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Conference e-Proceedings
International Conference of Research on Language Education 2023
e-ISBN: 978-967-2072-43-0

"Embracing Change: Emancipating the Landscape of Research in Linguistics, Language and Literature"

13-14 March 2023
Noble Resort Hotel, Melaka
Physical and Online Conference

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BOARD GAMES TO PROMOTE STUDENT ATTENTION AND ENJOYMENT IN ENGLISH SUBJECT

Umairah Binti Zulkefli[1], *Amirah Mohd Juned[2]

[1,2]Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara

[1]mayyah.u2002@gmail.com

[2]amirahjuned@uitm.edu.my
*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT:

This project aims to observe the effectiveness of creating an educational board game and the presence of fun environment in improving children's English skills in relation to the following criteria: spelling, vocabulary, and creating sentences. It covers the absence of an educational and fun source for children during their English learning session. The subjects were the teachers, parents, or guardians of children aged five to nine, and 21 students with 1 teacher from a kindergarten. The results and discussion demonstrate that the subjects leaned towards the idea of creating a fun way to enhance children's English skills, and conclude that it helps the students to understand better and make them be interested in learning. Further discussion reveals that children felt motivated to learn and were able to improve their English skills by playing the educational board game. It was evident that children learn better when an educational board game is applied during a learning session, as it creates a fun environment for them. Hence, this project can be used as one of the learning materials for teachers, parents or guardians in order to improve children's English skills through fun learning.

Keywords: Vocabulary, Spelling, Educational Game, Fun Environment

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language can enhance our life by giving advantages in various aspects, such as increased job opportunities and confidence. Most importantly, it widens the circle of people we can communicate with. Nowadays, parents encourage their children to be exposed to a second language at an early stage, especially in the English language. Parents appear to acknowledge that acquiring a foreign language takes time and can thus only result in proficiency if learning begins at a young age (Djiwandono, 2005). Besides teaching their children the basics of English at home, they also rely on teachers to guide them. Teachers use textbooks as the main source for students to learn new things in school. However, they need more spark to create a fun environment for the children to take in the knowledge they obtain; hence, making it hard for the children to stay motivated and focused during class if the learning session is not enjoyable. Therefore, games can be a great source of learning for children. Jiang (2008) conducted a study of 360 primary school students' behaviour when applying games to study English and concluded that they prefer to be engaged in a game-based learning environment, which is extremely successful at increasing enthusiasm and motivation in learning English. Besides that, according to Stoimcheva-Kolarska (2020), applying games in the

learning system boosts the process of understanding information by stimulating the child's cognitive processes and promoting play activities. Hence, creating an educational game for children would be ideal for teachers, parents, or guardians to encourage their students and child to learn things through play.

This type of game can also assist children in recalling their vocabulary since not all individuals communicate in English with a child, especially if their parents' first language is not English. Playing games to practice vocabulary improves learners' capacity to remember the terms successfully (Al Neyadi, 2007). Additionally, if a roleplaying question is present in a game, it can help children learn to use it in everyday scenarios. As inferred by Angelova and Lekova (1995), playing games and activities assist kids in retaining second language vocabulary and enable them to applyi t spontaneously. Eventually, they will begin utilizing it around their peers or even with their parents, and they can become fluent in English gradually.

This project is an educational board game consisting of questions related to spelling, vocabulary in English and Malay, and creating simple sentences. This game aims to improve children's English skills in a fun environment. The target community is teachers and parents or guardians of children between the age of five to nine years old. In addition, the target community can utilise the board game anytime and anywhere. However, it is recommended that teachers use it to improve their students' English skills by applying the learned syllabus to the board game whenever they are exposed to a set of new words from their English class. For example, a teacher can have one game session every two or three weeks to recall what the students have learned in the past few classes. This method can help them to improve their memorisation of the new vocabulary and understand their usage better. Based on the description and analysis of the past studies above, the problem statement that leads to this project is due to the need for a fun environment or tools to educate children on their ability to use English. Therefore, this paper focuses on exploring the effectiveness of using an educational board game to improve children's basic English skills in a fun environment.

1.1 Project Objective / Purpose

- **Purpose**

  1. To attract children to learn spelling and vocabulary to improve their English skills in an interesting way.

  2. Provide a creative and fun method for teachers, parents, or guardians to teach children English.

- **Objective**

  1. To develop an educational board game for children within 14 weeks.

  2. To apply three language elements in the board game: spelling, vocabulary in both English and Malay, and creating sentences.

1.2 Entrepreneurial Opportunities

The educational board game can help create an income by selling it to the target community. It is possible to create an advertisement in the form of a flyer, poster, or website and spread the word to kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers, and parents or guardians. The

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board game can also be promoted through social media because social media advertising enables us to target certain consumers and establish an audience. The target community can be persuaded by providing detailed information about the benefits of purchasing the educational board game and how it can help their students and children to improve their English enjoyably. A kindergarten was chosen to try out the game during the final production of the board game. One of the teachers was interested and enquired about the selling price of the product. This shows that this product has an entrepreneurial opportunity and is potential to produce a profit. It is crucial to research whether this board game can be a part of a business since it helps to fulfil the consumers' wishes for a certain product. By receiving feedback from consumers, it can help an entrepreneur to attend to any improvement and create a better product in the future.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sample

Teachers, parents and guardians were selected as the samples of the project to represent the population from the whole target community to generalise the findings or data collected for this project. Two Google Forms were made. The first Google Form, the 'Before Survey', was created to collect data on the target community's opinion about creating a fun environment for children to learn and what type of questions they prefer to have in an educational game. Meanwhile, the other form, the 'After Survey', was dedicated to the target community who could test out the board game after the prototype was produced. There were 65 respondents for the 'Before Survey' and 1 for the 'After Survey'. A kindergarten named Tadika Muttaqin Pintar in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, was chosen to try the educational board game. One teacher, alongside 10 5-year-old students and 11 6-year-old students, was present during the day of testing the board game.

2.2 Process To Create The Educational Board Game

Figure 1. Flowchart

Figure 1 shows the detailed and complete schedule of making an educational board game. The production begins with designing the tiles of the board game. The tiles are based on different species of animals: reptiles, mammals, sea creatures, and animals in the sky. These concepts are chosen because most children are fond of animals, and this is one of the best ways to create an interest in learning for them since the colourful illustrations can attract their attention. Before creating the questions, the Google Form for the 'Before Survey' was distributed via WhatsApp and analysed to identify what type of questions for children are preferred by the target community. Additionally, an English textbook, 'Super Mind', was used for research involving the students' syllabus. This research was conducted to ensure that the

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questions match and are suitable for the target age group. There are six questions for the vocabulary section, eight for the spelling section, multiple themed translation questions on the animal tiles, and one create-a-sentence question. These questions are flexible, and the target community can fill in the desired components to complete the questions since it is determined by the syllabus or English skills of these age groups. These questions are created in this form because it allows the target community to keep reusing the educational board game multiple times, and the answers are boundless.

Some examples of answers are given for the teacher, parent, or guardian to refer to, and it is organised according to the colour that corresponds to the questions. For instance, the 'Act It Out!' question is labelled in black; therefore, the example card for this question is labelled in black too. Besides that, to make the learning session more interesting, several fun facts are added between the sets of vocabulary and spelling questions. These fun facts were taken from reliable sources and were paraphrased before being printed out, and it mostly consists of facts about the English language and animals. Next, the designs for the game tokens, paw prints' collection cards, and adoption certificates were also made in week four. The game tokens were shaped into eight different animals. The purpose of the paw prints collection cards is for the players to record the number of paw prints they earned to be rewarded with an adoption certificate for their chosen animals. One of the rules to be declared a winner is to collect as many paw prints as possible, which can motivate the players to answer the questions correctly.

Finally, the two final components of the board game were made. The food packs act as a game currency, and every food pack has the same amount. For example, one pack is equivalent to one game currency or dollar. Besides collecting paw prints, players can also be considered winners if they accumulate the most food packs. If a player answers a question wrongly, they have to pay for one food pack; hence, players must work hard to get as many correct answers as possible to avoid losing their food packs. The four final tiles are located at the four corners of the board game, and one of them contains a question that involves creating a simple sentence. The board game revolves around vocabulary and spelling; hence, it is a great opportunity for the players to use what they have learned in class or during the game session and attempt to create a sentence.

Figure 2. The Prototype

Before printing out the designs, the designs were shared to an Art and Design student to ask for their opinion regarding the colours, fonts, and much more. Next, a survey was conducted online by searching for the most suitable materials with high quality to be used to produce the board game, and as a result, the game board was printed at a printing shop and card stocks were used as the cards' material. The materials and other components were purchased from the printing shop and Shopee. The figure above is the outcome of the prototype.

The board game needs to be tested by its target community to observe its effectiveness and to identify a way to improve it. Therefore, a kindergarten in Seremban, Tadika Muttaqin

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Pintar, was selected to test the prototype. Initially, one of the teachers was reached out via a phone call. After sending a formal letter along with a brief introduction of the project, an agreement was made, which led to a detailed discussion on WhatsApp. The teacher was given three documents for reference: a tentative, list of questions in the board game, and the game's instructions. These documents will help the teacher to understand how the programme will be handled on that day.

2.3   The Flow of Testing The Game

The programme began with an ice-breaking session followed by a short gameplay demonstration of the board game. The kindergarten students were divided into seven groups, each of which took turns rolling the dice. The game began, and it lasted for one and a half hours. At the end of the programme, the teacher recalled the vocabulary they used throughout the game session, and the Google Form for the 'After Survey' was given to the teacher. After reviewing the programme at the kindergarten, a lacking component in the board game was identified. The paw prints collection card was not labelled with its designated animals, which made it hard to identify which animal had been adopted. Therefore, an animal tag was added to every card with all 16 different animals written on it.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1   Results for the 'Before Survey'

The 'Before Survey' was created to gather data from the target community in order to analyse their view about having a fun environment for children to improve their English skills.
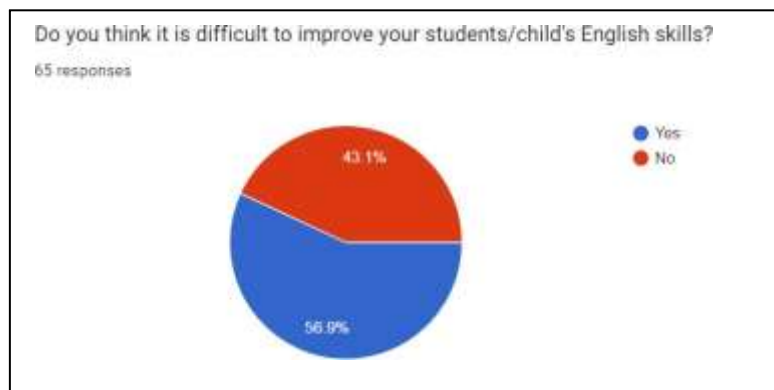
Figure 3. Question 1 of the 'Before Survey'

Based on figure 3, 56.9% of respondents agreed that improving students' and children's English skills is difficult, while 43.1% of respondents think the opposite.
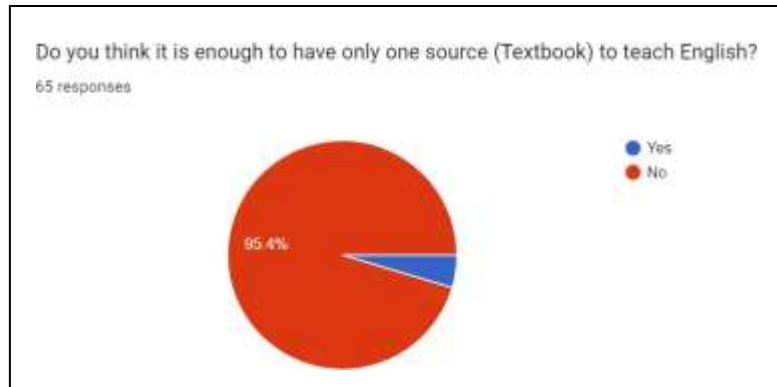
Figure 4. Question 2 of the 'Before Survey'

Next, most respondents agreed that there should be more sources to teach English besides a textbook.

Figure 5. Question 3 of the 'Before Survey'

Besides that, figure 5 shows that many respondents think having a fun environment for students and children to sharpen their English skills is crucial. This question is followed by a section whereby respondents can share their reasons for agreeing to it. After analysing the answers given, most of the respondents feel that creating an enjoyable environment is important because it acts as a source of motivation for them, makes the learning session easier to understand, and will be fun and sparks interest for students and children.

Figure 6. Example Questions for the Board Game

A list of questions that focuses on spelling and vocabulary skills was given in the form, and the respondents can vote for the question or questions that they think suit the children's age group.

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3.2 Results for the 'After Survey'

The 'After Survey' aims to collect data from the target community who tested the educational board game. Only 1 kindergarten could test it due to time constraints, and 1 teacher represented all of her 21 students to answer this Google Form.

Question	Percentage of 'Yes'	Percentage of 'No'
Is the board game suitable to be used to improve your students/child's English skills?	100%	0%
Did the questions in the board game matched with your students/child's age group?	100%	0%
Do you think the board game can help to motivate your students/child to learn English?	100%	0%

Question	Rating (1 out of 5)
Did your students/child enjoyed playing the board game?	5 - It's very enjoyable
How did you find the difficulty of the board game?	4 - It's comprehensible

Table 1. Table For The Questions In The 'After Survey' Google Form

Based on table 1, the respondent gave positive answers regarding the educational board game. She agreed that the questions are suitable for the children and can help improve their English skills. Additionally, she also agreed that the board game could be a tool to motivate the children to learn English. Additionally, she thought that the students enjoyed playing the educational board game, and the questions were easy to understand.

3.3 Discussion Based on Both Surveys

These surveys were distributed to the target community in Malaysia. Malay is our first language, and English is one of our main languages besides Tamil and Chinese. English is widely used among Malaysians, especially in the business field, and every primary and secondary student must take English as one of their subjects; hence, this shows the importance of being fluent in English. It can be challenging to sharpen children's English skills since they mostly apply it only in class, and some parents prefer to speak to them using mainly Malay or the other main languages. Teachers often use textbooks as a primary tool to teach their students, whilst parents rely on flashcards to introduce basic vocabulary to their children at an early age. It is undoubtedly that these sources are not enough to improve children's English skills. Most respondents agreed with the idea of creating a fun way to sharpen children's English skills. Below are some of the reasons shared by the respondents:

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- Kids learn through fun, active activities and visualisation method, and kids adapt or learn faster if it is done in a creative way, especially one which involves language.
- When teachers use activities that make learning engaging and fun, students are more willing to participate and take risks. Having fun while learning also helps students retain information better because the process is enjoyable and memorable.
- It starts with a simple skill, game, etc., to make it a habit or to speak English every day, especially from what they like most.

The target community should ensure that children are willing to learn new things, and they need to enjoy the process for them to grasp the knowledge easily. Most children are attracted to games or fun things; therefore, learning through playing will benefit them in obtaining new information and building their skills. Additionally, learning to recall vocabulary and spelling through games can help children to easily memorise the terms as children are focused and active when having fun. Playing a language game can encourage them to use the vocabulary they have learned.

Figure 7. Pictures of the Programme Conducted at Tadika Muttaqin Pintar

This analysed information can be supported by comparing it with the 'After Survey' collected from a kindergarten teacher. It is evident that the educational board game is indeed effective and meets its purpose. The children at the kindergarten were able to answer most of the questions from the board game with the help of their group members. They enjoyed the game, and they were eager to become the winner; hence, they were motivated to answer correctly. This shows that the questions used in the board game are suitable for the children's age group, and the teacher managed to adapt the question to her students' syllabus. This also indicates that the board game offers comprehensible material for the children. When a group answered correctly, the other groups could absorb the information and gain new understanding. The teacher asked the children a few feedback questions regarding the board game, and the children responded positively. Besides that, they could successfully recall the words they had learned in class by playing the board game.

4. CONCLUSION

Upon analysing the results, it is clear that employing a fun environment to improve English skills among children aged five to nine is evident. The educational board game is created with the goal of creating an opportunity for children to learn and enhance their English skills by playing a game. Teachers, parents, or guardians must find a creative way to motivate their

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students and children to love learning English for them to be familiar with the vocabulary and spellings so that they can apply it in their daily life. Additionally, it is a must to ensure the questions can be asked multiple times by the target community to the students and children, as their syllabus and English knowledge will increase as time passes; hence, they will encounter and need to adapt to many new words too. Researching what attracts children, such as using variations of colours, implying things they love, and much more, is also crucial because that is the essence of making children to be more focused when playing the game.

Despite that, several limitations occurred while creating this educational board game. Brainstorming questions to apply to the game was challenging because consumers seek a product that can be used multiple times. Besides that, designing the board game was difficult too due to the lack of experience in designing products, and it was hard to choose the best colours that suits the theme of the board game. Thus, asking for opinions from someone who is much more knowledgeable in art and design was the right choice to ensure that the produced design was suitable for the board game before printing it out.

This educational board game can give numerous benefits in the future for the target community, which are the teachers, parents, or guardians of children from the age of five to nine years old. This product can motivate children to learn more English and assist them in sharpening their skills, such as conversing in English, memorising, and understanding the vocabulary they learned. Moreover, some teachers may prefer to have pairs or groups of players to play the game, and they can work together to solve the questions. As a result, it creates a sense of teamwork between them, and they work together to become the winner. Additionally, this product can form a fun learning session for the children, and they would not feel pressured when it comes to learning English. It can also create an opportunity for the parents or guardians to bond with their children by doing both learning and playing simultaneously. Children who are fluent in English will have a wider path ahead in the future as it opens more opportunities for them to communicate with people worldwide and apply their bilingual skills in higher education or at work. Therefore, teachers, parents, or guardians must play a key role in choosing the best sources or tools to educate and help improve children's English skills and apply this educational board game in children's learning sessions.

In conclusion, I aim to play a role in the education industry and inspire them to create more educational games, especially language-centred games, for children and every other age group. My hope for a future project is that there will be a similar educational board game not just for this target age group but for the rest of the students and adults who seek to learn English as a second language. The difficulties of the board game can be increased and add more challenging questions into it. Besides that, the designs can also be changed since teenagers or adults may have different preferences and likings compared to children. For example, it is possible to adapt a English television series, such as 'Friends', or a various genre of music in English to a board game and create themed questions based on it. Therefore, future innovators or researchers should be creative in developing similar educational board games as the 'Adventure in the Zoo: Educational Board Game'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Besides that, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the teacher at Tadika Muttaqin Pintar for accepting me to hold a one-day program to test out the educational board game with the students at the kindergarten. I am also grateful to the respondents of my surveys for taking the time to answer them since it is one of the crucial parts of my extended abstract.

Special thanks to my family, who always supported me and helped me throughout this project. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my friends who assisted me when I was in need of help and supported me physically and mentally.

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