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## *A Game Strategy for Developing Soft Abilities in Fifth-Grade Elementary Students at Tabuga-Jama School in 2023-2024*

*[Estrategia lúdica para el desarrollo de habilidades blandas de estudiantes de quinto año básico de la Unidad Educativa Tabuga Jama 2023-2024]*

*[Estratégia lúdica para o desenvolvimento de habilidades sociais de alunos da quinta série na Unidade Educacional Tabuga Jama 2023-2024]*

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** Physical education offers many opportunities for developing soft abilities in school children. This paper deals with this topic using a game-based perspective.

**Aim:** To design a game-based strategy for developing soft abilities in fifth-grade students at the Tabuga-Jama Education Facility in 2023-2024.

**Materials and methods:** A descriptive research study used a mixed approach and the corresponding methods for this type of study.

**Results:** The results showed that the game-based strategy designed is highly pertinent and can be implemented through Physical Education lessons.

**Conclusions:** The study demonstrated the importance and need for this type of research.

**Keywords:** game-based strategy, soft abilities, Physical Education, students.

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## **RESUMEN**

**Introducción:** son diversas las potencialidades de la Educación física para el desarrollo de las habilidades blandas en escolares. La presente investigación presentó esta temática desde una perspectiva lúdica.

**Objetivo:** diseñar una estrategia lúdica para el desarrollo de habilidades blandas de estudiantes de quinto año básico de la Unidad Educativa Tabuga Jama 2023-2024.

**Materiales y métodos:** se realizó una investigación descriptiva desde un enfoque mixto y los métodos y técnicas utilizadas están en correspondencia con las características del tipo de investigación.

**Resultados:** los resultados mostrados evidenciaron que la estrategia lúdica elaborada posee un alto nivel de pertinencia y puede ser aplicada en la práctica escolar de Educación Física.

**Conclusiones:** se demostró a través del proceso investigativo la importancia y necesidad de la investigación desarrollada.

**Palabras clave:** estrategia lúdica, habilidades blandas, Educación Física, estudiantes.

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## **RESUMO**

**Introdução:** o potencial da educação física para o desenvolvimento de habilidades sociais em crianças em idade escolar é diverso. A presente pesquisa apresentou esse tópico a partir de uma perspectiva lúdica.

**Objetivo:** elaborar uma estratégia lúdica para o desenvolvimento de soft skills em alunos da quinta série da Unidade Educacional Tabuga Jama 2023-2024.

**Materiais e métodos:** a pesquisa descritiva foi realizada a partir de uma abordagem mista e os métodos e técnicas utilizados estão de acordo com as características do tipo de pesquisa.

**Resultados:** os resultados mostraram que a estratégia lúdica elaborada tem um alto grau de relevância e pode ser aplicada na prática escolar da educação física.

**Conclusões:** o processo de pesquisa demonstrou a importância e a necessidade da pesquisa desenvolvida.

**Palavras-chave:** estratégia lúdica, habilidades sociais, Educação Física, alunos.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In education, assessment is an indicator of performance, so students can think about their ways of learning and acquire strategic skills that will be relevant to their studies. Assessment shows tangible capacities, proving the potential of individual performance. It evidences the mastery of hard competencies, such as technical, scientific, and computer knowledge.

However, they hardly ever represent social and emotional skills, which are important to make responsible decisions, set up favorable relationships with others, and reach higher goals. These skills, commonly known as soft abilities, comprise communication, teamwork, leadership, emotional intelligence, and the building up of relationships.



Accordingly, several researchers have dealt with soft abilities through various different approaches. The scientific community coincides in that they are a set of capacities, knowledge, aptitudes, or dexterity acquired by individuals throughout their vital cycle success in any scenario. Some of these aspects have been dealt with by various authors, like Puga, and Martínez, (2008), and Guerra, (2019).

Moreover, Guerra, (2019, pp-7) noted that these are a set of socio-affective abilities needed for interaction with other individuals, which are effective to cope with everyday demands and challenging situations. (...) they permit people to make decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, recognize the emotions of other individuals, and build up healthy relationships physically and emotionally.

According to the previous statements, interpersonal abilities are personal attributes that permit individuals to interact effectively with others, communicate ideas clearly, and unfold during complex social situations. In education, these abilities comprise a series of essential capacities for academic success, and to establish favorable relationships, manage emotions, and solve conflicts (Gómez, Borrero, and Pertúz, 2020).

So these interpersonal capacities can be developed in the students, they must be part of the curriculum. Educators could plan their lessons including activities that promote teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. It is a way of working collectively in class, developing projects or tasks that could help students develop these abilities and strengthen their relevance (Fuentes, Moreno, Rincón, and Silva, 2021).

There are quite a few ways to classify soft abilities in the scientific literature, though in this paper the assumptions of Gilyazova, Zamoshchansky, and Vaganova, (2021) were included. To them, the abilities are pooled in,

- Soft social abilities: interpersonal abilities, communicative abilities, values, perception, and favorable attitude.
- Soft thinking abilities: decision-making, creativity, and problem-solving.



- Soft bargaining abilities: managing time, coping with stress, dealing with emotions, and teamwork.

Accordingly, Physical Education lessons could help with the acquisition of soft abilities in the students in different ways. Effective use of their methods and content encourages attention, memory and correlation, emotional and physical control (control over each individual's environment), the capacity to play, emotions, senses, imagination, and thinking. These aspects are associated with soft abilities in Physical Education.

From a research Physical Education perspective, students are allowed to raise their endurance and physical capacities. It improves soft abilities like teamwork and leadership. Learn and know your body. It reduces stress levels and increases the body's serotonin, providing a feeling of happiness. Furthermore, individuals are more spontaneous and creative, and it allows them to know, respect, and value themselves and others. Therefore, it is important to have a variety and experience of every game-based activity, recreation, and sport for continuous implementation, either in class or through educational game projects (Fernández, 2009 pp-1).

Consequently, Physical Education lessons should include many activities that stimulate soft abilities. Besides, this paper embraces the classification made by Doyle (2021), who said that Physical Education contributes to all, conferring more relevance to this discipline in the school curriculum.

In an initial exploratory diagnostic, methods like class observation and document review (lesson plans) were useful in identifying some of the shortcomings that hindered the harmonious development of this activity, namely, the absence of intention to use soft abilities when planning lessons, which causes poor utilization of the potential of Physical Education to address this topic.



Accordingly, the existence of shortcomings in the development of soft abilities during the Physical Education lesson affects the fulfillment of the objectives in the curriculum of the fifth-grade students at the Tabuga Jama Education Facility in 2023-2024.

Aim: To design a game-based strategy for developing soft abilities in fifth-grade students at the Tabuga-Jama Education Facility in 2023-2024.

## ***MATERIALS AND METHODS***

This is a mixed research study with the following features:

- **Method integration:** Mixed research combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study to address the scientific problem more comprehensively. It entails collecting and analyzing quantitative (numbers and statistics) and qualitative data (documents, observation, interviews).
- **Complementary base:** The quantitative and qualitative methods are used complementarily to offer a greater understanding of the research problem. The quantitative data could help identify general patterns, whereas the qualitative data shed light on individual experiences and perceptions.
- **Contextualization:** Combining quantitative and qualitative data in a single research study permits contextualization of the quantitative results, offering a broader understanding of the influential variables and factors.

Moreover, descriptive research was also undertaken. It describes and records information about phenomena or situations presented in their natural context. It does not seek causal relationships or variable manipulation. Descriptive studies are useful for a better understanding of a topic. Descriptive methods include user opinions. In this particular case, experienced Physical Education teachers in Ecuador.



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This study used methods at different levels. Such as:

Theoretical:

Analytical-synthetic: It favored a study about the theoretical rationale for the development of soft abilities in fifth-grade students. It was used for systematization, generalization, and application of the information processed. It was useful for interpreting the empirical information gathered.

Inductive-deductive: It helped establish inferences and generalizations in developing soft abilities in fifth-grade students, as well as interpreting the data gathered, leading to new logical conclusions.

Empirical methods:

Scientific observation: It was useful for direct observation of the development of soft abilities in fifth-grade students at Tabuga Jama Education Facility through immediate perception, which permitted quick knowledge of reality.

Survey: Information collection of the current state of the problem, with a broad number of participants.

User opinions: This method allowed the researchers to assess the effectiveness of the phases and moments of the game-based strategy designed, as well as the feasibility of implementation.

Statistical and mathematical methods:

Descriptive statistics, particularly, percent calculation was used and a variable was graded to know its values. This element coincides with the type of approach taken in this research.





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### Sample:

The population of the study was made up of 15 teachers of Physical Education, with a master's degree and over 20 years of experience in educational facilities in Ecuador. Besides, they have shown full mastery of the curriculum of the discipline.

The sample was selected intentionally, depending on two criteria. Firstly, having worked at the basic level for more than five years, and secondly, their participation in research papers associated with this type of curriculum.

## *RESULTS AND DISCUSSION*

In this study, the authors assumed the methodology and procedures of Rodríguez & Rodríguez, (2009), namely, introduction, rationale, aim, diagnostic, planning, instrumentation, and evaluation.

### Step 1. Introduction-rationale

Interpersonal competencies are subjective and cannot be measured by standardized tests, differing from hard competencies. They include problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and adaptability. They can be transferred to different settings, and are necessary for personal and professional success.

Interpersonal abilities are increasingly more important when preparing students for success in every life scenario. However, developing and cultivating them requires a collaborative effort among educators, parents, and students. Educational facilities play a pivotal role in promoting interpersonal competencies and the creation of an environment that favors their development.

Unlike hard abilities, which are specific technical skills needed for a particular job or discipline, soft abilities are transferable and may be used for a variety of scenarios and



situations. This flexibility makes them more necessary in today's changing world, in which people must adapt and recycle throughout their careers.

The significance of interpersonal competencies in education is a constant effort. According to a report at the World Economic Forum, interpersonal competencies, like creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence will be among the main competencies demanded by employers to succeed in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The practical character of the strategy is attached to the philosophical maxim about theory and practice. It is important to conceive practice as a space that favors feedback not only as a corroboration of the theory but also grants more value to philosophical categories of time and space.

#### Step 2. Stating the general objective

A Game Strategy for Developing Soft Abilities in Fifth-Grade Elementary Students at Tabuga-Jama School in 2023-2024

#### Step 3. Diagnostic

- A study of indicators
- Analysis of governing documents
- Application of research instruments.
- Data analysis and determination of the diagnostic regularities.

#### Methods and techniques

- a) Documentary analysis.
- b) Survey.

#### Aids

Diagnostic instruments, governing documents (Physical Education curriculum, lesson plans, and SPSS.



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## Step 4 Planning

- Selection of lesson activities.
- Intentional lesson planning for soft abilities in the fifth-grade students at Tabuga Jama Educational Facility, in 2023-2024.

## Methods and techniques

- Bibliographic review.
- Documentary analysis

## Aids

Every methodological indication for the Physical Education lesson in the curriculum is met.

## Step 5 Instrumentation.

Materialization of planned activities.

Example of a game-based activity.

## Methods

Games.

Joint design.

## Aids

The material resources required for the games in the strategy designed.

The material resources required for the games in the strategy designed.

Game name: Treasure Island.



Objective: Group search for a treasure hidden in a previously set area while soft abilities like communication, planning, and decision-making take place.

Materials:

- Cones or ribbons to mark the treasure and the traps.
- Blinds for the eyes.

Instructions:

- Split the group of students into small groups (ideally 4-6 students per team).
- Set a game territory big enough to favor team mobility.
- Mark a treasure (could be a small object, like a ball) within a spot inside the game territory.
- Mark some traps (could be soft obstacles, like cones).
- Blind the eyes of one member per team (the explorer) and give them a compass (real or imaginary drawn on paper).
- The rest of the team will perform as guides, giving instructions to the explorers to help them get to the treasure without falling into the traps.
- The explorers must rely on the instructions given by their partners to reach the treasure, only using the compass as a reference.
- Set a time limit (for instance, 15-20 min), and encourage the teams to collaborate, communicate effectively, and make collective decisions.
- When the time is up, the teams that found the treasure win.

This game not only promotes the development of soft abilities but also confidence among the students, creating a fun and collaborative environment during the Physical Education lesson.

Step 6 Assessment

- It encourages student participation through learning.



- It fosters individual, pair, group, and team effort, and confers the lesson a favorable setting for debate.
- It contributes to a systematic evaluation of the educational process individually and collectively, as well as individual results through self-assessment and co-assessment.
- It promotes predictive assessment of the strategy.

## Methods

User opinion.

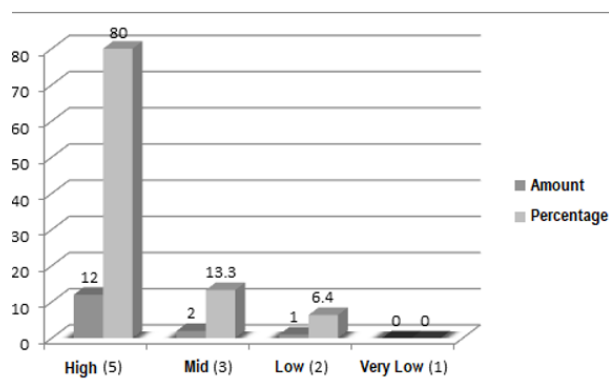
Measurement.

Aids

It is done according to the methodological guidelines of the nominal group described by Fleitas (2013).

### *Results of partial implementation*

Question 1. What are your considerations about the game-based strategy for developing soft abilities in the fifth-grade students at the Tabuga Jama Educational Facility (2023-2024)? Analyze the following indicators according to the scale (Figure 1).



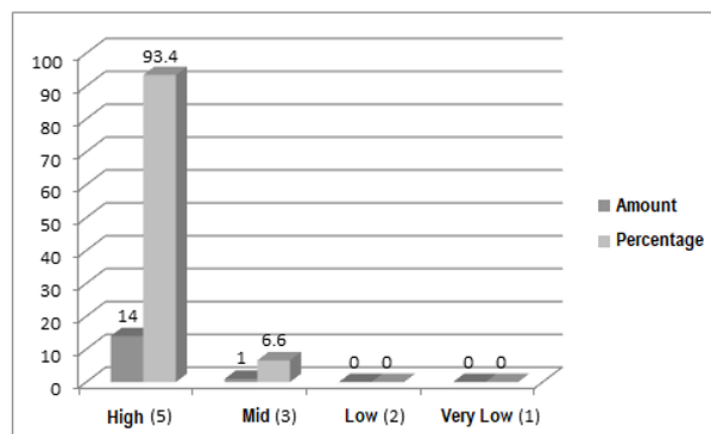
*Fig. 1. - Responses to Question 1*



As shown in Figure 1, most users considered that the game-based strategy for developing soft abilities in the fifth-grade students at the Tabuga Jama Education Facility (2023-2024) was highly pertinent for the Physical Education lesson. Twelve users (80%) of the sample considered it so. Meanwhile, only two individuals (13.3 %) said it was mid, and only one (6.4 %) thought it was low. Moreover, none chose the lowest level. These results show the pertinence level given by the users to the academic product from this research.

Question 2. Express your considerations about the real possibility of participating in the Physical Education lesson as a way of favoring soft abilities development in the fifth-grade students at the Tabuga Jama Educational Facility (2023-2024). Use the previous scale.

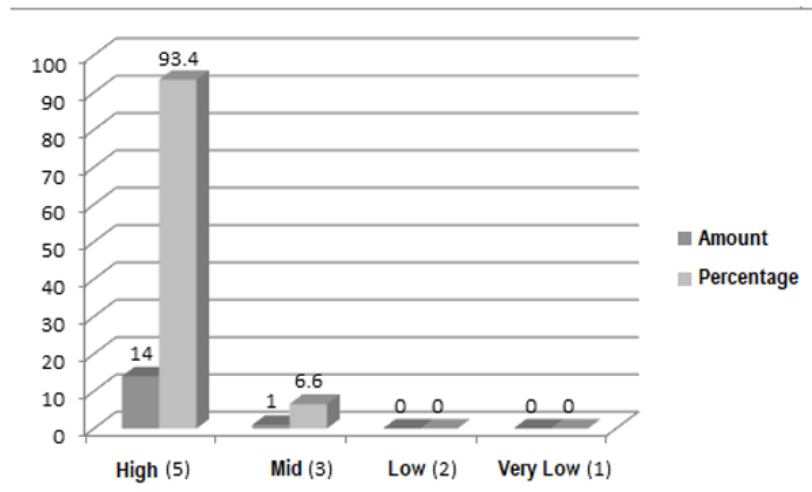
Figure 2 shows the results from the second question. As in the questions below, most subjects selected the highest pertinence category on the scale. Fourteen subjects (93.4%) expressed it that way. While only one (6.6%) said it was mid. None of the subjects considered the lower categories of the scale. These results demonstrate the real possibility of participating in the Physical Education lesson as a way of favoring soft abilities development in the fifth-grade students at the Tabuga Jama Educational Facility (2023-2024). (Figure 2).



*Fig. 2. - Responses to Question 2*



Question 3. How relevant do you think the games used for implementing the strategy designed are? Use the previous scale (Figure 3).



*Fig. 3. - Responses to Question 3*

As shown in the previous figure, the results from question 3 are similar to the rest. Most users chose the highest pertinence category, whereas only one chose the mid-category. The other categories were not chosen. These results confer higher value to the games used for implementing the strategy designed.

Overall, the results from the three questions were regarded as highly pertinent. Consequently, the strategy has a strong favorable assessment before it is implemented through the Physical Education lesson, which offers teachers more confidence.

The theoretical rationale for this research matches the aspects stated by Naranjo, (2008), who referred to the lack of soft abilities as causing poor assertive communication in children, leading to shyness and uncertainty in expressing their ideas, opinions, and even emotions, in addition to being more prone to manipulation. Therefore, the strategy shown in this paper includes games that permit children to deal with the previous issues.



Moreover, Hernández & Neri (2019) noted that the development of student personality and progressive improvements in communication go hand in hand with soft abilities since they strengthen students' confidence. These aspects are essential, and may be favored by proper use of Physical Education means. In the particular case of game-based research, the strategy stimulates personality and communication among the fifth-grade students at the Tabuga Jama Educational Facility (2023-2024).

Moreover, Díaz *et al.* (2020) conceived the life project as guidance and sense given by individuals to their lives, which is also made up of socio-cultural relationships and peer interactions. However, in their proposal, they did not refer to the potentialities given in the Physical Education lesson, depending on the arrangement of specific actions for work and the development of soft abilities in the students.

Below are some of the potentialities of Physical Education, as described by Brettschneider (1999), which allow students to develop soft abilities in class.

- It is the only school subject that aims at the body, activity, physical development, and health. This aspect is very distinctive and is based on a novel approach to managing soft abilities.
- It helps strengthen the respect for their bodies and their peers' bodies.
- It contributes to strengthening self-esteem and self-respect, which are two important aspects of soft ability development.
- It provides abilities and knowledge that could be used in their future careers.
- It shows that childhood, as the previous stage to adulthood, should be lived as it is. Some of the aspects that permit using Physical Education lessons as the ideal vehicle for developing soft abilities in school children.





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## CONCLUSIONS

The study of the theoretical rationales for soft ability development in students, evidences the need for a new game-based approach in Physical Education lessons, due to the potentialities of this subject to improve this aspect.

The analysis and interpretation of the results through user opinions confirmed the pertinence of the game-based strategy for developing soft abilities in the fifth-grade students at the Tabuga Jama Educational Facility (2023-2024) since this proposal is effective and ready for implementation in the community.

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***Conflict of interest statement:***

The authors declare having no competing interests.

***Author contribution statement:***

The authors have participated in the redaction of the manuscript and the documentary review.



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