



Incorporation of Digital Games in a TESL Methodology: An Innovative Approach to Teaching and Learning English Grammar in the ESL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The incorporation of digital games in the TESL methodology is considered an innovative approach to teaching and learning English based on its popularity over traditional teaching methods due to its ability to engage and motivate learners. In learning English grammar, digital games have proven mechanisms to offer an interactive fun way, enjoyable but challenging, for learners to practice and reinforce the newly learned grammatical elements with better retention and mastery. Accordingly, this paper proposes that using digital games to teach English grammar can be an effective and an engaging way to help Sri Lankan students improve their English language skills. In Sri Lanka, where traditional methods of teaching English often emphasize rote learning and memorization, approaches to learn based on digital games can be an effective innovation that boosts student-centred and immersive learning by allowing students to proceed at their own pace, receive immediate feedback, and practice skills in a safe and supportive environment. Against this backdrop, this study explores the perceptions of teachers and students about digital game-based learning in a Junior secondary ESL classroom in the Baddegama Educational Division, Sri Lanka. The data is investigated by a questionnaire served to 35 junior secondary level (grades 8-9) students

and 10 English teachers in the age group of 24–35 years. Although most of them responded positively, they pointed out several limitations in the usage of digital games in the classroom and accorded digital games only a supplementary status in TESL endeavours in the Sri Lankan context. The collected data was analysed manually using graphs, pie charts and tables.

1. INTRODUCTION

English grammar is an essential component of language learning, and it can be challenging for ESL learners to grasp the rules and nuances of English grammar. Digital Game – Based Learning offers an engaging and interactive way to learn grammar, making it more enjoyable and accessible for students. In the ESL classroom, digital games can be used to teach grammar. These games often provide immediate feedback, allowing students to learn from their mistakes and improve their understanding of grammar concepts.

Digital Games- Based Learning creates a multi-dimensional outcome in terms of educational gains, enjoyment, and confidence in learning a language (Gomb,2019). Digital Game – Based Learning enhances students’ focus in studies by giving them opportunities to learn with joy. It increases the concentration in learning. (Wang & Lieberoth,2016). So, it is a very powerful predictor of engaging students actively in lessons. Moreover, digital games can enhance autonomy in learning because students can operate games on their mobile or computer devices (Wang & Lieberoth, 2016)

With the advancement of technology and the widespread availability of digital devices, game-based learning has become more accessible and popular in Sri Lanka. There are various digital games available to teach English grammar. Kahoot, Duolingo, English vocabulary builder and Grammarly are some of them. Teachers should have an adequate knowledge on these games to

implement them to enhance learning outcomes successfully.

The objective of this study is to explore the perception of teachers and junior secondary students on Digital Game – Based Learning in English grammar learning context.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data was collected for the research through administering questionnaires to both junior secondary students and their English teachers. The questionnaire was used to find out the attitudes of the students and English teachers towards Digital Game – Based Learning in English grammar learning. 35 students from junior secondary level (grade 8 and 9) were randomly chosen according to their voluntary acceptance for this research. They were chosen from two schools in Baddegama Division. The English teachers aged between 24 – 35 were requested to respond for the questionnaire. There were two questionnaires. One for the teachers and another one for students. There were structured questions and 7 statements in each questionnaire. The statements were based on the 4-point Likert Scale that varies from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The students’ questionnaire was translated into Sinhala to avoid any confusion. Students from two schools in Baddegama Educational Division responded to the questionnaire at school under an observation of a teacher.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study were analysed using the percentages of the responses. Students have used various electronic devices to play digital games. In figure 01, students have been asked about the devices they prefer to use in Digital Game Based Learning.

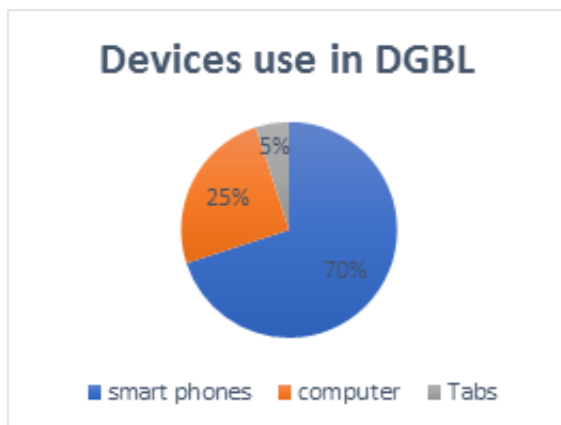


Figure 01.

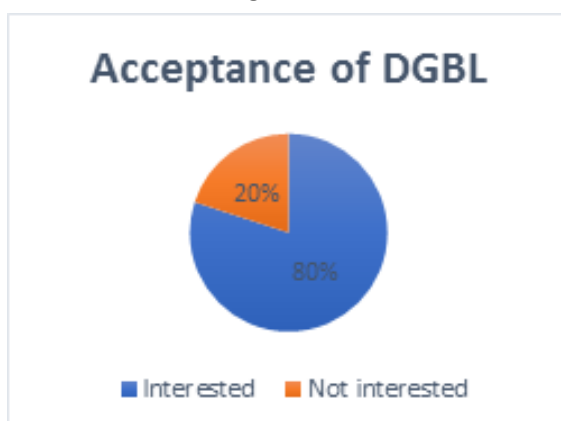


Figure 02.

Accordingly, the majority expressed their willingness to use smartphones to play digital games. As they were teenagers, they preferred to use smartphones. However, smartphones are not allowed for students in the school premises in the Sri Lankan context. According to the figure 02, 80% of students interested in Digital Game- Based Learning in English grammar learning context. However, there were 20% of students said that they were not interested in Digital Game Based Learning in English grammar learning context.

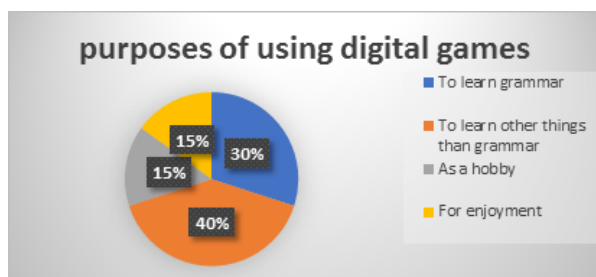


Figure 3. purpose of using digital games

In figure 03, it was showed that the preferences of various purposes of using digital games, such as hobby, enjoyment, to learn grammar and to learn other things than grammar.40% of students expressed their preference to use digital games to learn other things than grammar. However, a significant number of respondents preferred to use digital games to learn English grammar.

The questionnaire of students collected data based on 4-point Likert scale. Those statements are as follow,

1. I can learn English grammar through digital games.
2. Teachers allow us to play digital games at school to learn grammar.
3. Learning English grammar through digital games is easy.
4. We play digital games in the school computer lab/ language lab during the English period.
5. We play digital games to learn something more and practice what we have learnt already after the teacher conducts the lesson.
6. Digital game-based learning allows us to memorize the learnt grammar rules.
7. Digital Game-Based Learning motivates us to learn English well.

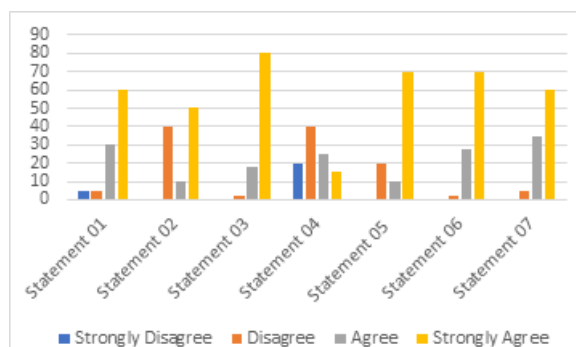


Figure 04. The Engagement with DGBL

According to the above bar graph, a majority of the students were positive towards DGBL in the grammar learning context. They had some knowledge about the effectiveness of Digital Game – Based Learning. They have played digital games for various purposes and using digital games to learn English grammar was one of them. They believed that Digital Game Based Learning was an easy access to learn difficult grammar rules easily, memorize them frequently after the lesson and motivate them to learn English well with an active involvement to the lesson.

3.1 Teachers' attitudes towards the Digital Game – Based Learning

The questionnaire was given to the English teachers who teach English as a second language for junior secondary level students. The results were analysed using percentages. The questionnaire asked how often teachers use digital games in English grammar teaching. It was revealed that while 80% of the teachers were using digital games for selected grammar lessons, 2% teachers stated that they have never used digital games in their teaching. Some teachers used digital games at the end of the lesson while some teachers used digital games at the end of the unit.

The following statements were asked from the teachers to identify their engagement for DGBL.

1. I prefer to use digital games to teach English grammar.
2. I know how to apply DGBL into teaching grammar as a second language context.
3. It is easy to teach grammar through digital games.
4. DGBL improves my teaching methodologies.
5. The available facilities can be managed to teach grammar through digital games in the school.

6. DGBL is a good motivational approach in ESL classroom for the junior secondary students.
7. We can totally replace DGBL with the traditional textbook to teach grammar. DGBL can be used as a supplement in language teaching learning programme.

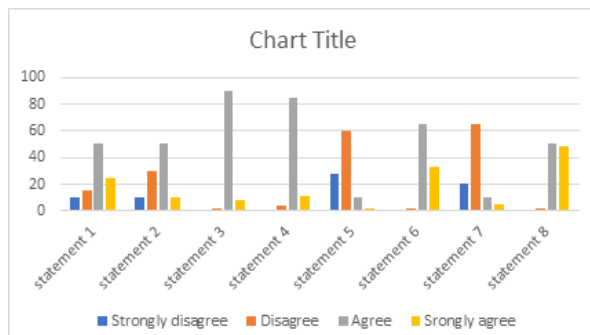


Figure 7: Teachers' engagement on DGBL.

The teachers have been asked about their previous knowledge on implementing the DGBL in language teaching and learning process. They said that they preferred to use digital games in their teaching, and it was an easy way to teach English grammar. They have found that the facilities of the school were not adequate for the better implementation of DGBL in the classroom. Accordingly, they expressed that using digital games to teach English grammar could be used as a supplementary work, but it was difficult to replace it with other traditional methods totally, due to some reasons. Junior secondary level students could be highly motivated by digital games as they provide fun and enjoyment for their learning. Majority of teacher respondents positive towards DGBL in English grammar learning context. However, when implementing and introducing digital games for the junior secondary ESL learners it was found that considerable number of limitations were there. Although teachers accepted the effectiveness of the DGBL and how it was important in teaching grammar, they could not use digital games frequently at school. Some teachers didn't know how to apply digital games into their lessons.

4. CONCLUSION

English language learning is a vital fact in the modern Sri Lankan society. In the context of teaching English grammar as a second language, it has greatly identified that the teachers need to deploy new appropriate teaching strategies to make their teaching more effective. Digital Game-Based Learning is one of effective methods that can be used to teach difficult grammar rules easily and make the students to remind them frequently in an enjoyable environment. As the modern world accepted the DGBL as a beneficial strategy, in Sri Lanka, digital games have been increasingly used in English teaching.

In conclusion, using digital games to teach English grammar for junior secondary school students can be an effective method as the study has indicated. Due to some limitations, it was found difficult to implement DGBL in ESL in Sri Lanka. Lack of access to digital devices and internet connection, lack of teacher training and large classes in size are some barriers. In addition, digital games would not be seen as a replacement of traditional language teaching methods. It can be used as a supplement, providing students an additional opportunity. With careful consideration and implementation, digital games can be a valuable tool for enhancing English grammar learning outcomes in Sri Lanka.

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