

TICKLE YOUR TENSES

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Abstract: Learning tenses is an uphill task for ESL (English as a Second Language) learners, especially children. One of the reasons is that grammatical structures in English are inherently different from those of the mother tongue. More often than not learners find it difficult to comprehend and apply the rules accurately for effective communication. Hence, they become frustrated and give up trying to learn the language. The main purpose of TYT is to address the said problems faced by these learners besides providing a fun, exciting and interactive environment to reinforce the rules of tenses learnt. Presently, English language games tend to focus on parts of speech and vocabulary learning but not many emphasise on tenses. TYT fills in the gap to reinforce the learning of tenses and its application in different everyday contexts. Children can learn with their peers while playing in an enjoyable setting which will promote better retention of their tenses knowledge. TYT is also useful for language educators as an alternative teaching tool to drill the rules of tenses which otherwise would be too monotonous and dry for students in the classroom

Keywords: language game, interactive environment, enjoyable setting, reinforcement, English tenses

1. Introduction

English is one of the tools for communication, but it is not easy for children to master it well. Unlike other languages, English uses tenses to express the time of action. This might be confusing for children especially those who are from different language background. Therefore, learning of tenses is not only responsible for English language learning but it is very important in establishing effective communication.

2. Problem Statement

Learning tenses is seen to be an uphill task especially for children due to the differences of grammatical structures between English and their mother tongue. On top of that, learning tenses is usually perceived as dull by most of the children. More often than not learners find it difficult to comprehend and apply the rules accurately for effective communication. Hence, they become frustrated and give up trying to learn the language.

3. Objective

The main purpose of TYT is to facilitate children's learning of tenses besides providing a fun, exciting and interactive environment to reinforce the rules of tenses learnt.

4. Novelty

Presently, English language games found online or available in the market tend to focus on parts of speech and vocabulary learning but not many emphasise on tenses. TYT fills in the gap to reinforce the learning of tenses and its application in different everyday contexts. Children can learn with their peers while playing in an enjoyable setting which will promote better retention of their knowledge of tenses in English grammar.

5. Usefulness

Apart from enhancing the learning and usage of tenses among the children, TYT also pro-motes interactive skills among their peers. To add, it is also useful for language educators as an alternative teaching tool to drill the rules of tenses which otherwise would be too monotonous and dry for students in the classroom. Unlike other conventional language games, TYT play cards enable players to use the tenses in a myriad of contexts. Thus, players are exposed to a wider range of the usage of tenses which would enhance their learning capabilities.

6. The Project: Tickle Your Tenses (TYT) Language Game

TYT is an English language proficiency-based game that is targeted towards elementary learners of English (Malaysian Primary 3 – 6), although users of any level can participate and enjoy the game as well. The language focus is on the basic tenses – present, past and future. The game set comprises a colourfully-designed board on which is a diamond-shaped trail of a colour-coded pathway where players will move their tokens. There are 3 sets of coloured task card stacked to one side of this shape and another 3 sets of card to the other side. The blue task cards correspond to the Past Tense; green cards correspond to the present Tense and the yellow cards correspond to the Future Tense. Bonus cards provide rewards if players do well and penalty cards “punish” them for incorrect responses. The life cards provide help to players who are in difficulty to complete a task given.

Figure 1 shows the playing board used in the game.

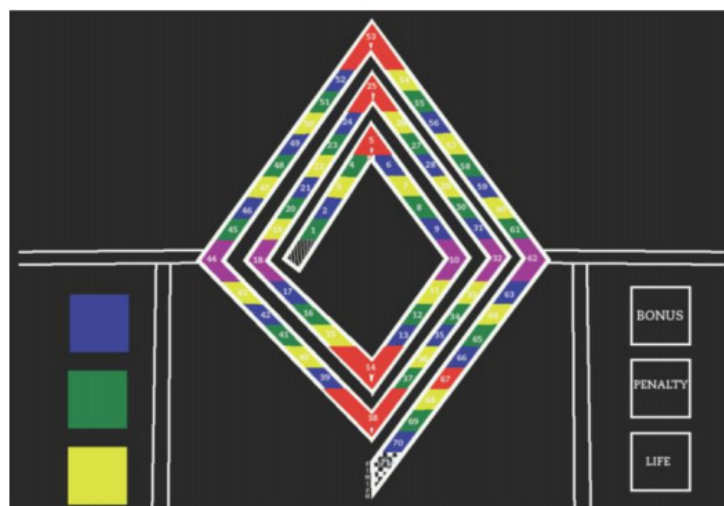


Figure 1: View of the playing board from above

Components of the game

- A playing board
- Tokens (player + “LIFE”)
- A dice
- A timer

Cards: A set each of blue, green and yellow Task cards (left-hand side);

Bonus Cards; Penalty Cards; Life Cards (right-hand side)

(An English-English only dictionary may be required but this is not included in the playing set – player’s/teacher’s own.)

How the game is to be played

Rules of the game

1. This game can be played by 2 - 4 players (preferably 4). The objective of the game is to complete language tasks along the journey – whoever finishes the journey first wins the game. The players will have a Facilitator (preferably a teacher or anyone with a higher English proficiency level) to monitor the game.
2. Each player may choose their own token to be moved on the board. In addition, each player is given 3 “Life” tokens.
3. Roll a dice to determine who will start the game (the person with highest number on the dice). Then the game begins in a clockwise direction.
4. The first player rolls the dice again to begin. The player moves the token along the path of the board according to the number shown on the dice.
5. When the player lands on any green, yellow or blue coloured square, the player draws a card from the corresponding stack of coloured cards (CC) that matches the colour on the square that they have landed.
6. Using this CC the player reads the task given and decides whether they can complete it immediately or if they need help to do it. Each player has 1 minute to complete the task.
7. If the player is able to solve the task successfully, the player needs to draw a card from “Bonus” stack to get the reward.
8. If the player cannot perform the said task they may use their life tokens in exchange for help or clues from the “Life” stack to try to complete the task. The player cannot move if they have not completed the task even after getting the help. If the player can perform the task after getting the help, then Rule 7 applies.
9. Along the path there are also Bonus and Penalty squares. If players land on the Bonus square, they draw a Bonus Card to get the reward. If players land on the Penalty square, they draw a Penalty Card and are penalized.
10. The game proceeds in this manner until one of the players reaches the last square on the path, and the game ends with a winner.
11. After all cards (CC, Bonus, Penalty and Life cards) have been played those cards must be returned to the bottom of the same stack of cards.

7. Commercialization Potential Or Impact Towards Socio Economy / Huminity

Since this tenses game package is able to assist better learning of tenses among the children, it can be a teaching aid for home teaching as well as in school. The game is designed for children below 12 but it can still be useful for youths who wish to strengthen their mastery of tenses, as well as other foreign language learners.

8. Conclusions

Tickle Your Tenses (TYT) has great potential for success in any pedagogical setting as it combines strong general learning principles with a clear focus on teaching and learning English Tenses. TYT is also useful for language educators as an alternative teaching tool to drill the rules of tenses which otherwise would be too monotonous and dry for students in the classroom. Learners will have the opportunity to reinforce what they have learned in their grammar lessons in a fun and challenging way. Other benefits to the learners include enhancing interaction and better communication skills among them while engaging in the game.