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LINGOLAND: THE ACADEMIC QUEST

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ABSTRACT

This study introduces LingoLand: The Academic Quest, a board game that is designed to assist in the development of Academic English skills among undergraduate learners at a public university in Perak. The game incorporates key language domains such as grammar, vocabulary, speaking, writing, and cultural awareness within a gamified framework that initiates collaborative learning and active participation among the students. Players engage in meaningful language tasks that enhance fluency, accuracy, and critical thinking by passing through thematic zones and skill-targeted challenges. The flexible design accommodates physical play, making it adaptable to be played by students in class. Preliminary classroom implementation suggests that LingoLand effectively motivates learners and fosters peer interaction, providing a novel and scalable approach to academic language acquisition.

Keywords: board game, gamified framework, language acquisition

INTRODUCTION

Academic English proficiency is a critical component of success in higher education, particularly for undergraduate students who are preparing to participate in global academic discourse. It encompasses a broad range of language competencies, including the mastery of academic vocabulary, grammatical structures, speaking fluency, writing clarity, reading comprehension, and cultural literacy. These skills are essential not only for academic performance, such as engaging in class discussions, writing essays, and understanding scholarly texts, but also for future professional and research pursuits.

Despite its importance, the teaching and learning of Academic English often remain constrained by traditional pedagogical methods. Such approaches typically emphasize rote memorization, grammar exercises, and decontextualized tasks, which may lead to passive learning and limited student engagement. These methods often fail to address the integrative nature of language skills and do not adequately support learners in applying their knowledge to real-world academic contexts. Moreover, many students struggle with motivation and confidence when learning academic English, particularly in settings that lack interactivity and peer collaboration.

To address these challenges, recent research has highlighted the potential of gamification and collaborative learning as innovative strategies in language education. Gamification involves the

application of game design elements such as competition, rewards, and progress tracking—in non-game contexts to increase learner motivation and engagement. When paired with collaborative learning, which emphasizes teamwork, peer communication, and shared problem-solving, these methods can create a more dynamic and supportive learning environment. Together, they provide an opportunity to shift from passive to active learning, encouraging students to take ownership of their progress while practicing language in meaningful, contextualized ways.

In response to this pedagogical need, the present study introduces LingoLand: The Academic Quest, an original educational board game developed to support undergraduate students in acquiring and practicing Academic English. The game integrates key language domains like vocabulary, grammar, speaking, writing, and cultural awareness through a series of themed challenges and activities designed to promote critical thinking and authentic language use. Players navigate a quest-like journey in which they complete tasks collaboratively or competitively, simulating academic scenarios that require the application of multiple language skills.

Notably, LingoLand is available in both physical and digital formats, making it highly adaptable to a range of instructional settings, including face-to-face, hybrid, and online learning environments. Its modular design allows educators to tailor content to meet specific curricular goals and student proficiency levels, further enhancing its practicality and relevance.

This study investigates the effectiveness of LingoLand in improving Academic English proficiency through a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative measures assess gains in vocabulary knowledge, grammar accuracy, and speaking fluency, while qualitative data explore learners' motivation, engagement, and peer interaction. By examining both performance outcomes and student experiences, this research contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting gamified, collaborative learning as a viable and impactful method for Academic English instruction.

METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to evaluate the effectiveness of LingoLand: The Academic Quest in enhancing academic English proficiency among undergraduate students. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for a comprehensive analysis of language skill development, learner motivation, and engagement.

A convergent parallel design was used, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and analyzed independently before being integrated during interpretation. This approach enabled the triangulation of findings, enhancing the reliability and depth of the results.

The study involved 40 undergraduate students enrolled in an academic English course at a Malaysian public university. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they had similar academic backgrounds and language proficiency levels (intermediate to upper-intermediate). Students were divided into groups of 2 to 4 players and participated in weekly game sessions over a six-week period. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all students.

The primary instructional tool was LingoLand: The Academic Quest, a custom-designed educational board game available in both physical and digital formats. The game consisted of five thematic zones: Vocabulary Valley, Grammar Grove, Debate Desert, Essay Island, and Culture Cliffs. Each zone featured interactive tasks targeting specific academic English skills. Supplementary materials included printed instructions, digital access guides, and tracking sheets for task completion and scoring. The study was conducted over six consecutive weeks during the academic semester. At the beginning of the intervention, students completed pre-tests that assessed vocabulary knowledge, grammar accuracy, and speaking fluency. These assessments were designed based on course-aligned learning outcomes and rubrics approved by language lecturers.

Each week, students participated in one 90-minute gameplay session facilitated by the course instructor. Tasks within the game required students to collaborate on writing prompts, complete grammar puzzles, engage in academic discussions, and respond to culturally themed questions. Peer feedback and in-game rewards were incorporated to maintain motivation and accountability.

At the end of the intervention, students completed post-tests using the same instruments administered at the beginning of the study. In addition, students completed a survey questionnaire and participated in focus group interviews to gather qualitative insights into their motivation, engagement levels, and perceptions of the learning experience. Classroom observations were also conducted by the instructor using a standardized observation checklist to document interactions, language use, and collaborative behaviors.

Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analyzed using paired sample t-tests to determine statistically significant improvements in vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize survey results. Qualitative data from surveys, interviews, and observations were analyzed thematically using coding and content analysis. Recurring themes such as motivation, collaboration, enjoyment, and perceived learning gains were identified and interpreted in relation to the quantitative findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data collected to assess the effectiveness of LingoLand: The Academic Quest in improving undergraduate students' English proficiency.

Quantitative results demonstrated statistically significant improvement in students' vocabulary knowledge, with scores rising from $M = 62.5$ to $M = 75.8$ ($p < 0.05$). Grammar scores improved slightly but not significantly ($M = 68.2$ to $M = 71.4$; $p > 0.05$). Speaking fluency scores significantly improved from $M = 3.1$ to $M = 3.9$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating that the game was particularly effective in promoting oral language use.

Qualitative feedback revealed high levels of learner motivation, enjoyment, and collaboration. Students appreciated the fun, competitive nature of the game and highlighted the value of working with peers.

Many expressed that the game helped reduce their fear of speaking English and allowed them to use academic language in context. Observations confirmed these findings, showing active peer interaction, increased participation, and spontaneous use of target vocabulary and structures.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study support the use of LingoLand: The Academic Quest as an effective pedagogical tool for developing English skills among undergraduate learners. Statistically significant improvements in vocabulary and speaking fluency demonstrate the game's potential to engage students in meaningful language practice. While grammar accuracy showed only modest gains, the trend suggests that extended exposure and integration of game elements could yield stronger outcomes over time.

Qualitative results affirm that the game fosters motivation, active participation, and a supportive collaborative environment which are essential conditions for language acquisition. These findings align with research on the benefits of gamification and peer learning, which suggest that learners are more likely to succeed when they are engaged, emotionally invested, and socially supported.

Educators are encouraged to explore game-based methods as complementary tools in academic language instruction, particularly when teaching mixed-skill areas. Future studies could examine long-term effects, scalability across institutions, and the incorporation of digital feedback tools to enhance the learning experience further.

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