CHAPTER 7

I-PICTOBYTES: A NEW REVOLUTION IN LEARNING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Online teaching and learning has taken both educators and learners by surprise and has left a lot of damage in its trail; for educators; the constant struggle to prepare interesting materials to entice learners and for learners, the constant struggle to want to attend classes and actually learn. Among the four skills in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, one would agree that writing is the most difficult skill to teach and learn. Being in a virtual domain, the difficulties double. That being said, in our context of a secondary school in Kuching, Sarawak, the researchers would look at vocabulary acquisition specifically figurative language in writing through the use of gamification. Gamification is suitable to use in educational settings specifically in online lessons where the nature of games are fun, motivating and engaging. Students would be exposed to figurative language through a series of interactive games with three different levels of difficulties. A total of 30 secondary school students participated in this study to examine the effectiveness of gamified-learning in learning figurative language and incorporate it in their writing. The study would employ a mixed-method methodology whereby participants would be given a pre and post test as well as undergo a survey to find out their thoughts in learning through this approach. Based on the findings, it can be deduced that learning through gamification heightens students' level of interest and motivation which subsequently aid in the learning of vocabulary. This study implied that more activities with gamification elements should be incorporated in the ESL lessons to maximize students' learning capacity especially in a virtual classroom setting.

Key Words: English as a second language (ESL), gamification, figurative language, writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the goals for the learning of the English language under the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025, is to develop students who are proficient in the English language to maximize their employability in the global market (MOE, 2013). This was resonated by a few researchers in that graduate employability highly depends on the level of proficiency of English (Ilhaamie Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2018; Siti Zaidah Zainuddin et al., 2019). The English language curriculum should be aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels and reflect the general aspirations of the CEFR. Students should leave the secondary school with the target minimum B1 level. A B1 "independent user" proficiency level should be someone who is "able to effectively express views and hold one's own in social discourse" (MOE, 2015, p. 58). However, many still could not achieve B1 level on exit from secondary schools and have a poor command of the language and in particular writing in English (Ang & Tan, 2018). Cole and Feng (2015) mentioned that writing is one of the obstacles that ESL students invariably face. Students have poor writing skills in various aspects; comprehensive knowledge of grammar, appropriate choice of words or phrases, writing mechanics, organization skills and style of writing (Yunus & Chien, 2016). In this paper, however, only lack of vocabulary specifically figurative language is discussed.

Lack of vocabulary has caused students to face challenges in acquiring writing skills (Misbah et al., 2017). Asep (2014) (cited in Moses & Mohamad, 2019) also opined that vocabulary is the fundamental element in constructing sentences which is the core of effective writing. A good repertoire of vocabulary including good use of figurative language can help students express their thoughts and how they feel to a tee. Stanley (1997) stated that if students hear or read a wide variety of figurative language, they may be more likely to use that language when writing. Thus, to promote retention of figurative language learnt and the use of figurative language in writing, the use of technology is adopted. In this 21st century, technology is integrated in the education field to aid the teaching and learning sessions (Yunus, 2018). New technologies have certainly brought major changes in educational acceleration and innovation, offering opportunities to engage students' learning in exciting ways. One of the most on- trend approach is gamification. Hence, this paper aimed to teach figurative language to enhance writing through gamification,

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Figurative language is difficult for students to learn simply because of its complexity. Figurative language does not offer a literal explanation but takes advantage of linguistic devices such as idioms, simile and metaphor, to name a few, to project more complicated meanings (Allo, 2017). This is challenging for students in an ESL lesson. Therefore, in order to aid students' understanding and foster better memory retention, gamification is employed. Gamification or gamified- learning is a developing approach in the education field. It is the process of adding game elements to the teaching and learning (Saleh & Sulaiman, 2019). Through gamification, students feel they are able to involve better and more meaningfully in a lesson (Yanes & Bououd, 2019). It focuses on boosting students'

engagement in ESL lessons and increasing their motivation through game elements and techniques such as leader boards and immediate feedback (A. A. Halim, Hashim & Yunus (2020). Moreover, gamification with points, challenges, and rewards are exciting and students compete and try to outdo each other in a healthy way (Hashim et al., 2019).

Dehghanzadeh et al. (2019) also added that while enhancing students' participation and motivation, gamification learning is effective for delivering content language learning. In the past, rote vocabulary learning, drilling and repetition were common practice, Students were taught new vocabulary, asked to repeat and memorize, after which they were expected to use them in their speaking or writing to test their knowledge and understanding. However, with the aid of this approach, the teaching and learning of vocabulary can be gamified into a fun learning experience. Kingsley & Grabner- Hasan (2018) commented that gamifying vocabulary learning is one solution to get students interested and excited about learning words in a playful context, yet still within comprehensive vocabulary instruction. Therefore, gamification is ideal in teaching figurative language, mainly because figurative language is not easy for students to grasp its meanings which puts students off. This approach will reel students in and get them hooked.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-method approach in which 30 secondary students from a secondary school in Kuching, Sarawak participated. The participants were randomly selected and varied in proficiency from low to intermediate. Majority of the students are lacking in imagination and are frequently uninterested in writing essays. They are unable to express themselves clearly and there is no variation in their sentences. Moreover, their essays lack clarity and do not convey a clear picture. Students were given a pre-test on a essay writing and were collected. Then, they had lessons on figurative language and were introduced to I- Pictobytes. Another post test were given again to test their essay writing.

The research instrument used was a ten-item survey questionnaire. The five-point Likert scale was utilized to measure students' feelings and opinions regarding I-Pictobytes as well as how effective the innovation was in helping them to include figurative language in their essays. The questionnaire items were categorized using a five-point Likert scale, which participants had to tick according to their responses to each item.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ten items in the survey were intended to investigate students motivation and awareness in including figurative language in their essays . Data gathered were tabulated in Table 1 below, and were analyzed descriptively.

Table-1. Pupils" motivation towards including figurative language in English essay writing after using online interactive I-Pictobytes gamification in frequency counts and percentages.

Items	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
A1	I know what Figurative Language was prior to this	-	35%	5%	50%	10%
A2	I understand and can use Figurative Language in my writing	-	60%	-	30%	10%
A3	I always use Figurative Language in my writing	-	60%	-	30%	10%
A4	I know the importance of using Figurative Language in my essay	-	10%	-	40%	50%
A5	Using I-Pictobytes makes me understand more what Figurative Language is	-	-	6.7%	23.3%	70%
A6	Using I-Pictobytes makes me remember better some Figurative Language that I know	-	-	6.7%	33.3%	60%
A7	I-Pictobytes is fun and challenging and makes learning easier	-	-	1%	19%	80%
A8	I become more aware of including Figurative Language in my essay after playing I-Pictobytes	-	-	-	30%	70%
A9	I had fun using I-Pictobytes	-	-	-	10%	90%
A10	What do you think of using I-Pictobytes in learning?	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: Instrument adapted from Gardner"s Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and Rajendran et al. (2019)

Based on Table 1, 3 out of 30 participants or 10% of them strongly agreed with item A1 (I know what Figurative Language was prior to this), whereas another 15 of them (50%) agreed with the statement given. For the next item, 3 or 10% of the participants strongly agreed with item A2 (I understand and can use Figurative Language in my writing), whereas 18 or 60% of them disagreed. For item A3 (I always use Figurative Language in my writing), 3 out of 30 participants or 10% of them strongly agreed with the statement, whereas 18 or 60% of them disagree with the statement. 15 or 50% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement in item A4 (I know the importance of using Figurative Language in my essay), whereas 12 or 40% of them agreed, and only 3 or 10% of them disagreed with the statement. Next, 21 participants or 70% of them strongly agreed with item A5 (Using I-Pictobytes makes me understand more what Figurative Language is),

whereas 7 or 23.3% of them selected 'Agree' and none of them selected 'Strongly Disagree' or 'Disagree' for this item. For item A6 (Using I-Pictobytes makes me remember better some Figurative Language that I know), out of 30 participants, 18 or 60% of them strongly agreed with the statement given, and 10 or 33.3% of them agreed and 6.7% or 2 participants were neutral about it. 24 or 80% of the participants agreed with item A7 (I-Pictobytes is fun and challenging and makes learning easier). 21 out of 30 participants or 70% of them strongly agreed with item A8 (I become more aware of including Figurative Language in my essay after playing I-Pictobytes). 90% or 27 out of 30 participants strongly agreed that they had fun in using I- Pictobytes as stated in item A9. Item 10 was a subjective question. Overall, response were positive and they had fun. Student 1 commented " I-Pictobytes provides exciting … colourful visuals … provides flexible time settings … the 3 levels … super exciting and unexpectedly fun. Student 2 commented that " … very fun learning figurative language with it … effective and efficient … . Student 3 responded " … it really amazed me … I never played nor heard of it before … absolutely interesting to … learn some new things...overall I'll give it a 10/10 … .

Students' level of motivation in using figurative language in English essay writing through the use of I-Pictobytes

The findings of this study indicated that students were more motivated to use figurative language in English essay writing. After playing I-Pictobytes, it was found that majority of the participants selected "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" for all questionnaire items. This showed that the students are motivated and enthusiastic about incorporating figurative language into their essays in order to add more vivid elaborations and clarity after the intervention of the approach. Moreover, the table showed that the majority of participants felt more confident and could remember better some of the figurative language learnt if it was done in entertaining way. They were more interested and driven to master figurative language in order to improve their performance in games.

Students' perceptions and expectations towards gamification approach in learning figurative language to enhance essay writing

Results showed that students had a positive attitude towards using figurative language in their essay writing when I-Pictobytes was used. It can be concluded that the majority of them viewed gamification as beneficial for improving their English essay writing skills. It increased their interest and were more conscious to include figurative language to create more quality, concise and precise essays. The majority of them also stated that learning figurative language through gamification reduced their anxiety because injecting fun into something as abstract as idioms, metaphors among others, minimalized the pressure of having to memorize, which allowed them better concentration. This also indicated that they enjoyed learn through Information and communications technology (ICT) rather than the more traditional "chalk-and-talk" strategy.

5. CONCLUSION

This innovation targets at the teaching and learning of figurative language through gamification to enhance students' writing. As the results showed, this approach is proven to be effective in elevating acquisition of figurative language among students. The students' positive responses indicated the increased motivation and acceptance towards using figurative language in their essays when gamification approach such as I-Pictobytes is introduced. Essays written after the introduction portrayed an improvement in terms of vocabulary used whereby figurative language was used to embellish a piece of writing to create more colourful and vivid descriptions. This is because gamification approach which incorporates elements of enjoyment, motivation, and competitiveness can help students become more motivated, interested, and competent at learning figurative language. When I-Pictobytes innovation was utilized, students are captivated as well as became more intrigued to use figurative language in their essays, which was the objective of this study. Rich multimedia contents gamification offers promote a deeper understanding between words and visual representations which increases learning effectiveness while heightening students' level of interest and motivation. Therefore, this innovation implied that it is imperative to tap into this newfangled developing approach in education to accommodate Generation Z; diversified, digital natives. Besides, more activities with gamification elements should be incorporated in the ESL lessons to maximize students' learning capacity especially in a virtual classroom setting. Future researches could perhaps include the different types of games for different age groups. In short, gamification is the way to go and indisputably the new black in the field of education.

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