everyone can work on what they do best while also having fun and using their creativity. We enjoyed the experience because we felt that we were on the same team, working toward the same goal," revealing an appreciation of individual skills articulated with cooperative work. G3, in turn, emphasized: "It was very fun and refreshing in the midst of our high school experience," suggesting that the activity broke away from the traditional routine and contributed to greater student involvement in the learning process.

It is therefore evident that the activity promoted group integration through collective work and strengthened the sense of belonging. In Project-Based Learning, this collaborative dimension is particularly relevant, as the construction of the game involved the participation of group members in developing a common product (Bender, 2014). This dynamic also aligns with Carvalho's (2015, p. 177) perspective that "when played in groups, even in a classroom context, a game can strongly reinforce socialization and support the exchange of ideas, becoming an exercise in dialogue." In the context analyzed, interaction was not restricted to coexistence among participants but was connected to the development of a task, the recognition of different skills, and the sharing of the products created.

From the perspective of Game-Based Learning, therefore, the game was not associated solely with entertainment but was integrated into the learning process by creating situations involving participation, interaction, and the use of English. Thus, the accounts suggest that the playful nature of the proposal contributed to an environment of greater engagement among students, while organizing the task around shared objectives fostered collaboration and appreciation of the different contributions made by group members.

4.1.4 Category 4: Functional Use of English

Regarding the use of English and the content related to the verb tense studied, the groups reported similar strategies for its implementation. G1 stated: "We used English extensively when creating questions that would be used throughout the game." G2 highlighted: "English appears in most of the spaces in the form of questions, which reinforced the content when we formulated the questions and translated them in the manual." G3 explained: "We decided to use special question spaces to use the *Simple Past*. While developing the questions, we were able to reinforce the content in a simple way."

The accounts show that the groups used English in developing the questions, rules, and structure of the games, with emphasis on the use of the *Simple Past*. The verb tense was not used merely as content to be reproduced but as a resource necessary for the development and functioning of the proposal. This process is consistent with an understanding of language as a social practice within Applied Linguistics, as it considers the use of English in relation to the interactional contexts in which it is mobilized (Richards; Rodgers, 2022).

This articulation between content and practice is also related to the principles of Game-Based Learning, since the knowledge addressed was integrated into the game itself and its educational objectives (Plass; Homer; Kinzer, 2015). In this sense, Alves's (2008, p. 4) critique of the separation between "'games for learning and games for fun,' as if it were not possible to articulate these two pleasures" is supported by the data, as the playful dimension was not dissociated from work with the content.

Overall, the data indicate that the proposal, grounded in Project-Based Learning, fostered collaboration, reflection, and meaningful use of English. In this way, the language assumed the role of a mediator in interactions, enabling the collective construction of knowledge and the development of linguistic and socio-emotional competences. This finding is consistent with Batouli Santos, Mello-Silva, and Santos (2024), who discuss Project-Based Learning from perspectives that emphasize interaction, collaboration, and knowledge construction in social contexts. Thus, rather than merely demonstrating the presence of English, the corpus makes it possible to understand that, during the construction of the game boards, the language was mobilized for a concrete purpose, articulating linguistic knowledge with the needs generated by the activity.

4.2 Results of Questionnaire 2: After the Gameplay Experience

Questionnaire 2 investigated perceptions, reflections, and learning resulting from the experience of playing the game boards, organized into categories related to the collective construction of knowledge, collaboration, decision-making, reflection, use of English, and playfulness.

4.2.1 Category 1: Team Learning

Regarding team learning during the experience of playing the game boards, the accounts indicate that knowledge construction occurred collaboratively, based on support among participants. The statements show that understanding the rules, making decisions, and progressing through the game depended on mutual assistance and the exchange of understandings among them. G1 stated: “Everyone was able to contribute, and this allowed us to play with some ease.” G2 emphasized: “It was a way to connect and strengthen the relationships between teacher and student in the classroom. Although it was a competition, we constantly helped one another.” G3 highlighted: “We had to help each other understand the game without the assistance of the creators.”

These accounts show that, even in a competitive context, in which there could be only one winner, learning was constructed collectively, which is consistent with Project-Based Learning. Masson *et al.* (2012, n.p.) highlight its role in “encouraging students’ ability to learn how to learn, work in teams, and listen to other opinions (even when they differ from their own).” Thus, the competitive dynamics did not prevent the exchange of knowledge among participants, demonstrating that different forms of interaction can coexist in the learning process.

One aspect that contributed to this was the fact that players could not rely on assistance from the game creators, which shifted part of the responsibility for conducting the matches to the participants themselves, making peer interaction necessary. This characteristic is consistent with

Active Learning Methodologies, in which student participation involves not only carrying out procedures but also mobilizing knowledge and making decisions in response to the situations presented (Diesel; Baldez; Martins, 2017). Thus, the questionnaires analyzed indicate that the conditions under which the proposal was carried out fostered team learning.

4.2.2 Category 2: Action-Oriented Active Participation

Regarding decision-making during the gameplay experience, the groups reported adopting strategies of adjustment and simplification throughout the game. G1 mentioned: “After a while, we decided not to write down the points, but to add them up in our heads.” G2 stated: “The game is very long, so we had to limit the maximum number of points and rules during the game.” These responses demonstrate action-oriented active participation, in which students analyzed the dynamics of the game in progress and made adaptations to ensure its continuity and functionality. In this sense, participation was not restricted to following the previously established rules, as the students themselves evaluated the conditions of the game and decided on the necessary modifications.

Furthermore, by playing the game boards developed by other groups, the students began to evaluate their own creative process based on practical experience. G1 stated: “Playing their game made us think about developing our instructions in the manual better, with the aim of making the gameplay easier.” G2 highlighted: “The game made us realize that we could make our game board more complex and elaborate.” These accounts indicate that learning occurred through experimentation, allowing students to identify limitations, propose improvements, and understand the impact of decisions on the functioning of the game, which reinforces the central role of students in this process.

This dynamic makes it possible to understand this form of action beyond the idea of student agency, as students began to evaluate their own products based on their experience of using the games. In this sense, the responses align with the principles of Active Learning Methodologies, which position students as central agents in the learning process by promoting collaboration, critical reflection, and decision-making regarding their own educational experiences (Diesel; Baldez; Martins, 2017).

The data analyzed are consistent with this perspective but further indicate that the central role of students was manifested not only in their ability to make decisions but also in the need to respond to concrete situations encountered during the experience. When they identified difficulties with the rules, the organization of points, or the game instructions, the students evaluated the products and identified possibilities for improvement. Thus, the active participation observed did not correspond merely to involvement in the activity but to a process of action, evaluation, and reformulation triggered by the experience of playing the games.

4.2.3 Category 3: Contextualized Learning

Regarding English language learning mediated by the game, the groups pointed to positive effects resulting from its contextualized approach. G1 stated: "This experience made learning English in the classroom easier." G2 highlighted: "The game worked with English in a practical and easy-to-understand way." G3, in turn, emphasized: "We had to associate the written form with the pronunciation of the word in order to read the cards aloud to the other group members." These accounts indicate that the board games enabled language learning through the articulation of different linguistic skills, such as reading, writing, and speaking.

This aspect is relevant because language use did not occur separately from the actions performed by the students: linguistic knowledge was a necessary resource for the continuation of the game. This characteristic is consistent with the understanding of language as a situated practice, discussed from the perspective of Applied Linguistics, according to which language teaching is not limited to grammar but considers its use in interactional situations (Richards; Rodgers, 2022). In this sense, the game not only exposed students to English language structures but also created situations in which they needed to mobilize them according to the dynamics of the activity itself, articulating content, action, and communicative purpose rather than simply inserting content into a playful activity.

When reflecting on the use of English in contextualized situations through the games, the groups recognized that the understanding and application of the content were enhanced by its connection with elements of their reality. G1 mentioned: "It became easier to understand how the content is applied in everyday life, and this makes the learning process easier." G2 highlighted: "We worked with regular and irregular verbs in a quick and practical way." G3 emphasized: "We learned the content through the tourism context." These elements reinforce the relevance of the chosen theme and its connection with the students' everyday lives, demonstrating that learning occurred in an integrated manner, enabling the application of knowledge.

The choice of theme therefore contributed to placing the grammatical content within situations close to the students' everyday experiences, as they encounter the circulation of tourists from different regions of the world, promoting an understanding of how the knowledge studied can be mobilized. Their accounts indicate that language use involved both written comprehension and production, as well as reading and speaking, going beyond isolated work with grammatical structures. This finding returns to the interactionist perspective of language by suggesting that linguistic knowledge acquired meaning as it was mobilized by students in the interactions and actions required by the game (Bakhtin, 2003; Schneuwly; Dolz, 2016).

The contextualized learning observed in this experience appears to be less related to the mere presence of an everyday theme and more to the possibility of assigning a function to linguistic knowledge within an interactional situation. The accounts suggest that, when English was incorporated into an experience in which students needed to understand, respond, read, and interact

in order to participate in the game, the language came to be perceived as a resource for carrying out actions.

4.2.4 Dimension 4: Playful Learning

When invited to comment on the activity, the groups highlighted the playful and motivating nature of the experience. G1 stated: “We were able to learn in a fun way,” while G2 emphasized: “It was a fun and interactive way to learn.” G3, in turn, summarized their perception by stating: “It was fun.” These responses indicate that the board games functioned as a pedagogical resource capable of promoting enjoyable learning by bringing together content, practice, and playfulness.

Thus, the analysis of the data indicates that the proposal, structured as Project-Based Learning, enabled not only English language proficiency and collaborative work but also student motivation and engagement, reinforcing the importance of resources that make learning more engaging. This reflects the ideal advocated by Masson *et al.* (2012), for whom the pedagogical value of a project lies in the dialectical mediation between creation, intention, creative competence, and development.

In this context, the experience aligns with Game-Based Learning, insofar as the playful dimension was integrated into the learning situation itself. As Kishimoto (2011) points out, an educational game fulfills its function only when it preserves the playful action without sacrificing educational intentionality. The accounts therefore suggest that learning and playing were not configured as opposing activities but rather as interconnected dimensions.

It is important to emphasize, however, that playfulness alone does not guarantee learning (Brougère, 2002). What the participants’ accounts demonstrate is that the learning experience was perceived as fun and interactive, without these aspects becoming detached from the educational process, since they were associated with students’ participation in carrying out the proposal.

These results provide a basis for the reflections presented in the Concluding Remarks, which revisit the contributions of the study and their pedagogical implications. The limitations of the research and possible directions for future studies are also discussed.

5 Concluding Remarks

This study aimed to examine how the construction and use of board games, within a proposal that combined Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning, promoted English language practice among high school students. By organizing teaching around a project, Project-Based Learning provided a continuous process of investigation, planning, creation, and experimentation, allowing students to take an active role in the learning process and apply the *Simple Past* in contexts related to the reality of local tourism.

Throughout this process, Game-Based Learning contributed to the construction and use of board games as a means of promoting the functional use of English, particularly during the development of the rules, questions, and manuals and, subsequently, during interaction with the game boards produced by their peers. In this sense, linguistic knowledge did not remain external to the playful experience but was mobilized through the act of playing itself, as students needed to understand how the games worked, respond to challenges, and interact in English in order to participate in the games. Thus, the proposed objective can be considered to have been achieved.

During the development of the games, students engaged in collaborative planning, negotiation of rules, task distribution, and individual and collective decision-making. Interaction with the game boards produced by other groups reinforced contextualized learning, encouraged the critical evaluation of their own productions, and consolidated the applied use of the language. In this sense, linguistic knowledge, socio-emotional skills — such as autonomy, empathy, and responsibility — and collaborative practices were articulated, demonstrating that learning goes beyond memorization and becomes a concrete and participatory experience.

The experience was also particularly relevant to the reality of a triple-border region, where tourism and the circulation of people, cultures, and languages are part of the students' sociocultural context. The results demonstrate that playfulness, integrated into Game-Based Learning and combined with the collective engagement promoted by Project-Based Learning, can make learning more motivating by bringing together theory, practice, and the context of language use. It should be emphasized, however, that playfulness alone does not guarantee learning, since, in the context investigated, its effects were related to the presence of pedagogical objectives, challenges, rules, and situations involving the use of English. Thus, the data indicate that the educational potential of the game does not derive solely from its playful nature but from the way it was integrated into the learning objectives.

From a pedagogical perspective, this research demonstrated the potential of combining Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning in English language teaching, particularly through the construction and use of board games by the students themselves. This proposal proved relevant in this school context, which sought to promote collaborative and contextualized teaching practices that do not depend on the use of digital resources.

Some limitations must nevertheless be considered. The research was conducted with a single class of 13 high school students over a delimited period of seven lessons. The data analyzed were produced primarily through questionnaires containing open-ended questions, complemented by observations made during the experience. No longitudinal monitoring of the participants' language development was conducted. Therefore, the results reflect the participants' perceptions and the situations observed within the specific context of the intervention and do not allow inferences to be made regarding language development beyond the period investigated.

In summary, the results suggest that Active Learning Methodologies, through Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning, can foster active learning, reflective participation, and the

development of linguistic and socio-emotional competences, demonstrating that knowledge construction is a continuous, dynamic, and potentially expandable process, particularly when connected to students' everyday lives. Future research may broaden the scope of investigation by including different proficiency levels, age groups, and cultural contexts, as well as comparing the use of board games with other Active Learning Methodologies. It may also follow similar experiences over longer periods and combine different data generation instruments, thereby expanding the understanding of the contributions of combining Project-Based Learning and Game-Based Learning to English language teaching.

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