Gamified-Learning to Teach ESL Grammar: Students' Perspective

Gamified-Learning y Enseñanza de Gramática ESL: Perspectiva de los estudiantes

Karmila Rafiqah M. Rafiq[1]
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia – MALAYSIA
karmilarafiqah@gmail.com

Harwati Hashim[2]
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia – MALAYSIA
harwati@ukm.edu.my

Melor Md Yunus[2]
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia – MALAYSIA
melor@ukm.edu.my

Fetylyana Nor Pazilah[2]
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia – MALAYSIA
fetylyananor@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Many educationists resort to technology in assisting their teaching. Despite the integration of technology in class, the English as a second language (ESL) learners face difficulties in learning the ESL grammar. Thus, this paper aimed to find out the perceptions of students towards gamified-learning. Thirty suburban secondary school students in Malaysia answered a questionnaire in this study. The main findings showed that most students favour the usage of gamified-learning in learning grammar because it is amusing, motivating, improves learning experience and provides a better understanding of the ESL grammar concepts. This paper implied that gamified-learning can be used by teachers to teach ESL grammar. In the future, research can look into the different types of games suitable for each skill in the English language. As the revolution of technology provides a diversity of technological tools to be used in classrooms, it is hoped that all teachers will fully maximise them.

Keywords: English as a second language (ESL), gamified-learning, grammar, online games, technology-enhanced language learning.

RESUMEN

Muchos educadores recurren a la tecnología para ayudar a su enseñanza. A pesar de la integración de la tecnología en la clase, los estudiantes de inglés como segundo idioma (ESL) enfrentan dificultades para aprender la gramática de ESL. Por lo tanto, este documento tuvo como objetivo descubrir las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre el aprendizaje gamificado. Treinta estudiantes de secundaria suburbana en Malasia respondieron un cuestionario en este estudio. Los principales hallazgos mostraron que la mayoría de los estudiantes favorecen el uso del aprendizaje gamificado en el aprendizaje de la gramática porque es divertido, motivador, mejora la experiencia de aprendizaje y proporciona una mejor comprensión de los conceptos de gramática de ESL. Este documento implica que el aprendizaje gamificado puede ser utilizado por los maestros para enseñar gramática de ESL. En el futuro, la investigación puede analizar los diferentes tipos de juegos adecuados para cada habilidad en el idioma inglés. Como la revolución de la tecnología proporciona una diversidad de herramientas tecnológicas para ser utilizadas en las aulas, se espera que todos los maestros las maximicen al máximo.

Palabras clave: inglés como segundo idioma (ESL), aprendizaje gamificado, gramática, juegos en línea, aprendizaje de idiomas mejorado por la tecnología.

1Corresponding author. Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.
2 Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.

1.   INTRODUCTION

The importance of English in the current revolution is overwhelming. Most of the industries in this fourth industrial revolution era use English as an interactive medium (Mona & Yehia, 2017). In non-native countries, the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) has changed in nature. Initially, learning English in schools is more towards the chalk-and-talk method of instruction (Mustafa, Nordin, & Embi, 2017) but it has since changed to cater to the technological world. Technology has not only made lives easier, but also promotes the educational benefits (Ghani & Daud, 2018; Hashim, 2018), such as providing a natural learning environment for learners (Azman, 2016; Azmi, 2017).

However, with the reformation of education towards a more technological education, ESL learners still find it difficult to learn the English language, especially in grammar. This is because, ESL learners find it to be complicated (Misbah, Mohamad, Yunus, & Ya'acob, 2017) and time-consuming (Yunus, Salehi, & Amini, 2016). One of the basic components in grammar is vocabulary, whereby it is important to know the correct words to be used in English in order to convey the proper meaning. Nevertheless, the time constraint and the complex structure inhibit the proper learning of the English language (Misbah et al., 2017). Plus, most lessons on grammar are made to cater to the traditional way of teaching, which is not favoured by ESL students (Chung, 2017). Due to that, changing the way of teaching from traditional to modern seems to be appropriate in teaching the ESL grammar (Azmi, 2017). ESL learners favour learning in a fun and relaxing atmosphere in which the gamified-learning method can grant those.

Gamification and 21st-Century Learning

Gamified-learning has become a hit among educators in this 21st century era (Liu, Holden, & Zheng, 2016; Tobar-Muñoz, Baldiris, & Fabregat, 2017). A game is well-known for its competitive nature played by one or more players. In the older days, games are created as a form of entertainment, but it has now became one of the educational tools (Hashim, M. Rafiq, & Yunus, 2019; Morschheuser, Riar, Hamari, & Maedche, 2017; Ruiz-Ariza, Casuso, Suarez-Manzano, & Martínez-López, 2018; Tobar-Muñoz et al., 2017; Tobar-Muñoz, Fabregat, & Baldiris, 2015). Online games condone to the digital learning era, whereby technology helps in creating a better impartment of knowledge (Hashim, 2018). Due to that, learning can be fostered through online games (Krystalli, Arvanitis, & Panagiotidis, 2014).

In previous studies related to gamified-learning, it can be seen that games promote second language learning, whereby learners are able to gain a better understanding of the language items (Li, Chen, Lafayette, & Lafayette, 2014; Liu et al., 2016; Silva, Roberto, & Teichrieb, 2015). Additionally, games also promote 21st-century skills. The skills in the 21st-century include communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving (The Partnership For 21St Century Skills "P21," 2009). These skills are vital for each individual to possess as the world is moving towards the 21st-century workforce.

Gamified-learning are able to promote communicative skills because learners are bound to communicate with other players or learners in order to complete a task (Perry, 2015). Interaction with peers is one of the benefits of gamified-learning, which contributes to the 21st-century learning (Ruiz-Ariza et al., 2018; Thorne, Hellermann, Jones, & Lester, 2015). In relation to communication skill, learners who play in a team will also be able to work well with others, which is promoting the teamwork skill. Teamwork skill is also an important skill in the 21st-century learning, known as the collaboration skill (Perry, 2015). An individual, who possesses communication and collaboration skills are more valuable.

Other than that, the critical thinking and problem-solving skills are interrelated. In order to solve a problem, it is necessary to think critically of a solution before taking any actions. Through games, students are more critical in thinking, whereby they are made to be aware and alert of their surroundings in games (Tobar-Muñoz et al., 2015). Plus, they are more determined to find the best solution to complete the tasks in the game (Liu et al., 2016; Tobar-Muñoz et al., 2017). Hence, through gamified-learning, the students' 21st-century skills will be able to develop unconsciously. There are indeed many undeniable advantages of gamified-learning in an ESL classroom. Some of the advantages include motivating and amusing, improves self-esteem and ESL learning.

Motivating and Amusing

Motivation is an important force, which could arouse the interest of ESL students in learning the English language. When a learning environment is motivating and encouraging, students will participate actively in the lesson (Liu et al., 2016). Not only that, students prefer playing to learn compared to a dull lesson, so gamified-learning will be able to provide a fun learning environment for students (Ashok, Revathi, & Saminathan, 2013; Metom, Tom, & Joe, 2013). Students, who are interested to learn the subject matter will be able to pay more attention in the classroom (Tobar-Muñoz et al., 2015). Students are more engaged in the lesson because they are able to play something fun, while learning in a relaxed environment (Thorne et al., 2015).

Additionally, motivation in second language learning has been an important factor, which contributes to the success of language learning (Krashen, 1982). In the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Stephen Krashen, it was mentioned that the affective filter of students should be retained low to ensure that students will be able to learn the second language better. This is because, the affective filter which can be caused by anxiety, acts as a barrier which could inhibit the learning of second language (Krashen, 1982). Due to that, it is important to know the suitable method of teaching,

so that learning will be a smooth sailing process for second language learners. Anxiety can be reduced when students are having fun in learning, which can be promoted through gamified-learning (Ibrahim, 2016; Yousef & Hana, 2013). With a high motivation, the students' desire to learn a second language is higher and they are more positive towards learning it.

Improves Confidence and Self-esteem

Students' self-esteem and confidence are closely related to attitude and motivation, whereby their motivated self will have higher self-esteem. Self-esteem is important in ensuring the success of second language learning (Krashen, 1982). Due to the fact that learning a second language can somewhat be terrifying for some learners (Ghasemi, Jafari, & Izadpanah, 2017), it is crucial to ensure that students are able to feel at ease when learning it. One of the reasons for lack of confidence and low self-esteem in students is afraid of committing mistakes in front of their peers (Ghasemi et al., 2017; Wichadee & Pattanapichet, 2018). Fear of making mistakes will only cause learners to feel uneasy when learning ESL. Due to that, gamified-learning is a suitable tool to overcome these problems, as games are made to be anonymous and players can even hide their own identities or create a new identity in it (Wichadee & Pattanapichet, 2018). This will not only reduce the students' fear and low self-esteem, but it will also make them feel calm, which will contribute much to the success of second language learning.

Improves ESL Learning

Apart from motivation, gamified-learning is also said to be able to improve ESL learning. Students perform better in various areas of ESL, such as phonics (Limsukhawat, Kaewyoun, Wongwatkit, & Wongta, 2016) and grammar (Hashim et al., 2019) depending on the games used in lessons. This is due to the fact that students are able to monitor their own progress through games, which could help them curb the difficulties in learning the English language (Einterz & Moon, 2017; Stojkovic & Jerotijevic, 2011). Students learn better when they are more engaged in the lesson. Their performance improves as they are able to grasp the subject matter taught for the day (Limsukhawat et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2016). This shows that gamified-learning is a good learning tool, which could affect the achievement of students.

Other than improving the students' academic achievement, games are also said to be able to improve the students' behaviour in the classroom (Ghasemi et al., 2017). Students are more inclined towards gamified-learning, which causes them to be better-behaved and indulge themselves in the lesson (Homer, Hew, & Tan, 2018). Additionally, gamified-learning is an eye-opener for students as their attention span towards a lesson will be longer, due to the incorporation of games, which are undeniably fun and amusing (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015). Online language games provide a wider scope of learning experiences, which can cater for independent learning among students. When students learn by themselves, they tend to remember better. Independent learning contributes to active learning, whereby students who are active learners tend to learn and grasp the lesson better (Morschheuser et al., 2017). Due to that, fostering independent learning in class will be a step ahead in helping the students to learn ESL. Hence, the development of technology, has made it easier to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching and learning session in schools. Thus, this paper aims to identify the perceptions of ESL learners towards using gamified-learning in improving their ESL grammar.

2. METHODOLOGY

The survey design was employed, whereby data were analysed quantitatively using frequency count. The participants of this study were chosen from a Malaysian suburban secondary school, whereby 30 students answered a questionnaire. The students had moderate to low level of proficiency in the English language. There were a total of ten items in this questionnaire, which were adapted from a study by Cheong, Filippou and Cheong (2014). A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5, followed these items with strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree respectively.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The perceptions of students towards gamified-learning was investigated in this study. The results were plotted into Table 1. Based on Table 1, it can be seen that a majority of the students agreed and strongly agreed that online language games is fun, motivating and it helps in grammar learning. Additionally, online language games are also able to enhance the confidence of learners in learning English and improve their self-esteem. Based on the responses, it can also be said that learners experienced positive learning and they prefer learning through online language games. A majority of them also mentioned that they want their teachers to use online language games more in the classroom because they believed that online language games have many benefits and they love them.

Table 1. The perceptions of learners towards gamified-learning

#	ITEMS	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	Online language game is fun	1	1	6	13	8
2	Online language game motivates me in learning the English language	0	1	7	16	6

3	It is easier to understand concepts in grammar with online language games	1	2	6	16	5
4	I am more confident in learning English with the help of online language games	2	2	8	12	6
5	Online language games improve my self-esteem	0	1	9	10	10
6	Online language games provide me with a positive learning experience	0	1	6	14	7
7	I prefer learning with online language games rather than the traditional method.	0	3	11	8	8
8	Teachers should use online language games more often in teaching the English language.	0	2	7	8	13
9	Online language games have many benefits	0	0	6	9	13
10	I love learning using online language games	0	1	9	12	6

Perceptions of students towards online language games

Based on the results, the students have positive perceptions towards online language games. The benefits of online language games contribute to the 21st-century learning environment, whereby it is deemed necessary for teachers to create a fun and positive learning environment, aside from successfully departing knowledge to students.

Fun and interesting

An online language game is a popular tool among youngsters and teenagers as they are used to surfing the Internet (Yunus, 2018). They also like to play games, so with the use of online language games, their interest can be aroused in learning the English language grammar. Games are a form of stress relief option which can be used in the classroom because of its relaxing and engaging nature (Tobar-Muñoz et al., 2015). When learners like the game, they are able to grasp knowledge in a more effective way (Koksal, Çekic, & Beyhan, 2014). The online language game is favoured by many because it is fun and amusing. The nature of games is to provide a fun experience for players. Due to that, employing games in the classroom shows that learners are able to have fun while learning.

Additionally, games are no longer an alienated tool for the younger generations as they grow up with technology (M. Rafiq & Hashim, 2018). Even without reading the rules and regulations, they are able to complete the game by the trial-and-error method. When a lesson is fun, there is a high possibility that the students will be more focused in the classroom. The most important element in learning is to ensure that learning is made fun and interesting. Classes which are fun will attract the students to pay more attention to the lesson (Singh & Harun, 2016)

Motivating and encouraging

There are various reasons that hinder learners from learning ESL grammar. One of them is due to demotivation. As it is well-known, grammar in ESL is difficult to learn and not to mention, it is boring. However, using online language games, it can be seen that many learners have a positive perspective towards ESL grammar. Using games, learners are more motivated and they managed to have fun while learning something difficult. Games increase motivation of learners, which makes it a valuable tool to be used in the classroom (Tobar-Muñoz et al., 2017). Apart from increasing motivation, it also increases learners' self-esteem in learning the English language. This is because, in second language acquisition, there is the theory of affective filter, whereby if the motivation is high, a learner will be more confident and have higher self-esteem in learning (Krashen, 1982).

Plus, games caused students to be engrossed and engaged in completing the tasks in the game. Gamified-learning undeniably reinforce the motivation of students, aside from fostering independent learning, whereby they are able to learn at their own pace (Hashim et al., 2019; Tan, Lee, Ganapathy, & Kasuma, 2019). The students are more motivated to complete the games, especially if there is a reward towards the end of the game. Due to being motivated, students will be able to learn better and they will independently master a subject matter in order to complete the game (Licorish, George, Owen, & Daniel, 2017). Not only that, when students are motivated, they will monitor their own learning (Einterz & Moon, 2017), which will bring benefits to them as an independent learner.

Improves learning experience

With the usage of technology, such as online language games, students feel excited and eager to learn at the same time. For them, as long as they are able to play, they will feel happier. Teachers who introduce games in the classroom would not have to worry about the students' learning achievement as gamified-learning improves the learning experience of students. Students are able to gain a better understanding of grammar concepts and the English language with the aid of gamified-learning (Hashim et al., 2019). With the aid of games, students' learning behaviour and their overall performance improved (Ghasemi et al., 2017; Homer et al., 2018). Additionally, students' performance in English language learning also improved as gamified-learning enhanced the vocabulary acquisition of learners because their interest is aroused and sustained throughout the learning sessions (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015; Hashim et al., 2019).

Students will also condone to active learning (Morschheuser et al., 2017), whereby they take the initiative to understand the concepts of the English language through games. This active learning is also due to the fact that games are engaging and motivating, which contribute to the willingness to learn by themselves in order to win the

game (Poondej & Lerdpornkulrat, 2016). Online language games such as Kahoot! is a good game to test students' knowledge in a particular area of grammar. It helps build a better way of understanding something complicated (Hashim et al., 2019). One of the ways to help learners increase their vocabulary is by using games, which is a good strategy in the classroom (Perveen, Asif, Mehmood, Khan, & Iqbal, 2016). Thus, learning grammar should be done in a fun way to motivate ESL learners in achieving better results.

Improves students' self-esteem

Apart from that, gamified-learning is also able to improve the students' self-esteem and confidence. Students who learn through games will be able to gain more confidence in learning the English language. This is because, learning through games means that students can take their time to complete the game. In games, students do not need to put their real name, which brings the meaning that their identity is anonymous. With this, the low self-esteem students can participate at ease and they will not be afraid to make mistakes (Ghasemi et al., 2017). Most students lack of confidence in learning the English language because they are embarrassed if they make mistakes in front of their peers. However, with games, students' identities are not known, so they will be more confident in learning the English language (Wichadee & Pattanapichet, 2018). Low self-esteem and lack of confidence are some of the factors which inhibit the success in learning the English language. Hence, gamified-learning is one the best solutions to curb these problems in learning ESL grammar.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall, this paper aimed at looking into the perceptions of ESL learners towards gamified-learning in learning grammar. The interesting and amusing features of games have implanted positive views on ESL learners towards gamified-learning. However, it is not only vital to look into fun learning, but also to ensure that learning does take place, which will improve the learners' grammar as a whole. This paper implied that the teaching and learning of grammar can be improved with the aid of games, which teachers can take the initiative to explore the various types of games suited to the classroom context. Integrating the gamification element into books and lessons will surely capture the students' attention. Future studies can look into the different types of games which are suitable for each skill in the English language. With proper preparation and guidance, ESL learners will benefit massively using online language games. It is hoped that with the developing era of technology and gadgets, ESL learners will learn better and more effective to cater to the demands of the 21st-century world.

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