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## **Students' Opinion on a Language Game: A Preliminary Study on MonoEnglish**

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### **Abstract**

This study was conducted with the aim to investigate ESL students' opinion on the usefulness of the language game on ESL learning, in relation to affective domain, and their opinion on how the game can be improved. The game was designed by four ESL students and supervised by their lecturer within 3 weeks. It was then played by a class of ESL students (n=28) for four ESL lessons. A set of questionnaires was distributed to the students to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that the respondents agreed the game was useful on ESL learning. It aided to improve their English language skills (median = 4.00), helped them learn English while having fun (median = 4.50) and improved their knowledge about English language (median = 4.00). Respondents would recommend the game to other people (median = 4.50), and they wanted to play the game in their English class (median = 4.50). In relation to affective domain, the game motivated them to use English (median = 4.00) and they were excited to learn English when playing the game (median = 4.00) and became more confident to use English after playing the game (median = 4.00). The respondents also believed that the game needed improvement in its appearance (57.1%, n=16), content (42.9%, n=12) and rules (35.7%, n=10). Their comments revealed four themes which are compliments, suggestions to improve

the game, benefits, and others. Discussions of the results and future research recommendations are also included in this paper.

**Keywords:** *language games, game-based learning, gamification, ESL learners*

## **1. Introduction**

The use of language games in the process of teaching and learning has long been studied in the field of English as a second language. However, studies on language games that are created by students are scarce as compared to the studies on language games that are created by instructors and professionals (e.g. Wahyuni & Junior, 2018; Fung & Min, 2016; Ghazal & Singh, 2016; Cheng, Liao, & Chang; 2018). Playing games in the classroom will encourage students to learn better. This is because game-based learning (GBL) is a learner-centred approach whereby students are in control of their own learning. Therefore, an attempt has been made to guide four ESL students in creating a language game and a study has been conducted to investigate ESL students' opinion on the language game.

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To investigate ESL students' opinion on the usefulness of the language game on ESL learning
- ii. To investigate ESL students' opinion on the usefulness of the language game in relation to affective domain
- iii. To investigate ESL students' opinion on how the game can be improved.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Game-based Learning (GBL)**

Game-based learning (GBL) is one of the methods that teachers can apply in a teaching and learning process. The method emphasizes more on the activities that the students do during the process of learning which is 'playing' and 'learning.' It is important to note that the term 'games' are not limited to digital or video games only. The criteria that the games must fulfill are there must be a clear and defined learning outcome and some learning must take place. It should also be fun and enjoyable activities which use English as the instructional language and are conducted with some rules to reach a goal. The games could be presented in different ways to the class at the appropriate moment to create a positive atmosphere for learning without thinking about learning (Ahmad Zubaidi, 2015; Ghazal & Singh, 2016; Wahyuni & Junior, 2018). Teachers and students can design new games or create variations of old games to be used in the classroom. In developing the language board games, Stages of Designing Process proposed by Pesce in 2015 (as cited in Wahyuni & Junior, 2018) can be referred.

**Table 1: Stages of Designing Process**

<b>Stage 1</b>	<i>Looking at Examples</i>	Students play a number of games which are provided, created by someone else. In this stage, students try to comprehend how the games work as well as identify the strategies used in the games.
<b>Stage 2</b>	<i>Developing Ideas</i>	Students share ideas within groups, then make a detailed plan for the games they will create.
<b>Stage 3</b>	<i>Creating Game</i>	Each group of students produces a detailed design, makes it up and checks the finished version.
<b>Stage 4</b>	<i>Testing and Evaluating</i>	The groups of the students exchange games and test them. When they are returned, each group assess its own game.

## 2.2 A Zone of Proximal Development

A zone of proximal development can be utilized in GBL. It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers. Guidance will be given in the form of scaffolding. Scaffolding is a temporary instructional support that helps students to understand complex concepts. The instructional support is slowly withdrawn when students are familiar with the concept and they can solve the problems on their own (Vygotsky, 1978).

## 2.3 Motivation

Motivation is a biggest problem that an ESL instructor might face in the classroom. Keller's ARCS Motivational Model is introduced by Keller (2010) to describe students' motivation. There are four categories in the model namely Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. The students are demotivated due to not interested in the learning material or they are too intimidated by it. To solve this problem, GBL can be implemented in teaching and learning process. GBL promotes learner - centred pedagogy as it allows the students to be active participants. Games with difficult but achievable challenges and self-rewards can capture and engaged the students' attention. As a result, they will not be easily bored even though the activity is repetitive, and they will give their best when playing the games. They will be more motivated when they can immediately see the result of their actions; the progress that they have made in order to master a set of content or skill through continuous feedback (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Ghazal & Singh, 2016). Classroom instruction such as pair and group activities also influence the students' level of motivation according to a study conducted by Kurt and Kurt (2018). The study revealed activities such as games, songs and materials including info-gap, problem solving, matching, puzzle, card games, picture description activities as the most motivating instructional practices. The students feel enthusiastic and energetic when the activities were conducted in a competitive way.

## **2.4 Grammar and Vocabulary**

Grammar and vocabulary are imperative in learning English. To make the learning meaningful and help the students to retain the information longer, GBL should be applied. The students will enjoy, motivated and not feel stress but at the same time they can learn something. It helps them to learn new words and phrases that appear in the games and also recall existing vocabulary. They can also use the vocabulary and grammar learnt in appropriate situation (Huyen & Nga, 2003; Cam & Tran, 2017).

## **2.5 Speaking and Listening**

Using GBL can eliminate the students' anxiety to speak English and they will be confident to use the language. This is because students were more relaxed and excited to use and speak the language while playing games. The language learning in classroom will become less stressful and enjoyable. This can be seen from a study conducted by Fung and Min (2016) and Ahmad Zubaidi (2015) that the students are confident when delivering ideas. It increased their confidence level when they were able to perform in subsequent game rounds and in class activities. Positive learning among peers is also established as they are learning from each other in the classroom. They are motivated to speak after watching their friends' presentation. They were able to build a sense of control because when there is less pressure, they will learn something better. They will become confident and their performance will improve.

When the students are able to speak, they can also listen. This is because speaking and listening skills are related. Listening can be demotivating for students when it just involved drilling. Hence, interesting activities through GBL can made the learning of listening more enjoyable to students. Students can practice listening via listening texts, short video activities, and song activities. It is found that songs were the most motivating listening activities in classroom (Kurt & Kurt, 2018). Focusing and listening to their friends while playing also improves students' listening skill. Students need to focus and listen attentively to the questions that are being asked by their peers to be able to answer them correctly (Sasidharan & Tan, 2013).

## **2.6 Reading and Writing**

Reading is important for students to excel in schools. To improve and master reading skill, student can learn the skill via GBL. According to Aliza, Zahara and Rohaty (2011), students' reading skill has improved after they play games. It is observed that students were able to recognize letters, say the sound of the syllables, and form a word from printed materials and objects. They can also name the words as they spelled the words during the activities.

Apart from reading skill, writing skill is also crucial for students to learn. However, writing can be difficult to some. To make learning the skill easier, students can learn writing skill through GBL. Playing games proves that it can make the students to write better. A study conducted by Cheng, Liao, and Chang (2018) demonstrates that students not only improve reading but also in summary writing. There are changes of the students' summaries after they play the game in the study. The students improved their summaries in terms of the numbers of main ideas and words.

### **3. Methodology**

A group of four students were given 3 weeks to design and create their language game while supervised by their lecturer. The students decided to adapt the concept of the Monopoly game by Hasbro and set new rules and tasks that were more suitable for an English language game. The game was then played by a class of ESL students during four ESL lessons.

A questionnaire was distributed to the participants after the fourth lesson to investigate their opinion on the usefulness of the language game, MonoEnglish, and to find out suggestions for improvement. The questionnaire was divided into 3 main sections:

- i. The usefulness of the game on ESL learning (5 Likert-scale items + 1 checkbox items)
- ii. The usefulness of the game in relation to affective domain (3 Likert-scale items)
- iii. Suggestions to improve the game (1 checkbox item + 1 open-ended item).

The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 in order to answer the research questions and the findings were presented in the form of descriptive statistics. The Likert-scale items (8 items) were first checked with Shapiro-Wilk test of normality and Cronbach alpha was utilized to check their reliability. The open-ended item was analyzed using thematic analysis and the themes from it were presented with the verbatim comments.

#### **3.1 How to Play the Game**

The game has to be played according to these rules:

- i. MonoEnglish can be played by a maximum of 4 players and a minimum of 2 players.
- ii. Each player chooses one color to represent them.
- iii. Players take turn to roll the dice once.
- iv. If players get an even number, they will pick a card in the even number section. If players get an odd number, they will pick a card in the odd number section.
- v. Each player has to answer the question on the card in 1 minute. The question can fall under these 4 sections: vocabulary, speaking, riddle and grammar.
- vi. If the question requires the players to build sentences, the sentences have to include an exclamatory sentence, an interrogative sentence, and an imperative sentence.
- vii. If the players answer the question correctly, they will get the points as stated on the card.
- viii. The game ends after three rounds.
- ix. The player with the highest points wins the game.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented according to the research questions:

- i. To investigate ESL students' opinion on the usefulness of the language game on ESL learning
- ii. To investigate ESL students' opinion on the usefulness of the language game in relation to affective domain
- iii. To investigate ESL students' opinion on how the game can be improved.

**Table 2: Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality**

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
SKILLS	.312	28	.000	.775	28	.000
FUN	.312	28	.000	.757	28	.000
KNOWLEDGE	.326	28	.000	.755	28	.000
RECOMMEND	.316	28	.000	.745	28	.000
PLAY	.316	28	.000	.745	28	.000
MOTIVATE	.364	28	.000	.713	28	.000
EXCITED	.344	28	.000	.748	28	.000
CONFIDENT	.290	28	.000	.776	28	.000
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

From the table above, it can be seen that the Sig. value of each Likert-scale item for the Shapiro-Wilk statistic was .000, suggesting violation of the assumption of normality (Pallant, 2016). Therefore, the median of each item was used instead of mean to report the descriptive analysis.

#### 4.1 The Usefulness of the Game on ESL Learning

**Table 3: Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test**

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.863	.863	5

From the table above, it can be seen that all 5 Likert-scale items in this section had high reliability, with Cronbach alpha = 0.863.

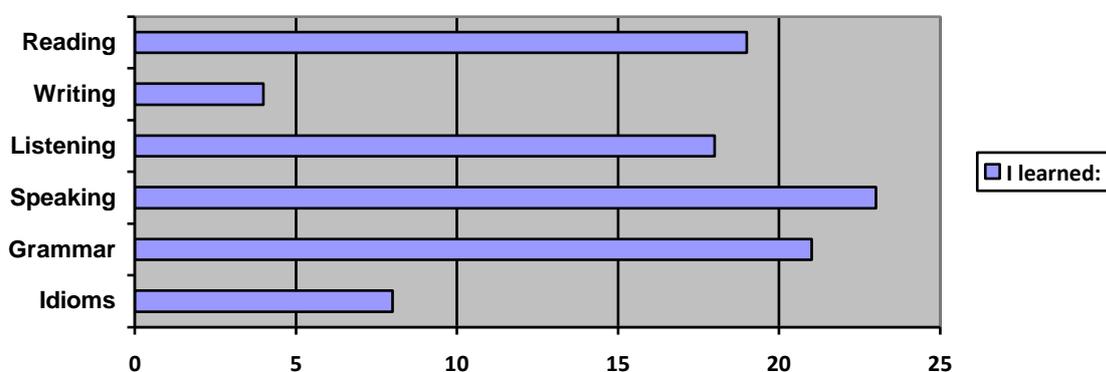
**Table 4: Frequencies on the Usefulness of the Game on ESL Learning**

		Statistics				
		SKILLS	FUN	KNOWLEDGE	RECOMMEND	PLAY
N	Valid	28	28	28	28	28
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Median		4.00	4.50	4.00	4.50	4.50
Std. Deviation		.630	.685	.600	.634	.634
Percentiles	25	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
	50	4.00	4.50	4.00	4.50	4.50
	75	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

From the table above, it is clear that all 5 Likert-scale items were rated positively by the respondents. The respondents agreed that the game helped improve their English language skills (median = 4.00), helped them learn English while having fun (median = 4.50), improved their knowledge about English language (median = 4.00), they would recommend the game to other people (median = 4.50), and they wanted to play the game in their English class (median = 4.50).

These findings were in tandem with the findings from the existing literature whereby students reported improvement in reading (e.g. Aliza, Zahara, & Rohaty, 2011; Cheng, Liao, & Chang, 2018), summary writing (Cheng, Liao, & Chang, 2018), and speaking confidence (Fung & Min, 2016) after playing the language games. The findings also supported the view that learners were more likely to learn and enjoy the learning process the most when they acted as active recipient of knowledge (Ghazal & Singh, 2016). It can also be understood from the findings that students found the game useful to the extent that they wanted to play it in their English class and recommended it to other people.

In order to understand the English language skills that they learned from the game, the respondents were asked to choose from a list and they were informed that they could choose more than 1 skill. The figure below reports the findings:



**Figure 1: English Language Skills Learned from The Game**

It was found that 82.1% of the respondents (n=23) chose speaking as the skill that they learned from the game followed by grammar (75%, n=21), reading (67.9%, n=19), listening (64.3%, n=18), idioms (28.6%, n=8), and writing (14.3%, n=4).

#### 4.2 The Usefulness of the Game in Relation to Affective Domain

**Table 5: Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test**

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.824	.845	3

The table above shows that the 3 Likert-scale items for this section had high reliability, with Cronbach alpha = 0.824.

**Table 6: Frequencies on the Usefulness of the Game in Relation to Affective Domain**

		Statistics		
		MOTIVATE	EXCITED	CONFIDENT
N	Valid	28	28	28
	Missing	0	0	0
Median		4.00	4.00	4.00
Std. Deviation		.548	.585	.763
Percentiles	25	4.00	4.00	4.00
	50	4.00	4.00	4.00
	75	5.00	5.00	5.00

From the table above, it can be reported that the respondents rated the 3 Likert-scale items in this section positively. The respondents agreed that the game motivated them to use English (median = 4.00), they were excited to learn English when they played the game (median = 4.00), and they became more confident to use English after playing the game (median = 4.00).

These findings were aligned with the findings reported in the previous research whereby students reported increased confidence level after playing the games (e.g. Fung & Min, 2016; Ahmad Zubaidi, 2015) and excitement in learning the lesson when it involved playing games (Kurt & Kurt, 2018). Furthermore, the games also helped students to be an active participant of their own learning process and thus, motivated them when they saw the results of their actions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Ghazal & Singh, 2016) in playing the games. The findings also support the previous study whereby games were listed as one of the motivating instructional practices (Kurt & Kurt, 2018) and when students felt good about their learning experience, they achieved satisfaction and felt motivated to learn (Keller, 2010).

### 4.3 Suggestions to Improve the Game

In this section, the respondents were asked to identify the elements that the game can improve on and provide their comments about the game.

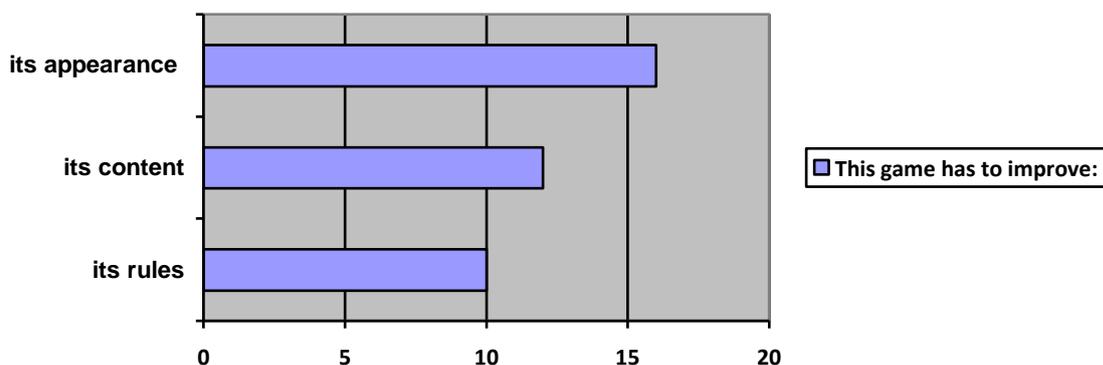


Figure 2: Suggestions to Improve the Game

The figure shows that more than half of the respondents (57.1%, n=16) believed that the game needed to improve its appearance. This is followed by its content (42.9%, n=12) and its rules (35.7%, n=10).

An open-ended question was asked to the respondents in order to gather their comments about the game. A thematic analysis was carried out and these themes emerged from the analysis:

Table 7: Comments about The Game

Themes	Comments
Compliments	"Good", "Superb" "Gooddddddd ☺" "gg" "Great game!" "This game is awesome XD" "so nice Imma buy dis game and spread it to the world"
Suggestions to improve the game	"can be improve with new design of board game" "needs more improvement" "More colourful" "They need to make the games more adveture." "Good but more improvemen" "Make it more interest and colourful" "Make it more intresting with the appearance." "Improve the rules so that the winner be found" "Improve the game to make it more fun." "The game is so far so good but they must Fix the appearance of their game"
Benefits	"Fun games." "Best game, help me to improve" "I like this game because i have fun while learning English" "Fun"

	“The game is quite interesting because it can improve our skills and learn more about English” “I think this game is fun to play because we can learn through this game and improve our skills in English”
Others	“An easy game but with a touch of English knowledge” “crackly more better” “Ouh ok guys”

The four themes that emerged from the analysis were compliments, suggestions to improve the game, benefits, and others. In the compliments, the respondents provided positive comments like “good” and one respondent wanted to buy the game and played it with other people. However, the game also received strong comments on the need to improve the game, especially on its appearance. Other than that, some respondents mentioned the benefits that they reaped by playing the game, such as having fun while learning English language. Three other comments that were not included in these three categories were listed as others.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings, it can be concluded that the game MonoEnglish has the potential to be implemented as an activity in an English language lesson. However, it must be highlighted that the study conducted was a case study and it was still in a preliminary level, therefore, the findings should not be generalized as the same study may reveal different results if conducted on a different sample. On a more positive note, nonetheless, the benefits reported by the students when they played the game should not be ignored as making English language lesson meaningful and fun can improve the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Thus, it is recommended that educators try to guide students in designing their own language game. Educators can discover the students’ interests when they attempt to create their own language game and also highlight the language skills that they mostly want to improve on. A similar study can be conducted and the results found may yield an interesting view to be compared with the findings in the current study. Future research can focus on a language game that highlights one of the main skills in English language, namely, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and a quasi-experimental study is suggested to find out the effects of the language game on test scores.

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