

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING BOARD GAME TO LEARN IDIOM: A STUDY ON IDIOMS HUNTER - JOURNEY BEYOND WORDS

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ABSTRACT

English literacy among ESL learners normally centres around the capability of learners to communicate in English competently. However, it is often a problem for ESL learners when the communication involves the use of idioms. Idioms are a figurative language where meaning cannot be taken literally. However, idioms rarely being included in the lesson of English, as many teachers choose to let learners learn them on their own. Learning idioms can be a dreadful experience for ESL learners as idioms are commonly used by native speakers and not often used by ESL learners. Thus, a board game called 'Idioms Hunter: Journey Beyond Words' was designed to help ESL learners to acquire a better knowledge of idioms. This board game was inspired by the famous snake and ladder board game. However, 'Idioms Hunter' will give players a better experience as they will be playing to solve the mission by answering questions on idioms. This educational game will work as a stimulant to catch and captivate students' attention in learning idioms.

Keywords: idioms, treasure, board game, English, ESL

INTRODUCTION

Games are often regarded as promising teaching and learning tool in the ESL classroom. It can help the educators to ensure students' involvement in learning for it heightens traditional teaching methods and make understanding a foreign language like English thrilling and pleasurable. There are two concepts as adapted from the Second Language Acquisition theory address in this study. This research investigates whether the gamified method is beneficial for ESL learners and whether this method can enable ESL learners to better use their English language abilities, specifically in reading skills. The uses of game-based learning methods are at the rise in

ESL classrooms due to the capacity of the gamified method in stimulating language learners' interest and motivation for SLA (Se, 2018).

Background of the Problem

Learning a foreign language often is challenging for many learners. Since a variety of skills is needed in learning the language effectively, problems can arise when the learners are unable to understand and apply the skills whenever they are needed. This will impede progress in the session of learning the target language. Needing also to learn to express distinctions that are not familiar among the learners from the language they know could disturb the whole learning process too. Besides, finding proper settings and platforms to use the target language can also be troublesome for those who do not live in a society where the target language is used as a norm. Most L2 learners in Malaysia are reluctant to use the target language outside of the classroom setting. Anxiety is among the famous factors that lead to this. The affective filter hypothesis, introduced by Krashen, supports the theory that learners are more likely to have an inefficient language learning process during the SLA period if they feel anxious (Krashen, 1981). This theory is supported by Mehmood (2018) when he finds that affective factors do influence Saudi EFL learning efficiency. He further states that students will block the input for language acquisition when they have low self-confidence, low motivation, and high anxiety. Hence, it is crucial for language learners to be well-motivated when learning a second language as well as making the journey of learning the L2 as a fun activity to them. This is because learning a second language is a time-consuming process and entails such commitment (Bell, 2011). L2 learners should not be discouraged during the learning process to catalyst maximal participation and use of the target language in the L2 classes.

Statement of the Problem

Observations and interview sessions with many English educators in Malaysia piloted revealed that the inability of the Malaysians students in mastering the reading skill is among the biggest challenge the Malaysian English educators have to deal with. This has caused the students to not able to perform in the public examination. In the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), reading accounts for the 40% weightage of the test. Many students have a hard time to apprehend the written textual content as they have troubles in their reading comprehension (Phantharakphong & Pothitha, 2014). According to Maasum and Maarof (2012), reading is the pathway for learners to attain and improve their knowledge, and it is a crucial skill for them. This makes improving the skill in reading comprehension is important among L2 learners. Reading functions as an important tool in every professional field where this skill helps to provide an additional means of access to academic, professional, and recreational materials (Nesamalar, as cited in Williyam, Melor & Azlina, 2016).

According to Davis (1995), the implementation of extensive reading in L1 and L2 language classrooms exhibits numerous insinuations as the process involves recognition, interpretation and perception of written and printed materials. Thus, a gamified method is believed able to enhance the process of learning in L2 classes, specifically reading skill class. The fun and

interactive aspects of the game can sustain the L2 learners' interest and their need to study the subject matter further.

Research Questions

For this study, the following questions are addressed:

- What is the respondents' attitude towards Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words?
- Does Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words affects respondents' motivation in learning English?
- What is the respondents' opinion on the game?

Research Objectives

For this study, the following objectives are outlined:

- To identify the respondents' attitude towards Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words.
- To identify if Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words affect respondents' motivation in learning English
- To investigate respondents' opinions on the game.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper underpins the theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) by Krashen (1981). This theory postulates that comprehensible input, as well as effective output, is the crucial element in learning the second language. Krashen's theory, as referred to as $i+1$ delineates the second language, is acquired unconsciously like the acquisition of a first language. There are five hypotheses according to Staphen Krashen. These hypotheses include Acquisition Learning Hypothesis, Monitor Hypothesis, Natural Order Hypothesis, Input Hypothesis and Affective-filter Hypothesis.

Theory of Second Language Acquisition

The SLA theory influences numerous researches on how the second language is acquired. Input Hypothesis in SLA explains about language acquisition. According to this hypothesis, L2 learners need meaningful interactions to learn the language. It required comprehensible input, which focuses on the delivery of messages without any intention of speech rules. Besides, Krashen claims that language learning should be natural, and the learner will produce speech when he/she is ready. Therefore, this study will explore whether the game-based learning method influences L2 learner's communication ability.

On the other hand, the Affective-filter hypotheses in SLA enlighten the vital of motivation in language learning. Thus, students' affective- filter while learning by using gamified method is disclosed in this study. A study by Lin (2008) approves the theory of SLA by Krashen when she

finds that incorporating music, films, and games yields positive attitudes of the students as they felt more relaxed, less embarrassing, and more motivated. Brown (2000) gives his three perspectives of motivation, which are; behavioral perspective, cognitive perspective, and constructivist perspective. According to Brown, students feel motivated because they gain rewards from leaning and they can fulfill the satisfaction of learning.

Application of SLA in language learning

To assure great learning experience to L2 learners, various methods and approaches have been developed and applied to provide effective learning outcomes. SLA theory and research can be useful in designing quality activities for L2 learners. In L2 classroom, teachers can create the language input comprehensible through many strategies, such as linguistic simplification, and the use of real objects to help bring lessons and learning to life. Besides, the application of visuals, pictures, graphic organizers, and other current ESL strategies are also effective for better use of the English language. This paper focuses on the gamified method of teaching reading skills in ESL classrooms.

The L2 learner's response by communicating to others their feeling; in other words, the *manifest response* encourages learners to do something rather than react in private. (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006). Learning language through games activates learners' communication skills and motivates them to express their feelings. This is due to the rules in playing games that require the participation of all players and learning while having fun.

Ghazal, Sadeqa & Singh, Smriti (2016) claimed that game-based learning could be very useful in enriching language learning in mainstream classrooms when carefully blended with text-based instruction. Thus, the gamified methods are designed with rules and instructions for the players to follow until the game completion. This enables language learners to produce language to complete tasks and win the game. Another study by Yong and Yeo (2016) found that board games can be an alternative way to help learners with their speaking anxiety in the classroom. Using board games will lessen the stress and make the lesson enjoyable. They also found that students were more motivated to speak as their confidence level increased. Viray (2016) shared the same result as he found that respondents in the experimental group who were exposed to board games scored better academic performance as compared to the control group who was not exposed to board games in their learning session. Squire and Jenkins (2003) agreed that games would be good for learning as a collaboration among the players will be encouraged and they also provide contextual content.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study involved 40 diploma students from five different faculties from UiTM Cawangan Johor, Kampus Pasir Gudang, with different levels of English proficiency. The respondents were randomly selected to answer the RQs and to gather their views towards this game. The instrument used to answer the three research questions is a five-point Likert scale instrument and was an

adapted questionnaire from Sasidharan and Tan (2013). The number of Likert-scale items used to answer the research questions is 13 and 1 open-ended question. Data collected is analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics to answer the research questions and the findings were presented in the form of descriptive statistics. The open-ended item was analysed using thematic analysis and the themes from it were presented with the verbatim comments. Table 1 and 2 are the breakdown of faculty and students' level of English respectively.

Table 1: Faculty

Mechanical Engineering	20
Electrical Engineering	2
Chemical Engineering	2
Civil Engineering	10
Business & Management	6
Total	40

Table 2: Students' level of English

Advance	2
Intermediate	32
Novice	6
Total	40

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented according to the research questions. Table 3 answering research question 1 of what is the students' attitude towards Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words? The analysed data showed that Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words was positively received by the respondents who played the game. 3.96 was the overall mean value for respondents' attitudes towards Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words. This value indicates that respondents have a positive attitude towards Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation value for respondents' attitude towards Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words

Mean	3.9591
12	

Std. Deviation .74340

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation value for each item in analyzing respondents' attitudes towards Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words. Most of the responses are in the mean scores ranging from 2.40 to 4.00. The highest positive response was gained from the items 'I get to know new idioms.' (4.3250) followed by 'The game was enjoyable' (4.2500), and 'The rules of the game were clear.' (4.2250). The highest negative response came from the item 'I took a long time to understand how to play the game' (2.4000), indicating that the respondents did not take a long time to understand the rules and the method of playing the game. This is encouraging news to the game developers that indicate the rules of the game are clear and easy to be understood by the respondents.

This section is very interesting as it described what the respondents were feeling while playing the board game. This leads to the benefits of using and integrating games in the lesson process as the data revealed that respondents were enjoying themselves while playing, creating a more relaxed atmosphere, become more motivated to learn, and to explore more and ultimately, respondents feel the ownership of their own learning process.

Table 4: Detailed Respondents' Responses towards Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	The game was enjoyable.	4.2500	.86972
2	The length of time for playing the game was suitable.	4.0250	.73336
3	The rules of the game were clear.	4.2250	.97369
4	The questions asked were challenging.	3.8750	.99195
5	I took a long time to understand how to play the game.	2.4000	1.17233
6	I like the interaction of the players during the game.	4.1500	.86380
7	I am active during the game	4.1000	1.00766
8	The game keeps me alert.	4.1500	.89299
9	I enjoy moving around on the board	4.1750	.98417
10	The game motivates me to learn English	4.2000	.99228
11	The game motivates me to use English	4.1000	1.08131

12	I get to know new idioms.	4.3250	.99711
13	The game requires the use of strategies to win.	3.8750	1.09046

Table 5 is presented to answer research question 2; Does Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words affect respondents' motivation in learning English? From the data analysis, the mean value is 4.1500, with a standard deviation of 1.00128. This result indicates that respondents feel motivated to learn English through playing Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words. This shows that there is a positive relationship between respondents' motivation in learning Idioms and using board games such as Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words.

Table 5: Mean and standard deviation value for respondents' motivation towards Idioms Hunter: Journey Beyond Words

Mean	4.1500
Std. Deviation	1.00128

Table 6 is answering research question 3. An open-ended question was asked for the respondents to comment on the game. A thematic analysis was carried out and these themes emerged from the analysis. The four themes that emerged from the analysis are compliments, benefits, suggestions to improve the game, and others. In the compliments, the respondents provided positive comments like "Excellent," and one respondent finds the design to be interesting and that makes him be excited to play. Under the theme of benefits, some respondents mentioned benefits such as a good way to learn idioms for students and this game motivates him to learn more about idioms. Apart from those, the game also received comments on the need to improve the game, especially on the design. Two other comments that were not included in these three categories were listed as others.

Table 6: RQ3 - Comments about the game

Themes	Comments
Compliments	Good game I enjoy it Good Awesome Excellent Okay Very enjoyable This game very fun Very good game

	<p>Okay</p> <p>Good game</p> <p>Nice game</p> <p>I love this board game</p> <p>It is a really good game.</p> <p>A good game for students</p> <p>It's fun. And really excited when play it. Good job</p> <p>The design of the game make me so excited to play</p> <p>It was fun and enjoyable</p> <p>I really enjoy with this game</p> <p>It is quite fun to play with friends</p>
Benefits	<p>Good way of learning idioms for students idioms.</p>
	<p>So far I like this game and it's very new to me. I think this is a great game for every generation age. Parents can have a good bonding time with their children. This can be a benefit to a young age group.</p> <p>Not bad. This game are suitable for children to learn English in the best way.</p> <p>Overall, the game was really fun and challenging. I hope other students can experience to play this kind of game in the future to increase their vocabs and knowledge about idioms.</p> <p>The game is interesting and challenging. I get to know new idioms and learn how to use it in words.</p> <p>The game is fun and looks nice. I think this game can be one of the methods for the children to learn about idioms in a fun way.</p> <p>The game was very enjoyable and fun especially with friends and I got learn new idioms.</p> <p>It's fun to play with your friends while learning new idioms.</p> <p>This board game motivates me to learn more idioms and now I know how to use it in my writing.</p> <p>That's good for improve our knowledge</p>
Suggestions to improve	<p>I hope that the font of the board is bigger.</p> <p>The space of the cards are not big enough therefore it interrupt the pathway of the game.</p> <p>It was a fun game. However, the font should be bigger.</p> <p>Some of the questions are not clear. There is one question that may have two answers.</p> <p>The question cards cannot put in the middle because the space provided is large enough.</p>

	This game is the best but once the task is completed which is to collect the keys, why don't you provide real rewards, like a box full of chocolates The one like coins
Others	I love you -

CONCLUSION

The paper has presented the responses from the players of the board game Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words. Generally, the positive responses showed that the board game was well received by the respondents. Most importantly, this study showed the integration of playing in learning and the potential that it must be implemented and used in the English language lesson. It is important to integrate fun in the learning to garner respondents' interest and eagerness to learn English, as in this case, Idioms. This result is in line with the finding of Al-Bulushi and Al-Issa (2017), where they find that students hold a positive attitude towards using games and believe that games help them to learn English better inside and outside of the classroom. The responses given by respondents should not be ignored as making and preparing a meaningful and fun lesson would improve the teaching and learning process. This is also mentioned by Gozcu and Caganaga (2016) that games should be integrated into ESL classrooms as it can provide a better atmosphere and learning engagement to ESL learners that will result in better learning performance.

Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words also cultivates student-centred learning, which is seldom practiced in the Malaysian English Language classroom, as pointed out in a study by Mustaffa, Aman, Seong, and Noor (2011) that the teaching and learning of English in Malaysia is still heavily teacher-centered. To realise the full potentials of Idioms Hunter: Journey beyond Words, more research should be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of this game in various aspects of the teaching and learning of English. 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.

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