Exploring Effects of Board Game on ESL Learners' Mastery of Preposition of Direction and Movement in a National type primary school in Klang

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Abstract: *There are various approaches to engage students in learning, one being through games and play. While the concept of employing board games for language learning is not new in educational settings, earlier studies have often overlooked the use of board games specifically aimed at enhancing mastery of prepositions. Thus, this study aims to explore the effects of board game on ESL learners' mastery of preposition of direction and movement in a selected primary school. Five were picked out from fifteen pupils by using purposive sampling as respondents in the study. Qualitative design was applied for this study. Semi structured interview, observation and documented analysis were used as instruments. Even though the end results showed mixed effects from the pupils, most of the respondents received positive effects during the duration of the conducted study.*

Keywords: *effects, board game, ESL learners, mastery of prepositions, direction and movement*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Grammar is helpful in writing since it aids in the creation of strong sentences. Another factor is that proper grammar facilitates reader comprehension. One of the subject matters in grammar is prepositions. Prepositions are words like "at," "in," "on," "near," "with," and "without" that are used with nouns in phrases to indicate time, place, and other connections involving actions and things, such as "with a knife," "without a thought," and "at five o'clock," "in the morning," etc. (Yule, 2006). Prepositions may be brief and appear insignificant, but they serve vital purposes. One of the language constructions that makes up a phrase is the preposition. This element is referred to as a connective word, function word, and part of speech in English. The preposition expresses the relationship between two elements, one of which is the prepositional complement. Prepositions are often placed before nouns or pronouns, but their placement might vary depending on how they are used.

Focusing on the study, the topic of discussion is drawn from a microlinguistic study (grammar), particularly preposition, one of the key components of English sentences, specifically prepositions of direction and movement. The placement of a noun (a person, place, or thing) in relation to another noun is indicated by prepositions of direction and movement. Prepositions frequently follow verbs of motion and come before nouns or pronouns. The prepositions to, towards, up, and down as they relate to direction and movement are covered in this study. Thus, by mastering the prepositions of direction, it would be a great assistance for the pupils to understand prepositions of directions and movement better.

Board games are good tools in order to master prepositions of directions and movement. Additionally, it is a gaming activity involving the placement, movement, or removal of pieces on a board marked with a specific pattern, following prescribed rules for piece interaction and board traversal. Thus, by moving those pieces, pupils would consciously learn some prepositions of movement (go up, go down, go to, move to, etc) and so on. Chess, Checkers, and Shogi are some illustrations of board games. Studies utilizing chess, a game involving two players on a board with 64 squares and 16 pieces per player, have significantly contributed to the theoretical

advancements in cognitive psychology (Charness, 1992).

BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

The researcher used to teach English in SK X in Klang. There is a key problem among the lower-level primary pupils in the particular school which is the lack of English communication skill due to low understanding of prepositions. While individuals might possess the vocabulary, they encounter difficulty in assembling it to form more intricate sentences that would express their thoughts and ideas more lucidly, particularly where the use of prepositions is crucial. However, it is unrealistic to cover all types of prepositions as it would cause confusion. Thus, in this study, the researcher plans to explore whether having board games could help the pupils to master one type of prepositions which is prepositions of direction and movement.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The extent to which prepositions have dominated modern English is one of its best-kept secrets (Scovel, 1988). Prepositions now play a crucial part in the syntax and semantics of the language, yet most grammar books disregard this change. Even the outstanding modern grammar of contemporary English does not seem to acknowledge this. Furthermore, even the most comprehensive and in-depth grammars, such as those by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) and Quirk, Greenbaum, Startvik, and Leech (1985), according to Scovel, do not emphasise the significance of prepositions in English. Thus, this reveals the lack of sources towards usage of prepositions even though it is becoming more important day by day.

A lot of pupils, especially for second language learners (L2) in Malaysian context, faced difficulties in understanding prepositions regardless of their mother tongues. Prepositions are difficult for L2 learners for a variety of reasons, some of which have to do with the properties of prepositions in English and the differences between those properties and those in the learners' first language, according to Lindstomberg (1997) and Lorincs (2012) (p. 225-236). Additionally, some prepositions combine with verbs, nouns, and adjectives to convey a variety of meanings, and the differences between Arabic and English in preposition usage, number, and meaning make it challenging to find prepositions that are equivalent in both languages.

Lack of motivation to learn prepositions among the pupils also is an alarming sign. This is because even if they have a lot of vocabulary stored in memory, they will still struggle to communicate and deliver their intended meaning effectively in English. Thus, as time passes, they could gradually become disinterested to use English altogether which is not advisable as English is now the main medium of international language.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study is conducted for the following objectives:

1. To explore usage of board games towards mastery of preposition of direction and movement

2. To identify whether traditional board games could help pupils to learn prepositions of direction and movement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the outlined goals, the study endeavours to address the following inquiries:

1. Will the usage of board games improve the mastery of preposition of direction and movement?

2. Will traditional board games help pupils to learn prepositions of direction and movement?
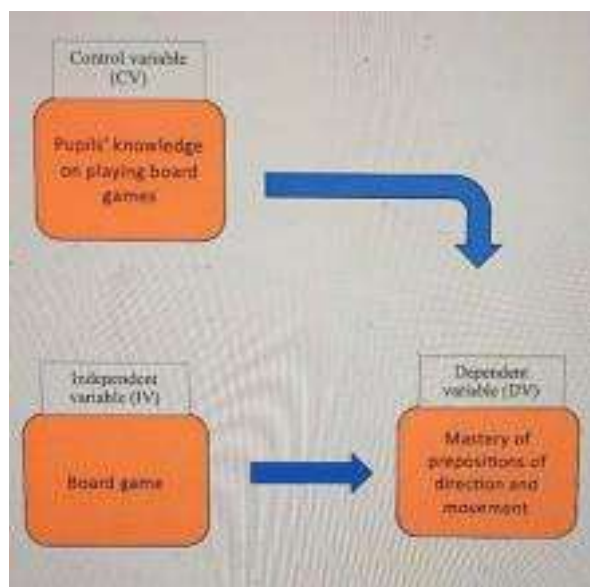
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Diagram 1 : Conceptual model with a control variable

A conceptual framework, according to Adom et al. (2018), this framework represents the researcher's chosen perspective that best clarifies the evolution of the phenomenon being investigated. It is linked to the concepts, theories, and empirical studies utilized by the researcher to substantiate and structure the information she presents and supports. The conceptual framework created needs to be able to demonstrate the relationship between the study's variables.

Based on the conceptual framework, the researcher uses a conceptual model with a control variable. In this model, there are three types of variables involved which are the independent variable (IV), dependent variable (DV) and the control variable (CV). Control variables in the study are more important than independent or dependent variables. According to Mulder (2017), a control variable is a variable that could have an impact on the dependent variable but is kept constant to ensure that it has no bearing on the results. In addition, the study findings will be less valid if control variables are not included in the study.

This study aims to explore the usage of board games towards mastery of prepositions of direction and movement. Therefore, it is crucial to make out the study variables in advance. In Diagram 1, board games act as the independent variable, mastery of prepositions of direction and movement as the independent variable while pupils' knowledge to play board games acts as the control. There is a reason why the respondents' knowledge of the board games must be practically the same in the starting line. This is because if the level of board games knowledge differentiates among respondents, then the final results might be invalid due to the fact that the more knowledgeable respondents will have a significant advantage among other respondents from the start.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This work is significant to the body of knowledge because it will enable future preposition researchers to broaden their scope of inquiry. Prepositional research has lagged behind other areas of grammar and language study so far. By carrying out this study, the researcher will be able to provide a foundation for future prepositional research by other scholars.

Aside from that, the English teachers in SK X and other schools will find this research to be of great use. They can use this data to generate fresh ideas for luring and inspiring students to learn prepositions, particularly prepositions of direction and movement. Teachers will then be able to modify the board game technique for their own students. This will be beneficial for them in the long run.

Lastly, as the clients in the educational sector, the pupils will receive most of the benefit from this study. Pupils who dislike prepositions due to their difficulties will be able to learn them in a fun way. In the end, with God's grace, the goal for them to communicate fluently in English will take a huge step forward with the aforementioned study.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of a study refer to the aspects of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the research results (Price et al., 2004). Examples of study limitations encompass the capacity to generalize findings, the extension of applications into practice, methods employed to ascertain internal and external validity, as well as unanticipated challenges encountered during the study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The questions were created based on the level of expertise of the specific participants. However, separate sets of questions must be created for various participant types from various educational institutions.

SAMPLING

Different pupil samples may produce varying results for this study. A different set of findings compared to the initial finding may be obtained from the same investigation utilizing the same tools on the same samples in a different setting. This is due to the fact that every pupil is different and unique to each other, which makes differences in the data collected in various contexts inevitable. The findings of this study are only concentrated on what was discovered in SK X. Therefore, it was impossible to conclude from this research's findings that they would also apply in other contexts.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review functions as an extensive evaluation of academic sources centered around a specific subject. It affords an understanding of the present knowledge landscape, assisting in pinpointing relevant theories, methodologies, and areas lacking in current studies. Boote and Baile (2005) states that "substantive, thorough, sophisticated research must first be preceded by a substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review." This shows the importance of putting literature review in a study.

(i) DEFINITIONS OF PREPOSITIONS

There are a few definitions of prepositions out there. Firstly, according to Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary (1998), preposition functions as a word or a group of words that precedes a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase, indicating direction, time, place, location, spatial relationships, or introducing an object in a sentence. Thornbury (2004) characterized prepositions as grammatical or function words primarily contributing to a sentence's structural integrity. Next, a preposition is also defined as a word or group of words (Kaplan, 1989; Tan, 1994; Hughes, 1992) and often has meanings which have something to do with location or direction and movement (Kaplan, 1989; Hughes, 1992) and time or method (Hughes, 1992). As for De Felice & Pulman, 2008), they classify prepositions according to their form, function and meaning. In terms of form, prepositions can be one word (simple preposition) or two, three, or more words (complex prepositions). The closed class includes simple prepositions. Thus, it is impossible to create fresh one-word prepositions. Complex prepositions, however, are an open class because new combinations might be created.

(ii) DIFFICULTIES OF PREPOSITIONS IN ESL LEARNING

Prepositions in English are challenging for any ESL learner since they are frequently compared to the prepositional system in their first language. The challenge is exacerbated by the disparity between the number, significance, and usage of prepositions in first language and ESL.

According to Takahashi (1969), understanding how to use specific prepositions intuitively is thought to be a key

component of learning English as a second language. The majority of prepositions in an ESL context may be learned by heart and utilised correctly with practise. The term "intuitively" is actually hard for young learners as they usually need concrete items to learn. Another view is from Lindstomberg (1991) and Lorincs (2012) (p. 225-236), stating prepositions are challenging for ESL learners for a variety of reasons, some of which have to do with the qualities of prepositions in English and the disparities between those properties and those in the learners' first language.

Additionally, it is acknowledged that prepositions are notoriously difficult to learn and they are notoriously hard for non-native speakers to master (Baldwin et al., 2009; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). For instance, Swan (2001) identifies several challenges ESL learners might encounter with prepositions, such as vocabulary issues, word order, the use of '-ing' forms, and the placement of prepositions before conjunctions.

From all these arguments above, it could be enough to state that learning prepositions are actually a hard thing to do and comprehend.

(iii) WHY CHOOSE TRADITIONAL BOARD GAME

There are various reasons to choose traditional board games as the intervention to master prepositions of direction and movement based on the view of the author. The reasons are as follows below:

First of all, in some teaching settings, computers are either restricted or absent, as observed in the specific educational context (Razak & Eswaran, 2013)..This could refer to schools which are situated deep in the rural area, which have less or no access to better facilities and equipment.

Secondly, compared to traditional board games, Kirriemuir and Macfarlane (2004) argue that digital games lack human interaction and tend to be passive in nature. In contrast, Billinghurst and Kato (2004) assert that traditional board games offer face-to-face interaction, involve physical actions, and enable the expression of verbal tone. As two-way communication needs face interaction, thus selecting traditional board games to learn prepositions could be the correct choice.

Thirdly, the assumption that traditional board games are not interactive is not entirely right. Instead, Kapp, Blair, and Mesch (2014) highlighted that board games foster interactivity as players engage with each other within the game's rules and context throughout the gameplay. Therefore, it is more likely that the words (prepositions of direction and movement in context) are more effectively retained in memory when related to one's practices according to Aslanabadi and Rasouli (2013).

Another reason is the board's visual nature aids pupils in forming mental images, facilitating recall and apply the information learned during the lesson as indicated by Treher (2011). For example, the black and white squares on the chessboard could assist the pupils to learn to move and direct the pieces with more ease rather than games with no board track. Thus, this will facilitate the pupils to learn prepositions of directions and movement better.

III.   PREVIOUS STUDIES

Past studies show that there are a lack of ways to deal with prepositions specifically involving prepositions of movement and direction. Lots of studies put more focus on other grammar subjects and language skills rather than prepositions when it comes to interventions.

Next, in terms of board games, studies on this intervention for ESL do not focus on prepositions. For instance, Ubaidatur and Tiyas (2021) deliver the title "The Effect of Board Game towards Vocabulary Mastery" and (Catherine, 2021) carry out the title "Board Games in Improving Pupils' Speaking Skills". Thus, this supports the argument that lack of intervention for prepositions, specifically prepositions of movement and direction is imminent.

SUMMARY

According to Naepi (2023), a well-done literature review should clearly explain the theoretical and empirical contributions made in the discipline and point out areas that require more research or inquiry. By interpreting the current literature in light of recent breakthroughs in the field, this chapter assists the readers in determining the consistency of their knowledge and the relevancy of the resources that are already available.

IV. METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is a method, framework, or pattern for conducting research. The functioning of theories and practices is facilitated through a compilation of ideas, beliefs, or understandings. Within research, the majority of paradigms stem from two research philosophies: positivism and interpretivism. Each research study adopts one of these paradigms as a basis for shaping its research methodology, striving for ethical and logical execution. The interpretivism paradigm was picked for this study's objectives. Central to interpretivism is the belief that reality is subjective, complex, and socially constructed.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study applies exploratory research design. According to Tegan (2021), exploratory study type is a methodological strategy that investigates research questions that have not received extensive examination previously. It is always regarded as qualitative and primary in nature. In addition, its flexibility and open-ended structure often lead to its identification as interpretive research or an approach rooted in grounded theory. For instance, interviews are asked in the form of non - leading questions in order to gauge a participant whether to spill out truthfully. By using the statements given by the participants, the researcher could develop the tools required to carry out the study.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

This study is conducted in SK XY, a national primary school situated in the suburban area in Klang. The real name of the school is not revealed due to confidentiality and ethics. This particular school was picked due to the researcher working there. Thus, it would be easier for the study to be carried out. Purposive sampling will be used to select five respondents from a group of 15 pupils. The pupils involved are in Year 2 which equals to eight in age. Etikan et al (2016) explain that purposive sampling, also termed judgment sampling, involves deliberately choosing participants based on their specific qualities or characteristics. It is a non-random technique, therefore no predetermined sample size or underlying theories are required. Essentially, the researcher determines the required information and seeks sources capable of providing it, often based on their expertise or experience. This approach, common in qualitative research, involves identifying and selecting instances that offer substantial information, aiming for an efficient utilization of resources.

INSTRUMENTS

Defining the research tool is crucial for this study. Arikunto (2010) emphasizes that the research instrument serves as a facilitative tool for collecting data. In qualitative research, commonly employed methods, as highlighted by Ary (2010), encompass document analysis, interviewing, and observation. In this study, interview, observation and documented analysis will be used to collect, measure and analyse the data.

Semi structured interview

Semi-structured interviews were the initial research tool used. Magaldi and Berler (2020) describe the semi-structured interview as a sort of an exploratory approach. They highlight its focus on a central issue, providing a broad framework typically guided by a set of questions. This qualitative research method gathers non-numerical data, capturing attitudes, emotions, and behaviors, offering a comprehensive but often descriptive understanding of why individuals act in certain ways. The utilization of interviews is emphasized as a means to extract narratives and stories from respondents.

The five respondents selected for this study's purposes are second-grade students from SK XY. The respondents were picked since the researchers obtained their consent to interview them for the study. The participants must have written parental approval because they are still officially minors. This is reinforced by Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which specifies that having parental approval is required in addition to getting a child participant's consent. This provides an opportunity for the parent or legal guardian to learn about the study, ask questions, and accept or reject their child's involvement in it.

Observation

Table 1

Design of observational checklist

Board Game	Lists of movement	Items
Checkers	Move up	2
	Jump over	2
	Move down	2
Chess	Move to	2
	Go towards	2
	Go across	2

The observational checklist will be designed with a Likert scale of 3. Scoring is established by deciding whether the level of participants performance based on the items in the checklist. As for the level of comprehension, scale of 3 will indicate high comprehension and scale of 1 denoting low comprehension. In order to avoid bias to ensure content validity, a number of teachers will preside over the observation and tick in the checklist separately.

Documented analysis

This research also employs document analysis as a tool. Document analysis is a sort of qualitative research that employs a methodical approach to find documentary evidence and answer specific research questions. Report evaluation requires repeated study, examination, and interpretation of the data in order to be useful, much like many evaluation approaches used in qualitative studies (Bowen, 2009).

In terms of this study, it is vital to see the progress of the participants during the duration of the study. Documents involving activity books, handouts, and classroom assessment will be taken into account. Regular checks will be implemented in order to make the progress of the participants have more reliability and validity in the long run. Taking classroom-based assessment aside, this type of assessment had just recently been given priority in Malaysia to replace national exams (UPSR, PMR etc) during the tenure of Dr Maszlee Malik as the Minister of Education back in 2018. According to the statement released by the Ministry of Education (2018), classroom-based assessment or PBD (Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah) in local context is being established in order to end the exam-oriented system in Malaysia. This is the reason why classroom-based assessment is being considered as one of the proper type of documentation to be analysed.

DATA ANALYSIS

After the interview, the audio will be transcribed in order to assess the data. We'll highlight the interview's important takeaways. Additionally, using the specified observational checklist, the observational data will be acquired and calculated. The interview and observation will be followed by a review of the documented analysis. In order to validate the information gathered from both of the used instruments, further literary reviews will be supplied.

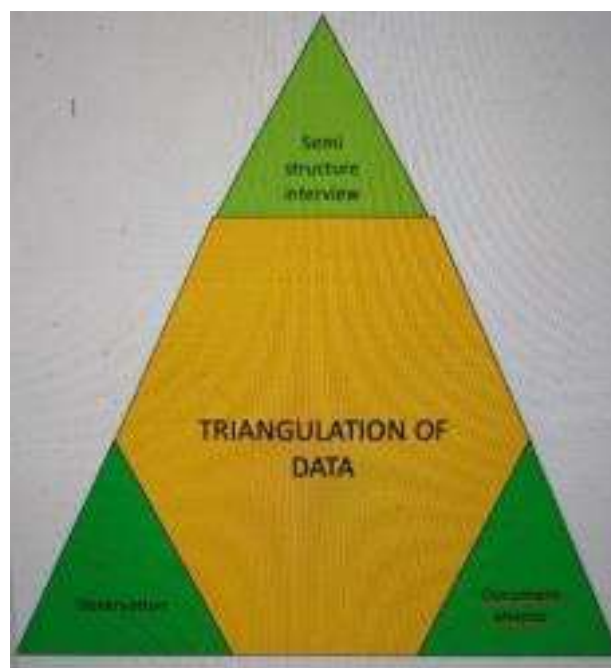**VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE RESEARCH TRIANGULATION OF DATA**

Diagram 2: Data triangulation

Data triangulation is the process through which a researcher uses two or more approaches to confirm the findings and results. Data triangulation, commonly referred to as cross examination, is double- or triple-checking the research's conclusions. The underlying assumption behind this, or the rationale behind using this strategy, is that when many methodologies produce the same results, one may be more confident and so increase the credibility and validity of the findings. When a researcher utilises two to three approaches to study a particular topic, two of the approaches may produce equal results or all three may produce contradicting conclusions. If a researcher just uses one approach, the findings are assumed to be accurate. Thus, triangulation is employed in this study as a way to validate all of the data collected. The observation and document analysis, which includes literature, will be analysed to assess the validity of each of the instruments utilised, even though the semi-structured interview serves as the primary source for the research and provides a window into the respondents' inner thoughts about their purpose. The data obtained using the equipment will also be further validated using this technique.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The researcher followed the following steps for collection of data:

1- The researcher reviewed the theoretical literature and past studies related to the issue
2- The researcher selects scope of the research
3- Getting permission from respondents' parents or guardians
4- Preparing and carry out the instruments
5- Analysing and interpreting data whose results are illustrated via discussion.
6- The researcher did a check on reliability and validity of the collected data

PILOT STUDY RESULTS

The results from the pilot study reveal the fact that the both respondents showed different mastery of prepositions of movement and direction after utilising board games guided by the researcher. The first responder scores better than the second respondent in terms of mastery of prepositions of movement and direction according to stated instruments implemented.

SUMMARY

The technique, samples, and locations where this data was gathered are all described in this chapter. In order to give readers a quick overview of the data gathering procedure and help them to understand this study, it was also presented in point form. Pilot study results are also being included as a guide to the readers to differentiate between piloted results and the real study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings obtained from the data collected from the study instruments on the effects of board games on ESL learners' mastery of preposition of direction and movement in a national type primary school in Klang are discussed. The data is presented according to research questions. The study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. Will the usage of board games improve the mastery of preposition of direction and movement?

2. Will traditional board games help pupils to learn prepositions of direction and movement?

Board games in improving prepositions of direction and movement mastery.
The first research question focused on exploring the usage of board games in improving mastery of preposition of direction and movement. Based on the interview with the participants, it is found that all five students had extreme difficulties communicating in English. Thus, in order to ensure that the interviewing findings are not being jeopardized, the language setting of the interview had to be changed to the participants' mother tongue which is in Malay language. However, to make it convenient to the readers, it would be changed back to English when being transcribed. During the interview, the participants admit that they were clueless on what board games really were. Additionally, they were also not familiar with the concept of prepositions. Examples were given on paper to show them what were prepositions, but all of the participants did not manage to comprehend them at all.

> *Mr, what's that? Board? Boat? What's that?* (P2, 10/12/2023, 14.03-14.05)

> *Pre?.. Po? What just now? Mr, I don't know* (P5, 10/12/2023, 14.06-14.08)

As the pupils were initially weak in English, it was understandable that they would not recognize any types of prepositions. However, for the participants did not even know what board games were, it would quite be a pity. According to (Collins and O'Brien 2003, 5), board games can be a very effective means to promote active learning when children "are engaged in some activity that forces them to reflect upon ideas and how they are using those ideas". Thus, it would be a good idea to use board games in order to introduce prepositions of direction and movement to the participants. Plus, any children would be interested to play as long as it involved gaming elements. This was supported by studies that included children aged four to twelve strongly suggesting board games were an effective tool to encourage active learning and the retention of knowledge. They also found that board games helped increase students' motivation for learning and even lead to positive changes in behaviour (Noda, Shirotsuki, and Nakao 2019).

> *Mr, can we try the game? Let's play..*(P1, 10/12/2023, 14.10 - 14.13)

> Play..Play..Let's us play Mr.. (P4, 10/12/2023, 14.13-14.15)

Traditional board games: does it help or not when it comes to prepositions of direction and movement learning?
The second research question aimed to explore whether traditional board games could be useful assistance when it comes to prepositions of direction and movement learning. There are two traditional board games to be applied on which were chess and snake and ladders. Both games were being adapted to suit prepositional content suitable for grade two children. Based on the observations, traditional board games could assist participants to understand prepositions of direction and movement.

Table 1

Scoring grade based on observation

Respondent/ Prepositions	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Move up	High	Moderate	High	High	High
Move down	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate
Jump over	Moderate	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate
Go towards	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low

Based on Table 1, the result seems to vary among participants. P1, P3 and P4 seem to be doing quite well while P2 and P5 seem to struggle with some of the prepositional items. However, compared with the initial level of the participants, the results here had been better. Thus, this clearly indicates that traditional board games had a positive impact on participants' understanding of prepositions of direction and movement.

This improvement in the results may be due to participants' eagerness to play in the game - based learning. They seem to be more proactive, trying to participate whenever they get the chances. This attitude highly supported the statement by Chitravelu, Sithamparam, and Teh (1995) who suggested that games play a crucial role in alleviating boredom, which is essential for effectively learning language components, particularly grammar.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on the findings, board games have proven to be majorly effective in improving mastery of prepositions. Most of the participants had shown significant improvement on their mastery of prepositions of movement and direction. Before this, the benefits of board games are only acknowledged in terms of mathematical performance. However, there are still gaps to be explored later as the usage of gaming elements to improve prepositions knowledge are still lacking. Many sources of references for prepositions are still outdated till today. Thus, having new insights or studies on prepositions will definitely help to find new ways to master them.

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