

‘PIC-N-SPELL’: PROMOTING THE APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH ACTIVE LEARNING

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Abstract: Every language educator knows that motivating language learners can be a very difficult task. It is more difficult if the learners are learning a second or third language. Learners are unmotivated because they are not interested in what is being taught in a classroom setting. Based on our experience in handling language programs in SK LKTP Krau (1), a rural school, we have found that the usage of English among the pupils is very minimal. The truth is, the main culprit is the approach being used to present the content. The main reason learners actively participate in their learning process is purely for enjoyment. When they enjoy the process, they participate and finally learn. Pic N Spell is a language game developed to enhance not only the spelling ability of the language learners but also their pronunciation of the words. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the game, pre-test and post-test were conducted, questionnaires were distributed to 35 pupils from year four, five and six. The researchers inspire to bring forth this language game based on their prior experiences interacting with rural school pupils. Pic N Spell is solely developed to spark interest and enjoyment in learning English. Based on the questionnaire it is proven that the pupils enjoyed themselves thoroughly. The data obtained proved that the game has made them learn better in a fun and competitive setting. Such findings indicate that language educators need to find unconventional methods in teaching English to ignite the interest and to minimize language learning anxiety.

Keywords: English spelling, Fun learning, Language, Language learners, Rural pupils

Introduction

Understanding the rules and patterns in spelling helps the student who doesn't intuitively pick them up and enables the teacher to clear up confusion instead of having to resort to "It's just how it's spelled." Others might acknowledge the value of learning to spell, but think that learning the rules and patterns is the stuff of drudgery. When students are practicing in ways that are effective, and getting appropriate feedback and experiencing success, practice is not drudgery. It may not be as fun as recess – but often it can be satisfying and even enjoyable, especially when technology is used creatively so that students can use their strengths with individualized lessons.

Studies show that children learn best in an orderly and engaging environment. Also, children respond to discipline in different ways as each child is different. The conducts of the teaching and learning process are still the same but the methods can vary depending on the creativity of the instructors (Mohamad, Salam, & Bakar, 2017).

This paper presents some satisfactory survey findings on a game-based activity designed as a fun learning method that has successfully broken down the students' emotional filter in learning, thus, encouraging even unmotivated ones to enjoy learning. If we do learn to spell a word, the mental representations of all the letters in that word are fully specified in memory, and recall is likely to be fluent and accurate. Pic N Spell has the same concept in keeping the word in memory and recall it in such a unique way, that is spelling a word based on its visual form. Recognition of words "by sight" is facilitated by knowing the details of sound – letter correspondence in the spelling system. Good spellers are also familiar with the patterns and constraints of English spelling and use that knowledge to help them remember specific letters in specific words (Rebecca Treiman, 2013).

Realizing the situations present in the way English is being taught in our classrooms, especially in rural schools, it is thus not only our duty, but our full responsibility, to take it upon ourselves to provide the best possible solutions by making learning of English fun and abolish the perception in the students that 'learning English is boring.'

There are tons of awesome ways to learn a foreign language using media such as watching movies, listening to music or even reading foreign magazines. However, most people can agree that playing games is definitely by far one of the best ways to learn a new language.

Learning through games is a solid method because not only are they usually appropriate for (and enjoyed by) learners of all ages, but many are also wonderful for get-togethers with friends and family. This can lead to multiple people learning foreign words and phrases all at the same time without using those boring books and mind-numbing tests that typical classes come with.

Needless to say, we cannot, and must not, deny the students the opportunity to quickly learn and grasp the fundamentals of proficiency in English and, more importantly, to master the language to be able for them not only to effectively communicate with others but also in the pursuit of knowledge. It is therefore our task to do whatever needs to be done to build a new generation of excellent English-speaking students which ultimately results in building the highest quality human capital resource that is so essentially vital to the economic growth of our country.

Among the objectives of this paper are:

- to create a fun learning environment in mastering spelling
- to practice fun and easy language learning which can be played anywhere and anytime
- to assist teachers and language practitioners to teach English using language board game
- to improve pupils' performance at rural schools
- to attract interest among rural school pupils in learning English language

Review of Literature

Acquiring languages is a great task (Jenny, Ann & John, 2001). It can be a bigger deal once an individual is being forced to learn language. Mastering the native language or mother tongue is supposed to be easier; an instinct (Raymond, 2018) compared to mastering a second, third or foreign language. This is because language is needed as a part of communication and the younger the learner, the easier for him or her to acquire the language (Jenny, Ann & John, 2001).

Learning how to spell words is one of the most useful lifelong skills and it builds the basic foundation that all children will need throughout their education and life in general. Learning how to spell is very important for other basic skills, including writing and reading. These skills support children in achieving good results and progressing through various grades. What is more, being good at spelling may have an impact on the future careers of students.

In Malaysia, all students are required to master the Malay and English language. Malay language as it is the formal language of Malaysia, and English as it is the second language. Students had a hard time in mastering English language, especially those who were not exposed to English language since they were young children (Raymond, 2018). In addition to that, they did not see the importance of having another language to master other than the language that they were going to use in their daily life (English Central, 2015).

Based on the Malaysian scenario, an individual is usually exposed to English since Standard one (7 years old) until Form 5 (17 years old), which would sum up to 11 years of learning English. Not all students are able to converse comfortably in English even though they have learnt it for more than a decade. Hence, there is a need to change the method of teaching and learning to improve English language acquisition (Gozde & Arda, 2017).

Learning through games and practical activities will lead us to a better result as it demonstrates the use of language (Flores, 2015; Perry, 2015) more effectively and actively. Most of the language learners prefer this method compared to the old teaching and learning method as it can give more impact towards language acquisition.

Furthermore, there are many activities that can distract students' attention from learning the essential skills. In order to attract the students' attention, the process of learning English language needs to be done using fun learning methods (Dominguez et al, 2013). Interactive games that involve electronic devices have been massively produced by thousands of programmers. Another way is by playing board games. Board games are a very convenient, compact and affordable way to learn language. This is because, it does not require you to be connected to the internet or electricity.

This method of teaching and learning is highly supported by The Higher Education Ministry as they are looking forward to implementing a flexible learning system for higher education institutions (Yasmin, 2016).

Methodology

Game Materials

To play Pic N Spell, there should be:

- a minimum number of 2 groups; a maximum of 4
- One (1) gameboard
- One (1) dice
- Five (5) group markers
- Picture cards
- One (1) white/black board
- One (1) user manual on how to play



Fig. 1 Pic N Spell Game Materials

Game Description

- Each group will place its group marker on START.
- A member of each group takes turn to roll the dice to decide the turn of the groups. The group with the highest number on the dice goes first and so on and so forth.
- The first player of Group 1 will draw a picture card and is given 15 seconds to spell the word of the drawn card on the white/black board.
- All group members will have to pronounce the spelt word.
- The player will get to roll the dice if
- the word is correctly spelt and
- the word is correctly pronounced
- If the answer is incorrect in any of the conditions stated above, the player of the group will not be able to roll a dice.

- The winner of the game is the first group that lands on the FINISH square of the board. The winner will only win by rolling the dice and getting the exact number needed to land on the FINISH square. If the player gets a number that exceeds the number of the square needed, it will bounce off the last square and the group marker has to move backwards.

Game Application

- **Performance**
Players will participate in Pic N Spell to sharpen their spelling ability and pronunciation.
- **Conditions**
Players will be judged on their ability to spell and pronounce the words correctly.
- **Standards**
Players will be judged on their performance based on their correct spelling and pronunciation.
- **Repetitions**
Learning opportunity through picture cards; spelling and pronunciation.

Methods

In order to analyse the feedbacks of the effectiveness and pupils' acceptance of Pic N Spell, questionnaires were distributed after the game. 35 pupils/players who participated in the game responded to the questionnaires. In this study, the respondents' feedbacks were used for the data analysis. Respondents were only given two options; Yes or No. Based on their responses, the researchers are able to identify the pupils' reception towards this game-based learning experience. Further discussions on the findings will be discussed in the result section of this paper.

Results and Findings

In order to measure the effectiveness of Pic N Spell, a simple satisfactory survey was designed after taking into account the respondents' background which is the students' level of English proficiency. Thus, the questionnaire was designed in dual languages in order to enhance the students' understanding of the questions. Thus, five simple statements were made so that the respondents can understand this self-designed questionnaire well. This questionnaire was distributed to 35 respondents who were male and female students from Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6, aged 10, 11 and 12 years respectively. The following table shows the completed results from the questionnaire.

Table 1 Respondents' background information

Respondents	N:35	100%
Gender		
Male	20	57.1
Female	15	42.9
Age		
10	10	31.4
11	12	34.3
12	12	34.3
Year		
4	10	31.4
5	12	34.3
6	12	34.3

From the table, it can be seen that 20 respondents or 57.1% of them were male while 42.9% or 15 respondents were female. Next, 10 respondents (31.4%) were 10 years old. For the 11- and 12-year-old

groups, the number involved were 12 respondents each (34.3%). As for the Year 4, 5 and 6, 10 respondents (31.4%) belong to Standard 4 while for Year 5 and Year 6, it was 34.3% each.

In this questionnaire, the respondents were given five simple and understandable statements. This is because the researchers believed that the simple statements can help the respondents understand better. This is proven by Mathers, Fox & Hunn (2009) where it is believed that the questions or the words used in the questionnaire should be simple and can be understood by the respondents easily. For this questionnaire, the respondents had to tick between *Yes* and *No* as shown in the table below.

Table 2 Respondents' Feedback on Pic N Spell

NO	STATEMENTS	N (35)= 100%			
		YES / YA (N)	%	NO/TIDAK (N)	%
1	Pic N Spell is fun <i>Pic N Spell menyeronokkan</i>	35	100	-	-
2	I enjoyed playing Pic N Spell <i>Saya seronok bermain Pic N Spell</i>	35	100	-	-
3	I learned something from Pic N Spell <i>Saya mempelajari sesuatu dari permainan Pic N Spell</i>	35	100	-	-
4	I agree Pic N Spell should be used for my English lessons <i>Saya setuju Pic N Spell digunakan untuk mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris</i>	35	100	-	-
5	I would recommend Pic N Spell to other pupils <i>Saya akan mencadangkan Pic N Spell kepada pelajar yang lain</i>	35	100	-	-

It can be seen that all of the respondents have given a very positive feedback about Pic N Spell. This shows Pic N Spell does give a positive impact to them.

For the first statement, the respondents were asked about their opinions regarding the game Pic N Spell, whether they think the game is fun or not. Surprisingly, all of the respondents or 100% of them believed that this language board game was fun. This might be influenced by the nature of this game where it combines picture, pronunciation and spelling and not to forget teamwork, to play this game. The mixture of these elements makes Pic N Spell a fun and complete language board game and it is definitely worth playing. At the same time, this can help the students to experience second language learning in a more fun and interesting way. As a result, by using Pic N Spell this could maximize the students' potential and at the same time will give positive result on their language learning. This is proven by Siguroardottir (2010) who believe using games in language classroom can spark the students' interest in language learning and it will lead to the success of language learning. To sum up, Pic N Spell is a fun language board game.

The next statement is about the students' enjoyment in playing the game, Pic N Spell. 100% of the respondents agreed that they enjoyed playing Pic N Spell. This is due to the fun learning concept which has been injected when the researchers came up with the idea of this language board game. It is believed that enjoyment can contribute to motivation to learn English which results in many positive impacts. This is supported by Ersoz (2000) who claimed that games can motivate the students as the games are interesting to play with. One of the impacts is the students will feel comfortable using the language which in this situation is English. When the students are comfortable and motivated, they will voluntarily involve themselves in the language learning process. In addition, according to Gardner (2006), playing games can maximize the students' relationship with each other and this will help to

establish good relationship, simultaneously creating a positive environment in the class. When the environment in the class is friendly, this will make the students happy and less stressful to learn English. Thus, with Pic N Spell, it is believed this language board game can bring enjoyment to the students to learn English while playing it.

Another statement which had been posed was “I learned something from Pic N Spell” and 35 of the respondents said Yes. To play the game, the students will have to know their vocabulary because they will have to pronounce the required word to their friends who will spell the word on the whiteboard. Even though the students may not get the word, the answer will be given so that they can know the correct vocabulary associated with the picture. Thus, this can enhance their vocabulary after playing this game. In fact, Pic N Spell is a language board game where the students can have fun while learning new vocabulary. Therefore, the students will have the opportunity to practice using English in a less stressful situation (Uberman, 1998). Having a wide range of vocabulary is really important as this can help the students in making sentences or when having conversations. As a result, the students can enhance their English proficiency by playing the language board game. This is proven by Rahmawati (2012) in her study where she used language board game in order to help her students in learning English especially in speaking and as a result her students showed improvement in speaking in English among themselves. In addition, Lia (2015) found that her students faced difficulties in learning English in terms of pronunciation. Thus, she used a language board game which helped her students tremendously at pronunciation. As a result, her students had improved a lot in English learning. Therefore, this can be said that Pic N Spell provides opportunity for the students to learn things from playing it.

“I agree Pic N Spell should be used for my English lessons” is the next statement which was posed to the respondents. All of the 35 respondents agreed Pic N Spell is an interesting language board game which should be used in their English lessons as this language board game brings them enjoyment. They can have so much fun guessing and pronouncing the words. In fact, when the students play Pic N Spell together, it simultaneously can instill the spirit of teamwork among them. According to Derakhshan & Khatir (2015), playing games can encourage students’ interaction, thus, they can improve their communicative skills with each other. Therefore, it cannot be denied that by playing Pic N Spell, which is played in groups, it offers great benefit in terms of encouraging the students to work together to solve the task in this game. This is very important especially when it involves students who are not proficient in English. Some of them might have some anxiety in learning English and this will hinder these students from participating in English activities in their language class. As a result, they could not improve themselves. Thus, creating a friendly and comfortable environment is really essential as it can be seen that using language games is important as a tool to engage the students in class and to trigger the students to try their best to speak in English even though they may have low proficiency in English (Yong & Yeo, 2016). On the other hand, since the respondents are young kids from the age of 10 to 12 years old, thus, it can be said that they do like Pic N Spell because this language board game is interesting to be played. According to Ying and Jang (2000) most of the young kids love playing with games. Thus, it can be seen that the students like Pic N Spell and agree to use it for their English lessons.

The last statement in this questionnaire is “I would recommend Pic N Spell to other pupils” and 100% of the respondents said Yes. This shows that Pic N Spell is a language board game that is worth to play and it can guarantee the students’ interest as it is a fun language game which can help the students to improve their English proficiency. It is really essential for the teachers to listen to the students’ preference as this can affect their motivation to learn especially in language learning. It is proven by Steve Sugar (1998) who believed the teaching days have changed where the students become inactive and less responsive. Thus, there is a need to change the way of teaching and learning English in order to improve English language learning as has been said by Gozde & Arda (2017). Therefore, playing games can make the students become more active and responsive. This is in line with the researches that were done by Flores (2015) and Perry (2015) who claimed better result can be yielded through games as playing games demonstrates maximum usage of English to the players. As a result, the teachers could provide an interesting way of English learning to the students and improve their students’ English language proficiency. This is important because the students can experience better language learning and at the same time become more proficient English users. Thus, it can be seen that the students like Pic N Spell very much and they want to recommend Pic N Spell to other friends.

Based on the positive feedbacks that have been given by the respondents, it can be said that Pic N Spell is a language board game that offers many great things to the teachers and most importantly to the language learners.

Conclusion

The reasoning behind fun learning is that learning is not about gaining knowledge through reading books or listening to lectures. Fun learning is about doing something differently in a fun way. From the outcome and the analysis above, it can be concluded that Pic N Spell has benefited the pupils in a fun way. All the respondents agreed that a language game like Pic N Spell can multiply their motivation towards learning English. Gardner (as cited in Welesly, 2010, p. 297) stated that "motivated individual will enjoy the task of learning and will claim that learning is fun, challenging and enjoyable even though sometimes the enthusiasm may vary". Chaves and Poirier (2007) mentioned that "an underlying premise of active learning is that internally motivated students learn more by taking ownership of the learning process". The depth and breadth of learning is greatest when students understand that learning can be fun and exciting. Most outstanding of all is that Pic N Spell has brought out the value of sharing doubts, successes and mistakes among the pupils. Alternately, Pic N Spell is more than an attempt to teach English to the pupils. It is an attempt to make them realise that learning English should not be terrifying at all.

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