



## Ludic Language Pedagogy Special Issue Article: *The Ludic You Love*

(2026)

<https://www.llpjournal.org/>

# Teaching Financial Literacy Using *EZWorld*

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*Ludic Language Pedagogy*

### Item Details

#### Keywords:

Board games  
EFL  
Game-based learning  
Vietnamese board games  
Financial literacy  
Authentic learning

### Key points

- **Name of ludic object:** EZWorld
- **Type/genre/theme:** A tabletop game where players try to survive the challenging financial world
- **Intended audience age** 🧑: 8 and above
- **Intended audience proficiency** 🗨️: A1 and above
- **Typical time to play** ⌚: 30-45 minutes
- **Number of players** 👤: 2-4 players

### Microblog synopsis

*EZWorld*, developed by Mr. Nguyễn Bá Phước, is a Vietnamese board game that compresses ten years of financial decision-making into one hour of play. Grounded in experiential and sociocultural learning theories, it exemplifies how simulation and embodied interaction can foster 21st-century financial literacy through autonomy, reflection, and intergenerational dialogue.  
#gamebasedlearning #vietnameseboardgames #boardgames #EFL  
#financialliteracy #authenticlearning

View at the LLP Site: <https://www.llpjournal.org/2026/07/01/llp-special-edition-the-ludic-you-love.html>

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# 1. The current landscape of Vietnam's financial literacy education

Financial literacy in Vietnam remains at a nascent stage, despite the country's rapid economic development and growing exposure to complex financial situations. National surveys indicate that Vietnamese citizens rank among the lowest in Southeast Asia in financial-literacy scores (State Bank of Vietnam, 2018). Empirical studies similarly reveal substantial gaps in basic financial understanding. Nguyen Dang Tue (2017) found that Vietnamese adults generally lack essential knowledge of savings, investment, and debt management, with education level and exposure to financial training emerging as key predictors of literacy. Among university students, Nguyen Thi Hai Yen (2017) reported comparable deficiencies, suggesting that current schooling provides limited preparation for financial decision-making.

Recent analyses emphasize that the expansion of fintech and digital-payment systems further widens the divide between technological access and financial understanding (Morgan & Trinh, 2020). Although government agencies have begun embedding financial education into mathematics and social-science curricula, implementation remains uneven and primarily urban-focused. The growing presence of Gen-Z in Vietnam's digital economy heightens the urgency for innovative, inclusive, and age-appropriate financial-literacy interventions (Dinh & Vo, 2025).

Overall, Vietnam's financial-literacy landscape is marked by low baseline knowledge, limited curricular integration, and the increasing complexity of modern financial systems. This context highlights the need for experiential, game-based approaches that can contextualize and simplify financial concepts for broader audiences. *EZWorld* exemplifies such an approach, fostering foundational financial understanding and socio-cognitive engagement from an early age through playful simulation and intergenerational dialogue.

Although *EZWorld* is typically played among family members who share the same first language, its relevance to language learning extends beyond traditional second-language learning contexts. Learning financial literacy also involves learning the specialized language through which financial concepts are understood and communicated. Children and adults alike encounter new vocabulary, expressions, and ways of reasoning when discussing topics such as savings, investment, debt, or risk. Thus, with this paper, I want to have language be viewed not as foreign-language acquisition alone, but as the development of domain-specific communicative practices embedded within play.

Vietnam's financial literacy remains low despite rapid economic growth. As fintech expands, the gap between access and understanding widens, making experiential, game-based learning like *EZWorld* more vital than ever.

## 2. A game-based approach to financial literacy education

### 2.1 Theoretical foundations of *EZWorld*

The idea of *EZWorld* was first formed around 2020 by Mr. Nguyễn Bá Phước. He is a financial educator/ consultant from Hồ Chí Minh City, Vietnam as well as the founder of EasyFintech (an online academy that offers families across Vietnam financial literacy courses). The game was a response to the subtle cry for help from different people and families in Vietnam who remain in the dark when it comes to finance during the time of rapid changes in our country. After four years of development, *EZWorld* came to life through many revisions and feedback from not only the financial experts within his circle but also from the board game community in Saigon.

At its core, *EZWorld* takes heavy inspiration from Monopoly of Hasbro. The idea is that everyone will have a certain amount of money to begin. The goal is to be the last one to have money or tangible / intangible assets on the board. Each turn, players will roll two dice to move, and, wherever they land, they need to resolve the effect of the space. However, what makes the game special is the idea that it is built upon an asymmetrical system where each player gets to choose their characters, and each character will have certain perks as well as strengths and weaknesses. In addition, *EZWorld* also contains in-depth mechanics based on real-world financial situations like debts, insurances, interest rates, and trivia questions relating to different situations players encounter on a daily basis.

*EZWorld* is grounded in the principles of game-based learning (GBL), which views games as structured systems that create meaningful learning through play, feedback, and problem-solving (Gee, 2003; Plass, Homer & Kinzer, 2015). Within this perspective, the game's design intentionally transforms financial concepts into interactive challenges, allowing players to experiment, reflect, and internalize knowledge through iterative cycles of action and consequence. GBL provides the pedagogical frame through which the game's three core theoretical foundations: experiential learning, sociocultural theory, and self-determination theory are enacted in practice.

First, according to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, effective education arises from learners' active participation in concrete experiences followed by reflection and conceptualization. Within *EZWorld*, players engage in simulated financial decision-making: earning income, investing, or managing risk, while receiving immediate, tangible feedback on their actions. This cyclical experience promotes deeper comprehension than abstract explanation alone.

Second, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning is socially mediated and occurs through dialogue and shared activity. What makes *EZWorld* particularly distinctive is its ability to extend learning beyond the classroom. Owing to its simple mechanics and familiar resemblance to the popular Monopoly game in Vietnam, parents can easily participate alongside their children at home without continuous teacher supervision (see *Figure 1*). This accessibility gives rise to *EZWorld*'s intergenerational format, in which children and parents become co-players who engage in negotiation, reasoning, and the explanation of financial choices. Through these communicative exchanges, abstract economic ideas are transformed into meaningful, socially constructed understandings.

*Figure 1*  
Picture of a family discussing while playing *EZWorld* together



Finally, *EZWorld* reflects Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), as it satisfies players' needs for autonomy (choosing their financial paths), competence (developing mastery through play), and relatedness (connecting with real life situations). These motivational drivers explain why playful simulation often yields higher engagement and retention than didactic instruction.

*EZWorld* embodies Kolb, Vygotsky and Ryan & Deci in one table: learners act, reflect, and connect. Through play, families turn abstract finance into shared stories, where autonomy, competence, and relatedness drive real learning.

## 2.2 Financial literacy as generational dialogue

Financial discussions are often limited within Vietnamese families, partly because many adults feel underprepared to teach what they themselves were never formally taught, and partly due to cultural sensitivities surrounding money. *EZWorld* reimagines this silence as generational dialogue that is a playful and inclusive approach that connects classroom learning with family practice.

In the classroom, *EZWorld* functions as a collaborative simulation where students learn key financial principles: income, expenditure, saving, and investment through discussion, role-play, and decision-making. Teachers guide students to articulate their reasoning, justify their financial choices, and reflect on consequences. These communicative practices mirror authentic financial conversations and prepare learners to extend the dialogue beyond school.

At home, the game's accessibility: simple rules and familiar Monopoly-style structure enable parents to join in the experience without requiring teacher mediation. This continuity between school and home creates an intergenerational learning loop, where children share classroom insights and parents contribute life experience. The result is a reciprocal exchange: children reinforce classroom knowledge by explaining it to parents, while adults model real-world financial thinking and ethical reasoning.

Such intergenerational co-play transforms financial literacy into a social and emotional experience. Adults witness their children's reasoning processes, while children gain confidence through equal participation. Research on family-based learning shows that these shared ludic spaces foster communication, empathy, and financial socialization. This gradually transfers values, attitudes, and decision-making strategies across generations (see *Figure 2*) (Fleer, 2010; Gudmunson & Danes, 2011).

In Vietnam's rapidly digitalizing society, where both schools and families grapple with attention fragmentation, *EZWorld* restores face-to-face, dialogic learning as a bridge between formal education and lived experience. It allows the classroom to extend into the home, and the home to enrich the classroom, creating a continuous ecosystem of play, talk, and reflection through which financial literacy becomes a shared generational narrative.

Figure 2  
Picture of a father and daughter playing EZWorld at home



*EZWorld* turns money talk into meaningful talk. By linking classroom simulation with family play, it transforms financial literacy into a generational dialogue where children teach, parents reflect, and learning becomes a shared experience.

## 2.3 Financial literacy as language socialization

While *EZWorld* is primarily designed for financial education rather than second-language instruction, its relevance to second language acquisition emerges through the development of domain-specific language practices. Learning about finance inevitably requires learning the language through which financial concepts are understood and communicated. Even within first-language contexts, children and adults often encounter unfamiliar terminology and expressions when discussing financial topics. Consequently, financial literacy may also be understood as a form of financial language literacy.

Within *EZWorld*, players are repeatedly exposed to specialized vocabulary and communicative structures relating to economic decision-making. These include nouns (income, debt, savings, insurance, investment, assets), verbs (borrow, invest, earn, spend, save), and functional language for negotiation and reasoning:

- "If I invest now, I might earn more next round." → Conditional Type 2
- "Should I take a loan or wait?" → Model verb of suggestion / giving advice
- "I don't think this is a good decision." → Complex sentence structure

Repeated encounters with these expressions transform isolated terminology into usable language practices. Rather than memorizing financial vocabulary as decontextualized terms, learners acquire language through

meaningful participation in gameplay. In this sense, *EZWorld* aligns with sociocultural perspectives of language learning in which language functions as a mediating tool for thinking and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

Financial understanding therefore develops alongside communicative competence, as players gradually learn not only what financial concepts mean, but also how to discuss, justify, negotiate, and reflect upon them in interaction with others.

Financial literacy also becomes financial language literacy. Through play, *EZWorld* transforms abstract terms like debt or investment into living vocabulary used to explain, negotiate, and make meaning together.

## 2.4 Game art and visual accessibility

While *EZWorld* is primarily recognized for its educational design rather than elaborate or visually striking artwork, its visual presentation and artistic direction nonetheless play a crucial role in ensuring accessibility for a broad range of players, including children, parents, and those with little to no prior gaming experience (see *Figure 3*).

The game adopts a bright, family-friendly art style that blends playful illustration with real-world financial themes. Characters, cards, and board elements are designed with clear iconography and minimal textual load, allowing even younger players to navigate rules intuitively. Color-coding and simple visual metaphors (e.g., houses for property, wallets for savings, coins for income) reduce cognitive overload and make abstract financial concepts tangible. This visual clarity aligns with principles of universal design for learning, which emphasize accessibility through multiple modes of representation (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

*Figure 3*  
*The simplicity in the artstyle of EZWorld*



Moreover, *EZWorld's* aesthetic choices reflect a pedagogy of inclusivity. By avoiding overly technical or adult-oriented visuals, the game invites family members across generations to participate comfortably. Its approachable art direction communicates that financial learning is not reserved for experts, but it is a shared,

everyday experience. This sense of visual familiarity also lowers the barrier for teachers introducing the game in classrooms, as students can quickly grasp mechanics without long instructional phases.

Though not its most prominent feature, *EZWorld*'s art subtly reinforces its educational philosophy: learning through simplicity, clarity, and connection. The visual design ensures that cognitive energy is spent on discussion and decision-making rather than rule decoding, enabling the game to serve as a bridge between formal instruction and spontaneous family interaction.

In *EZWorld*, simplicity is the strategy. Clear icons, bright colors, and familiar symbols turn complex finance into playful discovery for every age. Accessibility is the artwork.

## 2.5 Lesson flow of the game

To translate *EZWorld* from a family board game into a structured educational tool, teachers can integrate it within a three-phase lesson flow that aligns gameplay with reflection and knowledge transfer. This structure ensures that financial literacy develops not only through play but also through guided inquiry and dialogue.

### Phase 1: Pre-Play Activation (10–15 minutes)

The session begins with a brief introduction to core financial concepts such as income, expenditure, saving, and investment. Teachers prompt students to discuss everyday money experiences, namely pocket allowances, family purchases, or saving goals and predict what strategies might lead to success in the game. This activation phase primes learners' prior knowledge and situates the upcoming play within familiar contexts.

### Phase 2: Play and Decision-Making (30–15 minutes)

Students (or families, in home settings) then engage in the core simulation: *living ten years in one hour*. Each round represents a financial year in which players make decisions about jobs, housing, investments, and unexpected life events. The teacher acts as facilitator rather than referee, circulating to observe reasoning, prompt reflection ("Why did you choose that?"), and connect decisions to broader economic principles. This phase embodies Kolb's experiential cycle, as learners act, experience consequences, and begin informal reflection in real time.

### Phase 3: Post-Play Reflection and Application (15–20 minutes)

After gameplay, students debrief in groups to analyze outcomes: Who accumulated wealth or debt, and why? What patterns of saving, risk-taking, or cooperation emerged? Teachers guide discussion toward financial ethics and real-world applicability—budgeting, planning, and family decision-making. Students are then invited to design short "financial tips" posters or journal entries summarizing lessons learned, completing Kolb's reflective-conceptual-active cycle.

This lesson flow supports three layers of learning:

1. **Cognitive:** grasping financial principles through repeated decisions and feedback.
2. **Social:** negotiating meaning and observing peers' strategies in a shared environment.
3. **Affective:** developing confidence and motivation through playful success and self-reflection.

By combining simulation, guided discussion, and reflection, *EZWorld* transforms financial literacy from static content into an embodied learning experience that extends beyond the classroom. The structure also remains

flexible as teachers can scale the game to shorter workshops, family learning sessions, or integrated units on economics and citizenship education.

*EZWorld* turns financial literacy into lived experience. A three-phase lesson: Activate, Play, Reflect lets students do, discuss, and discover money decisions. Teachers guide inquiry, not just instruction.

## 2.6 Linguistic affordances of gameplay

Beyond financial knowledge acquisition, the lesson flow of *EZWorld* also creates structured opportunities for language development. Across the three phases of instruction, learners engage with different forms of communicative practice that support vocabulary acquisition, reasoning skills, and interactional competence.

During the **Pre-Play Activation** phase, students activate prior knowledge by discussing familiar experiences and predicting outcomes:

- Teacher: "What would you do if you had 100,000 VND?"
- Student A: "I want to save it."
- Student B: "I will buy snacks."
- Teacher: "Why?"

Such exchanges introduce core financial vocabulary while encouraging learners to justify personal choices.

During **Play and Decision-Making**, language becomes functional and goal-oriented. Learners negotiate, persuade, and explain strategies:

- Student A: "I think buying insurance is safer."
- Student B: "But investing gives more money."
- Student A: "Yes, but there is more risk."

Through gameplay, students repeatedly produce conditional and causal language structures (*if...*, *because...*, *but...*), creating opportunities for authentic interaction.

Finally, during **Post-Play Reflection**, learners move toward more analytical and reflective discourse:

- "I lost money because I spent too much."
- "Next time I will save more."
- "My strategy worked because I invested early."
- "My approach focused on buying insurance and taking chances, and it paid off during the last few turns."

This progression illustrates a movement from naming and describing toward explaining and evaluating. Language therefore functions not as an additional activity attached to the game, but as a central mechanism through which understanding is constructed and shared.

*EZWorld* turns language into action. Learners name, negotiate, justify, and reflect, transforming financial talk into meaningful communicative practice.

### 3. Conclusion: from simulation to shared understanding

*EZWorld* illustrates how financial literacy can move beyond rote instruction to become a lived, dialogic experience. Rooted in experiential learning, sociocultural theory, and self-determination theory, the game transforms abstract financial principles into tangible, emotionally resonant actions. Through its accessible art design, intuitive mechanics, and intergenerational format, *EZWorld* demonstrates that play can serve as both a pedagogical tool and a social connector.

By linking classroom activities with family interactions, the game establishes a continuum of learning, where reflection in school prompts dialogue at home, and family experience enriches classroom discussion. This cyclical exchange situates financial literacy not as a discrete subject but as an evolving social practice grounded in real-world decision-making.

At a broader level, *EZWorld* challenges educators to reconsider how board games can serve as authentic learning environments. When designed with clarity, inclusivity, and pedagogical intent, such games can bridge generational divides, support diverse learners, and nurture 21st-century competencies: critical thinking, collaboration, and ethical reasoning.

Ultimately, *EZWorld* offers more than a lesson on money management. It provides a model for game-based pedagogy in which knowledge is co-constructed, values are shared, and learning becomes both playful and purposeful. In a rapidly changing economic landscape, such embodied, intergenerational approaches may be key to preparing learners not only to understand finance, but to participate thoughtfully within it.

*EZWorld* turns financial literacy into lived experience. Blending play, reflection, and dialogue, it connects classrooms and families, showing that learning about money is not just cognitive, but social, emotional, generational and linguistic.

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