

Interactive English Language Learning: DishZle Language Game

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Received: 17 August 2018
Accepted: 10 December 2018
Published: 31 December 2018

ABSTRACT

English language learning is often perceived as a static mode of classroom learning activities. Hence, interactive teaching materials are necessary for grabbing learners' attention span and interests, and in enhancing their involvement. DishZle - a 2-in-1 self-designed language game, focuses on vocabulary and sequencing activities. DishZle deals with various local traditional Malaysian dishes. Hence, the game introduces the learners to the special and unique ingredients and the processes involved in preparing the dishes. They can develop their knowledge of local dishes and improve their proficiency in the English language (speaking, vocabulary and linkers). The game is suitable for beginner to intermediate learners of English (as lead-in activity or post activity of a lesson) in which it introduces cultural topics, which are related to local dishes to their students. This study is a preliminary study to identify the participants' reactions towards DishZle (effectiveness of using this game in learning the vocabulary and sequencing skills), language learning challenges they face during the game and suggestions to improve the game. The method used was a semi-structured interview, involving 17 participants (diploma students). Most participants claimed that both games were interesting, fun, interactive (communicate with team members) and informative (learn new words and steps to prepare local dishes). It is recommended that language games can often be used as part of teaching methods in ESL classroom as they enhance fun learning, communicative competency, teamwork and



cooperation as well as develop English language components (vocabulary and sequencing , in the context of this study.)

Keywords: *Interactive; language game; learning; vocabulary; sequencing*

INTRODUCTION

Being able to master basic English proficiency has become one of the crucial requirements for students in Malaysia to encourage them to use the language proficiently in an academic setting and to compete in the job market later. Thus, to achieve this basic level of proficiency, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers are responsible for identifying appealing and attractive ways to teach and motivate their students to acquire language efficiently.

English language learning is often perceived as a static mode of classroom learning activities, especially when the teachers use traditional methods in teaching language such as repetition, drilling and memorisation. Despite many years of learning English in schools, many students still have difficulties in using the target language effectively for genuine communication (Abdullah and Abdul Rahman, 2010). This issue is made worse due to the existence of affordable, portable and rapidly functioning electronic devices and cable television which provide students with constant entertainment and enjoyment that schools cannot compete with (Talak-Kiryk, 2010). This explains why many students are demotivated to study in class, lack attention and become negligent in their learning. As Lawrence and Arul Lawrence (2013) detailed, using the conventional method of teaching for English language would bore the students and the English language teachers, and this may severely affect the students' levels of achievement in English.

To improve the English teaching and learning process, teachers need to provide a favourable environment, useful resources, carefully structured input and practice opportunities to ensure a positive learning atmosphere (Ara, 2009). Thus, interactive and fun language games can be inculcated as part of the English teaching and learning process. There are many existing language games that can be conducted in class to achieve learning. Such games can be effective tools in the learning process,

whereby they can aid the students in their personal context and practice that, are needed for educational development sustainability (Dieleman & Huisingsh, 2006). Talak-Kiryk (2010) suggested some effective language games such as the adaptations of established board games, television game shows, or childhood games.

Huyen and Nga (2003) revealed that vocabulary games bring real world context into the classroom and improve students' use of English language in an adaptable and appropriate communicative way. In consequence, applying interactive teaching techniques and materials is suggested to increase the learners' attention span and interests, and retain their involvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Language Games in English as Second Language (ESL) Classrooms

Language games can be classified in many kinds. Lee (2000, p. 65) categorised games into ten categories: structure games, vocabulary games, spelling games, pronunciation games, number games, listen-and-do games, read-and-do games, games and writing, miming and role-play, and discussion game.

Games, as defined by Byrne (1995) are any forms of play governed by rules, which should have the elements of fun and enjoyment. In fact, it is also further acknowledged as a break from routine activities, the way of getting the learner to use the language in the course of the game.

In some circumstances, some teachers may think that language games are a waste of time and prefer not to use them in the classroom since using games are all fun and games, and hence, might not provide proper learning. In contrast, Deesri (2002) affirmed that language games can provide EFL and ESL students with more than just fun. In fact, language games should be used as effective approaches to improve English lessons, and not to be used only to make full use of extra time, for ice-breaking sessions or to divert the learners' attention.

To add, Singh (2016) in his study in India stated that the number of ESL learners in this era is increasing and this creates a strong urgency to design effective methods or approaches to enhance the language proficiency of ESL learners. He further elaborated on a more global scenario of English language teaching in which language games have made a strong mark in recent times.

B. Beneficial Features of Language Games

Language games can motivate learners to be active and help them in the process of consolidation and provide a situation for language use and teamwork and act essentially to instructional planning as young learners acquire knowledge through play (Garris, Ahlers & Driskell, 2002; Singh, 2016).

Ghada Sari (2002) as cited in Rohani and Pourgharib (2013) listed several main advantages when games are used in the classroom, including:

- Games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help them learn and retain new words more easily.
- Games usually involve friendly competition, and they keep learners interested.
- Games are highly motivating, and they give students more opportunities to express their opinions and feelings.
- Vocabulary games bring real word contexts into the classroom.

Additionally, Bradley et al. (2010, p. 3) pointed out four advantageous features of language games to language learners and they are discussed below:

First, games engage all students in the learning process. When students play games in pairs or groups, they have the opportunities to recognise and appreciate the contributions of others and use team-building skills. Some classroom games focus on individuals working to win against all other peers in the class. This type of game works well with students who are highly motivated and competitive.

Second, games provide an opportunity for collaboration and/or cooperation. Classroom games provide an opportunity for students to

collaborate and cooperate with each other, while working towards a common goal - winning. In some games, where students are paired or grouped, this might provide peer tutoring and the use of cooperative skills in order to win. They may not realize that they are learning, but they are working together toward a common goal.

Third, games provide an enjoyable learning experience. Creating a fun and enjoyable learning environment is a large first step toward motivating students. Research indicates that classroom games are effective approaches that facilitate language learning.

Generally, language games help to engage all students to have more interests to learn language, provide an opportunity for collaboration and/or cooperation if played in a group, and provide an entertaining learning experience (competing against one another and communicating in a fun and enjoyable channel).

C. Empirical Studies on Language Games among ESL Learners

Tengku Nor Rizan et al. (2015) reported on a possible initiative to maximise learners' exposure to the language outside the classrooms, especially young rural Malaysian learners. Forty BA English Language Studies undergraduates enrolled in a course that required them to create language games as their final class project. A rural school was selected to execute the pilot project in an informal classroom setting. The undergraduates engaged the pupils in language games that they had created, considering the learners' age, English proficiency and interests. At the end of the session, the participants were asked to respond to a self-report questionnaire to provide feedback about their perception of the games and the pupils provided positive impact of using language games in teaching English. With regards to the acquisition of new vocabulary, the findings revealed that most of the respondents agreed that they had acquired new vocabulary.

Perveen et al. (2016) conducted a study to find out the effectiveness of language games in acquiring vocabulary while learning English as a second language (ESL) in the Pakistani context. The study explored how games encouraged second language (L2) learners in

retaining vocabulary because being able to use vocabulary accurately can be more important in many aspects of language fluency than only achieving grammatical competence. The findings revealed that games could acquaint students with new words or phrases and facilitate deep learning of vocabulary in an effective way. Games also help to develop the students' communicative competence.

Ranalli (2008) reported that playing the Sims in pairs could improve vocabulary acquisition among English as Second Language (ESL) learners. The nine intermediate level ESL university students played the game and interacted with some supplemental website materials. Pre-test and posttests results illustrated that the participants recalled a significantly higher number of vocabulary words from the game. Most importantly, the findings indicated that the participants enjoyed playing the game in pairs and thought it was helpful. The participants also claimed that they interacted in English during the game.

Wang (2010) examined the use of communicative language games for teaching and learning English in Taiwanese elementary schools, which involved 150 teachers teaching in Taiwanese primary schools. The results of the study provided a positive evidence to indicate that Taiwanese elementary school teachers generally valued the benefits of communicative game activities in the teaching of English language.

D. Language Games: Enhancing and Retaining Vocabulary

“If language structure makes up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and flesh,” (Hammer, 1991, p. 153). It is evident that even in the initial stages of second language learning process, vocabulary is a significant aspect of English language learning, in which vocabulary is one of the core elements of language aptitude and it reflects how well learners listen, speak, read and write (Perveen, et al., 2016). Lewis (2006) also acknowledged its significance as the language ability of learners can be improved by vocabulary improvement.

In relation to acquiring English vocabulary, Perveen et al. (2016) affirmed that educational games could help learners to acquire vocabulary unconsciously while they are engaged in the game process. They added

that utilising games can also be very facilitating for the language teacher because of the playful atmosphere, which makes the teaching-learning process more effective. When the learning atmosphere is playful and conducive, the rapport between the teachers and students will also be improved.

Yahoui (2012) suggested that there are numerous techniques and methods that can be used to introduce vocabulary; however, if the teacher wants the students to remember new words effectively, these words should be presented in a context where the students can practice and revise them to avoid forgetting. According to Schmitt (2000), the amount of exposure can affect second language vocabulary acquisition.

Ayu and Murdibjono (2012) revealed that the students learn better when they have the feeling that they are making progress and games provide the opportunity for students to practice their language and omit their fear of learning English as Second or Foreign Language. It is supported by Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (2005) who mentioned that language games provide a context for meaningful communication, which takes place as the students seek to understand how to play the game and as they communicate about the game.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Some students fear learning the language due to the complexity of the lessons taught. Some teachers prefer teaching their students through 'chalk and talk' which emphasises more on the teachers' roles in the classroom than the students'. Consequently, many students feel disinterested or less enthusiastic in learning the language. In an attempt to address this situation, an interactive 2-in-1 language game called DishZle was designed to make the language process fun, amusing, challenging and appealing. This interactive learning material is feasible in enhancing the English learners' communicative skills as well as their team spirit.

This preliminary study has three objectives which are:

1. Identify the participants' reactions towards the designed 2-in-1 game (effectiveness of the language games in learning vocabulary and sequencing).

2. Identify language learning problem(s) that arise while the participants are playing the games.
3. Determine ways to improve the games.

RESEARCH METHOD

A self-designed 2-in-1 language game was used to investigate whether and how this language game could help students in learning the language in a fun and meaningful way. The data was gathered from an immediate interview after a group of ESL students played the DishZle game. Another reason to conduct this descriptive study was to test the feasibility of this game and its effectiveness to teach language (vocabulary and sequencing).

A. Participants

The participants of this study were 17 Part 2 Diploma students from one of the public universities in Sarawak. They were 19 years old and represented different genders of 10 males and 7 females. They were selected based on convenient sampling. These students were the students for one of the researchers who had covered parts of the topics on culture, people and food.

The participants were placed in groups of four to five. As they played the game, they indirectly interacted with their group members to complete the tasks, with the lecturer's monitoring. Grouping also helps in language learning as Sahar Ameer Bakhsh (2016) had acknowledged the significance of this technique where it will help to create a cooperative and competitive atmosphere among the members of the groups. The participants took turns to play Game 1 and 2, and after the games, they were immediately interviewed to gain genuine responses and perceptions.

B. DishZle: 2-in-1 game

DishZle is a 2-in-1 self-designed language game which makes learning English more interactive and exciting with its colourful layout and pictures. It engages the players' involvements by learning and using vocabulary and sequencing tasks. Phillips (1993) added that "the best way to learn vocabulary is when the meaning of the word is illustrated, for example, by a picture or real object"; hence the use of visuals in the game will enhance the students' vocabulary learning.

The theme of this game focuses on various traditional dishes in Malaysia. Thus, the game will introduce learners to the unique ingredients and processes involved in preparing the dishes. They can enhance their pre-existing knowledge of local dishes, and learn new words and sequencing by using linkers. The game is suitable for beginner to intermediate learners of English (as pre or post activities).

DishZle will add up to the existing activities that have been laid out by the educators in introducing cultural topics which are related to local dishes to their students. The novelties of the game are it involves pictorial illustrations of famous local dishes and their ingredients through a magnetic board and its magnetic pieces, and jumbled arrangements of dish preparations in the form of flip charts. This game is also handy and travel-friendly. Its storage is quite convenient as the game is placed in an attractive wooden box with a vibrant layout.

Game 1: Know Your Ingredients (Matching Vocabularies)

The first game can be played by matching Malaysian local dishes to their pictures of the main ingredients. There were 16 local dishes (Assam Pedas Fish, Bihun Sup, Chicken Rendang, Fried Popiah, KoloMee, Johor Laksa, Laksam, MeeGorengMamak, Penang Char KueyTeow, Prawn Sambal, Sarawak Laksa, Satay, AyamPansuh, Penang Laksa, NasiLemak and Umai) with 52 pictures of ingredients. The ingredients were labelled to aid students in the process of identifying the pictures. The games were played in groups of five (a mixture of good, average and weak students of English proficiency). To begin the game, one of the group members chose any dish, while the other players chose six main ingredients and matched them to the chosen dish. Later, they would

identify the picture of the dish. The team which completed the matching game in shorter period would win the game.

Game 2: Cook It Right (Sequencing Steps in Recipes)

The second game lets the students sequence the processes involved in preparing them according to their proper order. The same 16 dishes were utilised, and 5 steps for each dish were prepared. The steps to prepare the 16 dishes were all jumbled, and the players would sequence the steps for each recipe correctly by flipping the right steps to match the dish. As they read out the steps, the players would add sequence connectors or linkers to organise the steps. The linkers were already taught in earlier lessons and thus, the players would recall the linkers that were taught previously. To enhance writing skill, one of the players wrote the correct instructions on a piece of paper for the teacher to check. The team which could sequence all dishes correctly within a shorter time would be the winning team. The game was played in a group of five (mixed-abilities and levels of English proficiency). They were strategically grouped to allow maximum interaction between members and the more proficient students could aid the weaker ones in completing the game.

C. Instrument

A semi-structured interview was conducted as the method to collect information regarding all 17 participants' reactions to the designed games as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of the games in learning vocabulary and sequencing. In order to capture their opinions aptly, the interview was conducted immediately after the game. Before the interview, the participants were briefed on the types of questions asked, and after that, the participants were interviewed one by one and their responses were recorded. The duration of time for each interview was around 15 minutes and was conducted after class hours. The six interview questions were adapted from Yahooui's study (2012) on The Effectiveness of Language Games in Improving Learners' Vocabulary (Table 1). The recorded responses from the semi-structured interview were transcribed and presented in the tabular forms.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The data collected from the semi-structured interview were transcribed, the participants' responses were summarized into tabular forms and the data were categorized according to the sequence of items.

Table 1 illustrates the participants' perceptions regarding the first game and overall, their responses were encouraging. They were aware that the game enabled them to learn new words, especially on the local ingredients needed to prepare local dishes. They expressed their interest and enjoyment towards the game, though many found it to be a bit challenging as they were unfamiliar with some of the ingredients. Some of them mispronounced certain words but with the aid of the lecturer who was there as a facilitator, they were able to learn how to pronounce the words properly.

Some of the participants also suggested the game to be more challenging and this finding concurs with the study by Bakhsh (2016) who suggested that teachers must be conscious of how their students learn, and think and should be able to find out what students are interested in and utilise it for language teaching. To add, Wang (2010) also suggested that when facing students with different backgrounds, learning styles, needs, and expectations, teachers should be aware of taking learners' individual variations into account and being more flexible in their use of communicative games in order to maximize educational effects. In other words, teachers need to use games that are appropriate to the students' levels of proficiency, backgrounds and interests.

Besides, DishZle allowed the participants to improve their communication competency as they managed to interact with one another and worked together as a team to complete the game. Even though they had learned new words in the context of local dishes and ingredients, they also claimed that they needed more practices to remember the words better. In line with this, the recommendation by Yahoui (2012) illustrated that there are many techniques and methods can be used to introduce new words but to encourage students to remember new words effectively, these words should be presented in a context where the students are given opportunities to practice and revise to avoid forgetting.

Table 1: Game 1

ITEM	PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES
<p>1&2 Interest in the game and reason(s)</p>	<p>All the participants' responses indicated their enjoyment during the game because "it was interesting, informative and fun". Participant Number 4, 5, 8, 10, 11 and 16 mentioned that they appreciate food, so the game was fun, whereas some (Participant Number 2,3,9 and 12) said that they learned new vocabularies, and the game required thinking (recalling the ingredients from previous knowledge and experiences), improved knowledge on the ingredients. Most admitted that they could play the game with friends where they discussed, and they were able to pronounce the words as they assembled the pictures to match the dishes.</p>
<p>3 What they have learned</p>	<p>Their answers were positive as they revealed that they have learned the names of local ingredients in English, such as the words: "tamarind", "skewer" and "tapioca". Participant Number 2, 7, 9 and 15 also claimed that they have also learned how to communicate and cooperate with their friends to complete the game, where the ones with better English would aid the ones with weaker English proficiency. To note, they have gained few benefits from this game.</p>
<p>4 Difficulties encountered</p>	<p>Participant 3, 6, 12 and 13 asserted that they encountered some difficulties during the game, though a few of them claimed otherwise. First, they were not familiar with the dishes, such as Laksam, Penang Char KueyTeow and Assam Pedas Fish. Nonetheless, since it was done in a group, they managed to help one another. Next, Participant Number 1, 2 and 14 did not recognise the ingredients even though the pictures were labelled (tamarind, skewer, tapioca, asamgelugor and bungakantan). Some of the words were also mispronounced.</p>
<p>5 Would they remember the words</p>	<p>Most of the pupils stated that they gained knowledge from the game as they could learn new words (local ingredients for local dishes). The topic on Malaysian food is also good as it is something familiar to some of them. However, Participant Number 5, 7, 8, 11 and 17 stated that they needed more practice so that they could remember the words better.</p>
<p>6 Suggestions to improve</p>	<p>Some of the suggestions given were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Prepare Western and Japanese dishes b. Bigger and clearer pictures for the ingredients c. Include rarer local dishes and ingredients d. Make the game be more challenging e. Use digital devices, like an app

Table 2 presents the participants' reviews on the second game, which is to sequence the steps in preparing local dishes. Generally, most responded well to the game which they claimed was informative, and they learned how to sequence steps in recipes. Three participants (Respondent 10, 16 and 17) admitted that they found the game to be difficult as they were not familiar with the recipes, the use of some challenging words or not having much interest in the topics of food and cooking.

On a positive note, the participants mentioned that they could discuss and consult one another to sequence the right steps of the recipes. This supports the study by Talak-Kiryk (2010) who emphasised the importance of collaborative effort in promoting a spontaneous discussion about the learning material, improving pronunciation, increasing participation and aiding comprehension, while the students were thinking quickly to complete the games.

The participants also claimed that they would be able to be able to complete similar sequencing tasks in the future and used linkers or sequence connectors to explain step by step procedures. This is seen as constructive as they could recall what they have learned during the second game and applied the skills and knowledge in other contexts. The activity of using local dishes recipes is also seen as authentic as the participants could recall what they have seen, read or experienced in their daily lives, and apply them during the game or transfer what they have learned during the game to their own daily contexts.

As mentioned by Wang (2010), exposing learners to authentic materials will not only enable them to develop strategies necessary to comprehend the target language that native speakers use in real-life communication, but also helps them to apply what they have learned in the classroom to the real world. He further asserted that communicative learning strategies emphasises on authentic or 'from-life' materials, such as television programs, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, lectures, advertisements, radio station broadcasts, road signs, audio-visual programs and so on, and in this study; recipes.

Table 2: Game 2

ITEM	PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES
1&2 Interest in the game and reason (s)	Most of the participants' responses responded positively and they claimed that this game was simple, yet informative . Only two participants (Participant Number 13 and 15) stated that the game was challenging (due to some difficult words). Moreover, they said they could learn steps by steps process in preparing local dishes and learn new words.
3 What they have learned	They revealed that they learned the names of local ingredients in English ; as well as learned new vocabularies (verbs and ingredients) related to cooking like sauté and blanch. Besides, they also learned how to sequence the steps logically and use sequence connectors . On top of that, the game added knowledge on how to cook local dishes (16 dishes). They were able to discuss and co-operate with their members of the group.
4 Difficulties encountered	Most of them claimed that they did not face challenges during the game. However, Respondent 10, 16 and 17 said that the game was difficult as they did not know the meaning of certain words and they were not familiar with some of the dishes (Laksam, AsamPedas Fish and Popiah). Additionally, they did not know how to cook well.
5 Would they know how to sequence	All of them indicated that they would know on how to sequence if they were given similar tasks in the future, except one (Respondent 3) who stated otherwise by saying that this activity was new and unfamiliar to him. Notably, the linkers and sequence connectors were taught in previous lessons, so this game further enhanced their knowledge on the use of linkers in sequencing.
6 Suggestions to improve	The suggestions were: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Add more unique dishes (local and international) b. Do research first to know steps better (unfamiliar dishes) c. Provide more pictures d. Find more challenging dishes e. Use more difficult words to pose more challenges f. Give a shorter time to tackle the tasks g. Colourful wordings/ fonts

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The feedback from the participants were generally optimistic, in which both games seem to be useful to encourage the students to learn and remember new vocabularies effectively, sequence steps and procedures logically and enhance their communicative ability. The use of authentic materials such as recipes and their ingredients enabled the students to learn new English words and steps in recipes in a real context. Huyen and Nga (2003) affirmed that vocabulary games bring real world context into the classroom, and improve students' use of English language in an adaptable and appropriate communicative way.

Most importantly, teamwork and cooperation among the groups were also developed during the game. In this way, good rapport between the team members and the teacher will be positively developed. This is in line with Littlewood (1981) who asserted that activities that involve communicative interaction provide many opportunities for cooperative relationships to come out, both among students and between the teacher and students because in game situations, the class is often divided into pairs or a group, which encourages students to communicate naturally with others.

Though few participants encountered problems during the games, they were able to overcome them by discussing and consulting their team members. To be able to learn and consolidate new words better, the students need more practice and exposure to vocabulary activities. Teachers can utilise more communicative language games during their ESL lessons and provide ample opportunities for them to have practiced. In relation to DishZle, this game can be an effective source of motivation for the students to improve their vocabulary items as it can encourage the students to use the vocabularies that they have learned on their own in their daily lives. It is also perceived that DishZle will allow ample room for students to associate their pre-existing knowledge on the topics given in accomplishing the tasks.

The researchers would like to highlight that teachers need to use the games with caution and within appropriate conditions in order to accommodate the students' levels of proficiency in order to achieve the educational objectives and to manage class time. Yahoui (2012) asserted

that teachers need to be aware of the why, how and when to use the games. The designed games can be used at the beginning of the lesson as a lead-in (cultural themes/ topics) or towards the end of the lesson to recall or review what have been learned previously.

Besides, the theme of Malaysian local dishes used in the game is seen as effective as the participants can learn authentic word context which are related to their Malaysian backgrounds. As mentioned by Ghada Sari (2002) in Rohani and Pourgharib (2013), vocabulary games provide an opportunity for students to express their ideas and bring real vocabulary and lexical frameworks into the classroom.

It is also emphasised that language games should not be utilised only to create fun learning settings, but they could be alternatives for ESL students to present, practice, retain, consolidate and evaluate any English language components such as vocabulary, grammar and writing in their efforts to improve their proficiency and communicative competence.

Moreover, to optimise the effectiveness of language games, the teachers should be more encouraging, enthusiastic, flexible and friendly as the goal is to create fun and conducive learning condition. It is also recommended that the teachers fully comprehend the objectives of the games and their rules so that the learning of vocabulary and sequencing could be fully exploited. Besides, the teachers need to evaluate the suitability of the games in the classroom by choosing appropriate time and making adaptations that suit the learning environment, their teaching styles and the students' learning styles. Notably, these games could be integrated into the language lessons and syllabus as innovative educational tools and practice.

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