

Gamification using board game in students' English vocabulary

Queencie Dohny

*Faculty of Psychology and Education
University Malaysia Sabah
queenciedohny6@gmail.com*

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Abstract. The gamification is another way of improving student's learning English vocabulary. Vocabulary is also important element in learning language because it is related to words that carry meanings. Without meanings, message and information could not be transferred from transmitter to receiver. Students perceive English language as a difficult subject to learn. In the classroom, students could not comprehend what they read during reading activities as they have low proficiency in English vocabulary. Objectives of the research were eliciting students' perceptions of learning vocabulary skill, traditional vocabulary learning, and game vocabulary learning. The research was conducted among Form 2 students which are in the same class. The selected group of students were from mixed ability of low to high level of English language proficiency. Three themes identified from the interview: Students' conception of English vocabulary skill; traditional vocabulary learning experienced by the students; and students who were part of board game vocabulary learning experienced positive enforcement. This research concludes that board games do promote better vocabulary learning, at least in the perspective of the students themselves.

Keywords: gamification method, board games, vocabulary skill, vocabulary learning, game vocabulary learning.

INTRODUCTION

Gamification is another way of improving student's learning English vocabulary. Gamification would make lessons fun, and this would make students actively participate in their learning process. Retherford (2020) states that gamification would allow the transformation of any learning content to an interactive game using technology or hands-on materials. Gerovasiliou and Zafiri, (2017) state that, applying games in language classroom encourages students involved, participated and paid attention to the lesson. Vocabulary is another important element in learning language because it is related to words that carry meanings. Through meanings, message and information could be transferred from one person to another. Fiqih, Emier Abdul (2017) mention that vocabulary is one of the elements in English that needed in the communication. Uberman

(1998) claims that vocabulary learning is a tedious and strenuous task especially if it is delivered through rote and mechanical strategies. Nevertheless, the ability to retain new words is perhaps the most challenging part in language learning (Holden, 1991).

For speakers who have low proficiency in the English language, especially the non-native speakers, they might find it difficult to converse in English, again due to lack of English vocabulary. Longer time may be needed to translate words from their first language to the English language. Graves, August, and Mancilla-Martinez, (2013) state that using games would enable students to practise and rehearse words therefore can develop domains of words and relatedness.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

English vocabulary is one of the main components in English language. School students should master the usage of English vocabulary as stated in KSSM English Language Curriculum. However, students perceive English language as a difficult subject to learn, which directly affects their performance. In the classroom, students could not comprehend what they read during reading activities as they have low proficiency in English vocabulary. The same situation also happens in terms of their homework. At the same time, the traditional approach in teaching vocabulary is no longer relevant in today's classroom, which is why students' performances are affected.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of this research are:

- i. What are students' perceptions towards learning vocabulary skill?
- ii. What are students' perceptions towards traditional vocabulary learning?
- iii. What are students' perceptions towards board game vocabulary learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gamification in classroom. On one hand, Kapp (2012) defines gamification as using game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems. On the other hand, (Garcia, 2017) sees gamification as the inclusion of game design elements into non-playful contexts that involves the incorporation of the common game elements like scores, points, and rewards outside the traditional game spaces. One of the studies conducted to prove that games can be used in the classroom to stimulate the learning process (Premanand, 2014, p.52). Grobber and Maaik (2020) state that gamification generates a lot of attention in educational assessment to increase student motivation. As the principle of using game elements like scores, points, and rewards has been used in various levels of learning (Permanand (2014), then it has created a wonderful way to increase interest in the classroom. Besides, it opens doors for learners to enhance their learning experience and acquire skills to solve any tasks or challenges in the class (Figuro, 2015).

The Vocabulary Performance. Vocabulary acquisition is the most important thing in language learning. It is mentioned by McCarthy (1992) that a meaningful communication cannot take place without having sufficient knowledge of vocabulary. English vocabulary as a second or foreign language plays an important role considering that students' English skill is depending on the total number of words they know (Abdul Rabu, et.al., 2017). However, in a study conducted by Nahmod (2017), she states that many high school students find difficulty in decoding grade-level vocabulary. According to Astika (2016), vocabulary has been acknowledged as crucial to using language. Insufficient vocabulary will lead learners to difficulties in communication. Due to these reasons, educators must use a variety of teaching modalities such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic to best meet the needs of each student (Nahmod, 2017). Astika, (2016) argues that it is important for the teachers to decrease the students' learning burden by guiding them to use appropriate strategies in learning vocabulary.

Board Game in Teaching Vocabulary. Due to the significant importance of implementing gamification into teaching and learning in classroom, researchers decided to develop a board game as a way to implement gamification in classroom. There has been research that proves that board games are able to increase students' interactivity in classroom. In a study conducted by Fotini and Makrina (2017), they argue that board games are useful in stimulating six years old students' motivation in learning vocabulary in a foreign language classroom. They also stated that games are useful tool to motivate students to actively participate in the learning process which supports the proof of the pedagogical value of implementing games in language learning. Moreover, as stated by Bruner (1983), learners learn more effectively when they are involved in practical activities. Students are able to demonstrate and articulate their thoughts through hands-on activities such as playing games; Bouniol (2004) stated that, therefore they can learn better according to Dewey (1990). Bouniol (2004) also stated that, Piaget (1967) claims psychologically students learn by constructing knowledge when there is opportunity for them to do so. Other than that, students learn better when they have social interaction with their surroundings, which can be achieved through playing games (Vygotsky, 1978).

METHODOLOGY

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that research method itself explores human problems and characteristics and it is believed that the method used in qualitative research is able to be focusing on the language learners' ability for language acquisition. This research is appropriate to measure and explain students' ability to create strategies and plan in language learning. Since the research relies too much on students' point of view, they should not be given the force to provide such answers that is wanted to be heard by the researcher, instead they should be given the freedom to say what they wanted to say.

Research Participants. This research was conducted among Form 2 students which are in the same class. The selected group of students were from mixed ability of low to high level of English language proficiency. From the total number of Form 2 students in the school, 30 students were chosen to undergo the interview to collect their opinions related to English teaching vocabulary. Then, a test was given to the students and their score recorded. Once done, they were given a sheet to write their self-reflection essay related to their feelings and opinions on English teaching vocabulary. All data collected were utilized for data analysis.

The two students voluntarily participated in the research. The two participants of this research come from different schools in Malaysia. One comes from Peninsular and one from East Malaysia. Both of the students are female and both are in Form 2. One of the students is an Indian, meanwhile the other is Kadazan. Both students use English as their First Language at home and use their native as their second language. However, when they speak with their friends, they use other or mixed languages.

Each participant experienced the same intervention and was given the initiatives to learn vocabulary by using Board Games. Besides, both have experiences traditional vocabulary learning in classroom for over 7 years in the same school system which is Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan, with the same syllabus. Each participant was interviewed over Google Meet. The Google Meet was an effective and necessary way to communicate with the participants because of their location in multiple states in two different schools. Online interviews also allowed for convenient transcription of recorded interviews. Recording and transcription of interviews were done manually through video recording and Microsoft word. Interviews were transcribed within a couple of weeks of occurrence, after which participants were able to review and adjust their comments. Interview was conducted on the same day but different time. Before the interview, participants were briefly explained on the consent.

In this research, the researcher applied three types of instruments which are one-to-one interview, a test and self-reflection. All the instruments chosen for data collection were carried out with accuracy, validity, reliability, and credibility.

Instrument 1: One-to-one interview. The interview was conducted in one-to-one manner. Each student was given consent letter which allows the researcher to use their responses for data collection. A total of 9 questions were asked related to research. Each interview was recorded for data collection purposes.

Instrument 2: A test. The test looked at the students' vocabulary performance after the implementation for 12 weeks. The researcher employed the similar worksheet from pre-test where students need to list down the vocabulary words that they have acquired after playing the board game. The vocabularies will be related to their English Form 2 textbook. They were taken up from unit 6 Money, Unit 7 Journeys, Unit 8 Good Luck, Bad Luck and Unit 9 Take Care.

Instrument 2: Self-Reflection. The use of self-reflection instrument helped students to reflect on the board game after playing it for 12 weeks. The writing

of self-reflective essay enables students to revisit their experience playing the board game. The content of the writing is narrowed down to the students' feelings and their experience playing the board game. A template was given to assist students' writing. However, students were free to give their thoughts and opinions on regarding to their experience. The researcher gave code to the self reflection and categorise them into themes. In the self reflection, if the students give words such as happy, enjoy, fun, entertaining man many more; all these words form multiple codes that were categorized under one theme. In the data analysis, there were multiple themes to categorize the coding.

RESULT AND CONCLUSION

There were three distinctive themes emerged from the research data. The major themes identified from the interview analysis of this research included:

Theme 1: Students' conception towards English vocabulary skill

Both students perceived English vocabulary learning in negative way. One of the students mentioned that *"I think learning English vocabulary is boring"*. The participant also stated that it was difficult by saying, *"This is because it's difficult, boring"*. The participant said that *"I do not know which word I should learn in order to score"* indicating that the participant struggled to learn English vocabulary skill. Meanwhile participant 2 was asked on whether learning English vocabulary was fun, participant just said that *"Personally, I think learning English vocabulary is very so-so"* in which indicates the participant showing disinterest towards learning English vocabulary.

However, both showed that English vocabulary skill used in many places. Participant 1 said that *"Usually places where I have to use a lot of English vocabularies in English is at my school's English Club, English classes and whenever I travel overseas where English is common"*. Meanwhile, for participant 2, the usage of English was very crucial because the language is the participant's language used at home. The participant mentioned, *"My cousins that are around my age on my father side have English as their mother tongue so whenever they visit me or have a sleepover at my house, we would communicate in English"*. Both also stated that English vocabulary is necessary and widely spoken, where Participant 1 told in the interview, *"it is a widely use skill and it'll help during communication between locals & foreigners, meanwhile, Participant 2 stated, "I do think learning English vocabulary is necessary"*. Participant 2 added, *"English is an international language and can be spoken and understood by mostly everyone in the world"*.

Theme 2: Traditional vocabulary learning experienced by the students

It was barely any positive comments given when it touched about traditional vocabulary learning. One of the participants even asked the interviewer, *"Traditional learning? Can teacher explain more about it?"*. After the explanation, the participant mentioned that *"We do learn vocabulary by writing and listing many words and search the meaning in the dictionary"*, indicating the understanding towards the approach mentioned by the interviewer in the research. However, the perception of the participant remains unchanged in which

the participated stated that traditional vocabulary learning was hard and unknown. The participant said that *"I think learning English vocabulary in the classroom is difficult..."* Added, *"It is because I donot know what's the meaning of some words in test and exam", I still need to improve myself"*, with additional note to improve on needs to improve vocabulary skills. The same experienced reported by Participant 2 in which stated that learning English vocabulary in traditional way was difficult and was not able to understand some of the words taught. The participant said, *"there are many words that I think is quite difficult for me to understand especially the hard one"*.

Participant 1 did not mention any strategy to solve vocabulary learning issue. However, Participant 2 did mention the needs for strategy to solve the issue and confronted that extra classes were taken to improve vocabulary performance issue. The participant mentioned that *"I need to attend English tuition as well to improveon silly mistakes I've made during my examinations"*.

Theme 3: Students' who were part of board game vocabulary learning experienced positive enforcement

Participants reported feeling fun to be part of board game vocabulary learning experience. Participant 1 stated from the interview that, *"I love playing games but my parents always remind me not to go overbroad"*. Added, the participants mentioned playing games as part of leisure activity; *"I also play many other games during my free time but I could not remember the name"*. Participant 1 even gave a list of sample of games played before; *"Games ranging from sports, educational and board games"*. Not surprising, Participant 2 stated almost similar opinion, saying that, *"I do think learning through board game is entertaining"*. To be added, Participant 2 also mentioned that, *"For me, each time I have done a set of questions, I would try and do harder questions to challenge myself and if I manageto get the answer right or close, I would feel good and proud of myself"* indicating that not only the Participant had fun but also had experienced positive enforcement towards board game vocabulary learning which was feeling good and feeling proud for self-accomplishment. Not only that, both participants agreed that learning through board game was more pleasing and preferred. Participant 1 stated that, *"If there is an opportunity, I would prefer to learn vocabulary through board games as it is more entertaining and not boring"* The participant added, *"Besides, playing games is definitely entertaining as I can gain some knowledge and at the same timeI get to enjoy a game"*. As for participant 2, it was mentioned that *"I prefer game learning, since I really do enjoy doing exercises not only in the English subject but also in other subjects"*.

Not only participants feeling fun, entertaining, amusing, and pleasing. Both participants agreed to say that learning vocabulary through games help them to spend more time with their family and friends. Participant 1 stated that, *"I got to play with my friends and family"*. It was added, *"Besides, I can also compete with my friends. I can challenge them and whoever wins can get prizes"*. As for Participant 2, *"I do think learning through board games is entertaining"*. Added, *"It is because learning while playing with family members or friends is actually a very effective and fun way to improve on something"*.

Both participants agreed that learning through board game learned to be theeffective way to learn vocabulary. Participant 2 especially mentioned that it

was challenging; *"I would try and do harder questions to challenge myself and if I manage to get the answer right or close"* indicating that it challenged the participant to learn vocabulary. The participant added, *"I have learnt quite a few new vocabularies not only through board games but in online games as well"*. As for Participant 1, *"I can also learn because there will be tasks that we need to complete in each level"*. Added, *"By doing that, we get to learn a lot of vocabularies"*. The participant added, *"So far, I can only find board game that is in English"*.

Both participants understood that in learning vocabulary through board game, there will be times when participant won and there will be time for losing. Participant 1 said that *"Sometimes I will win but there will be times when I lose as it was not just about the task, but also on the teamwork and many more"*. As for Participant 2, *"Sometimes, I win and sometimes I lose.... so it's in between"*. The participants believed that board game helps to divert vocabulary learning into easy mode.

Participant 1 stated that, *"I can say yes because I play a lot of games and somehow not only board games, I played other games to...such as Mobile Legend and PUBG"*. The participant added, *"Besides, I also have also played Scrabble, Word Search, Crossword, Puzzle, Articulate and Spelling Bee"*. Adding the participant testimony, Participant 1 stated that, *"I did not find answering in English test is difficult, I am able to understand most of the words in the test and exam"* which indicate the positive enforcement of learning vocabulary through games specifically board game.

As we come to the end of the interview, both participants were asked to choose which approach they would choose to learn for English vocabulary skill and rate their vocabulary skill after learning through the method given. Both preferred to learn via board game. As they believed, it helped them to be more skilled and to improve in learning more vocabularies. Participant 1 stated that, *"I would rate it approximately 8.5 because I think I have excelled in many English vocabularies but I still need to work on a few tweaks"*. Meanwhile, participant 2 mentioned that, *"I would rate my English skills in vocabulary 7.5 out of 10 as I know there is still so much for me to learn and improve"*. *Not only were both students much confident they also felt that there were room for improvements for them to improve their vocabulary skills.*

One thing that is crucial in implementation board game was to listen and put students at the centre. Students' voices are important. Whatever they feel should be taken into consideration. There were concerns on the time that when their parents felt there was a need for boundaries for playing time. It's best to get not only students' consent but as well as the parents so that they will know on what their kids are involving with. Since the research was only conducted in school and among students, it can be expanded to family approach to promote more of family-oriented learning coherent with today's situation in which students stay most of their time at home and learned via online and guided by their parents. Looking at the participants' comment on their enjoyment having their family joining was really important in the success of this research.

This research concluded that board games do promote better vocabulary learning, at least in the perspective of the students themselves. However, it is only a start to what hopefully will be a series of ongoing studies that examine the

relationship of gamification and vocabulary. It is probable that the future success of schools and students depend on the effectiveness of vocabulary learning to promote better English language performance.

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