



LANGUAGE GAMIFICATION IN ESL CLASSROOM: TEACHING PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Language games have always been the reinforcement activities in second language acquisition. Such activities will not only help the learners to retain the knowledge but to ensure the sustainability of it for a long run. It was not until the early 2000s when researchers began to carry out studies on online language games. Soon after, the terminology of Language Gamification came into perspective. This paper discusses on the notion of language gamification from a teaching perspective. It starts by discussing the related theories on language gamification and second language acquisition before moving to discussing on creating gamification in classroom. This paper is also set to disclose the ramifications of language gamifications in teaching and learning.

Keywords: language gamifications, second language acquisition, second language learners

1. Introduction

The challenges in teaching English among second language learners (L2) have always been as much substantial as teaching English among students where English is perceived as their mother tongue (L1). The needs to teach English effectively have caused educators to be adaptive (Athanasas, Bennett & Wahleithner, 2013; Kerr, 2014 & Thoeming, 2016) and creative (Constantinides, 2015) in carrying out their lessons. The gradual shift of teaching and learning (T&L) from traditional to contemporary method provides more spaces in terms of creativity, adaptivity and flexibility (Kerr, 2014) in carrying out English lessons in the classroom whilst the emergence of 21st century classroom idea allows educators to integrate the use of Information Technology (IT) devices (e.g. desktop,

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laptop and smart phones) to further making T&L more effective and conducive (Kolk, 2017).

Numerous language advocates and researchers share a stance on the vitality of integrating the use of technology in English T&L. Many adopted the use of technology in classroom and hence, the result has been positive. In addition, mobile learning (M-learning) has now taken the place of online learning (E-learning) although some researchers in E-learning may beg to differ. Undeniably, the educators have always acknowledged the vast and positive benefits that these two bring about. One of the positive outcomes that E-learning and M-learning share in common is gamification. In fact, the term itself has recently being brought in and given a wider definition. In a general term, Danowska-Florczyk & Mostowski (2012) defines gamification as changing unpleasant activity or idea into something that is more desirable.

Bruder (2014) provides the definition of gamification in a rather specified instance and that is a mechanic in using game element for problem solving and students' engagement in a classroom. Myhre (2015) on the other hand defines gamification, as opposed to the idea of game itself, as a mechanism of bringing in the mechanics of a game into a non-game product or service. With these stated, it is understood that gamification generally refers to the technique of making something interesting and likeable. In English language T&L, the notion of gamification is still new and has not been ventured by many educators. Nonetheless, those who advocate it, believe that the idea of gamification can be a good platform of making classroom lesson to be more interesting.

Myhre (2015) mentions that language gamification functions to lift student's morale and motivation in classroom. This is due to its engagement element and its features that are similar in nature with the games played by students at home. From the line of policy makers, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, via its Minister, mentioned the importance of integrating gamification in T&L of all levels of education; primary, secondary and tertiary. This chapter will further explore the idea of language gamification in T&L from the view of teaching and hence, will provide some insights that may be useful for further research and application in the classroom.

2. Language Gamification and Learning Theories

Before we further explore on language gamification that mirrors the learning theories, we must first understand that any language gamification is often piloted on two types of learning; E-learning and M-learning. Both learning types are best to be used as the basis in protruding the idea of gamification.

Mehdipour and Zerehkafi (2013) discuss the common traits of these two as well as some other trait that makes them indifferent in the diagrams below:

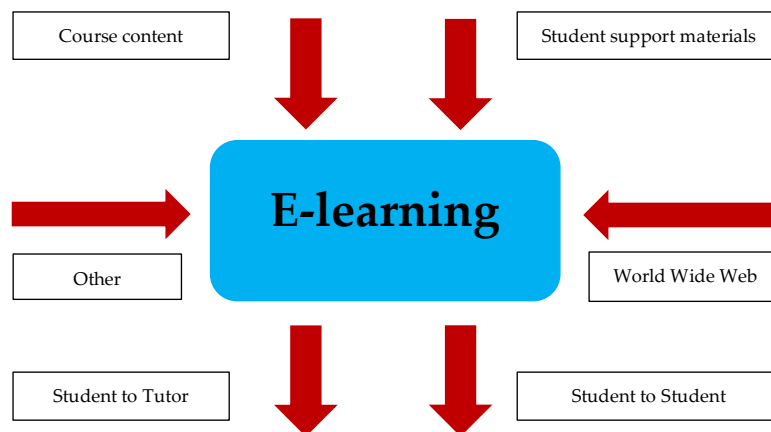


Figure 1: Wired E-learning Environment
 (Mehdipour and Zerehkafi (2013))

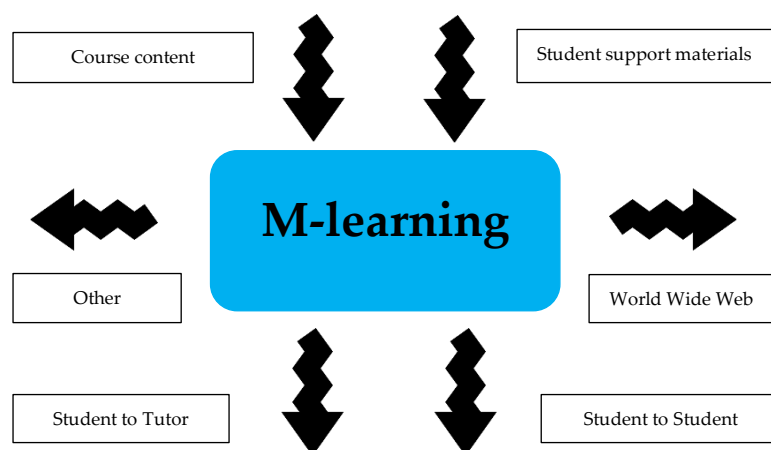


Figure 2: Wireless M-learning Environment
 (Mehdipour and Zerehkafi (2013))

Both E-learning and M-learning require inputs in a form of course content, other materials, student support materials and information obtained from the web. Gamification, according to the authors, is categorised as other materials to which it helps in assisting one’s understanding towards the course content.

There are many debates among the educators of E-learning and M-learning on which learning theories should be used as the based for both types of learning. The main three pillars in learning theories namely Behaviourism, Cognitivism and Constructivism or better known as the Big Trees, have always been used as the fundamentals in designing E-learning and M-learning instructions. In fact, some educators have been believed to adapt and integrate more than one learning theory in ensuring a more effective and meaningful outcome. Whilst some educators are still clinging on these major learning theories, others have adapted rather non-conventional learning theories such as Cognitive Flexibility, Situated Learning, Communities of Practice, Discovery Learning, Social Development, Cognitive Load Theory and Elaboration Theory. For what it’s worth, these learning theories aim in designing learning instructions that are effective. The

diagram below depicts the summary of learning theories that are used in E-learning and M-learning:

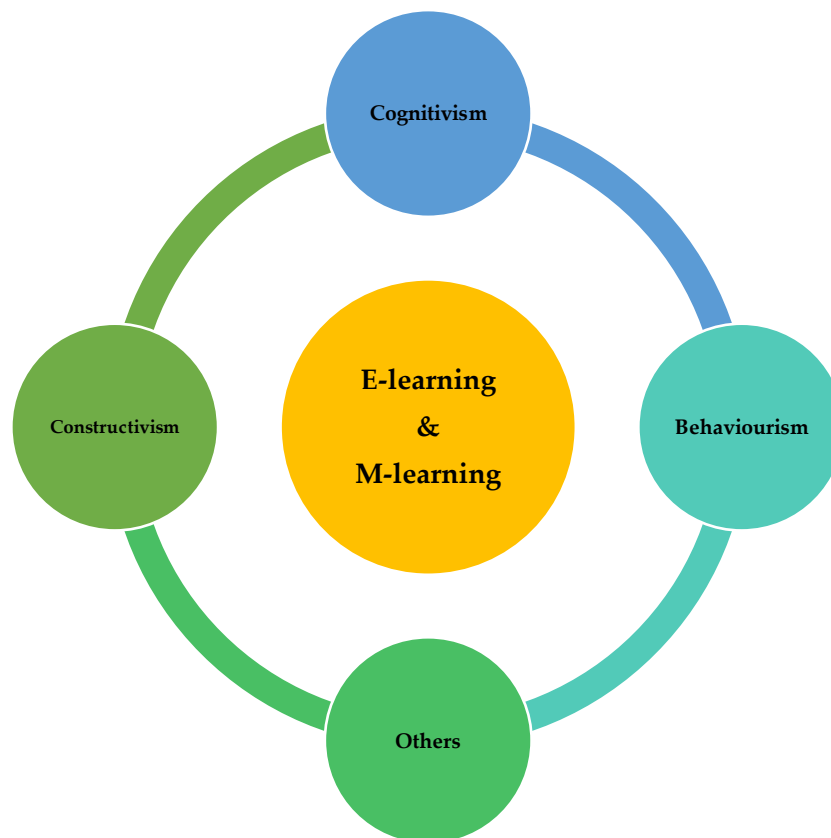


Figure 3: Learning Theories

3. Language Gamification and Teaching

For many reasons, language educators have used various teaching strategies to enhance T&L in the classroom. Keywords such as effective learning, meaningful learning, experiential learning & lifelong learning have always been the end product of a learning session. Gamification in education especially in acquiring a language sometimes becomes a choice for certain language educators to enhance T&L in a classroom. In fact, Danowska-Florczyk and Mostowski (2012) went to an extent by developing a new term of gamification in education known as gamucation. They further explain that education gamification in a classroom does not only assist in learning but also making teaching to be more efficient. Applying gamification in T&L will give a new dimension not only to the students but also to prepare more dynamic language educators in embracing the rapid change in teaching and technology.

Perry (2015) claims that though the idea of combining gamification in T&L is new, the development of technologies has indeed become an ideal way to form an immense E-learning environment.

Other researchers such as Kapp (2014) and Werbach and Hunter (2015) state that the idea of gamification in T&L, ranging from primary to tertiary level, has been a successful implementation because it does not only cater the needs of creating fun

activities but to make these activities meaningful. Eventually, the prime intention in T&L can be achieved with the assistance of gamification.

4. Creating Language Gamification in Classroom

Language gamification requires many processes to which few aspects should put into consideration to ensure that the end product works and functions as to its purpose. For instance, if a language game is designed to gauge students' understanding towards certain subject, then the purpose of the game is to reinforce the content knowledge.

Bruder (2014) mentions the characteristics of an educational game as follows:

- a) Continuous challenge,
- b) Interesting storyline,
- c) Flexibility,
- d) Immediate and useful rewards,
- e) A combination of fun and realism.

In another research, Smith-Robbins (2011) explains three main characteristics that an educational game should consist of:

- a) Goal: it is important for educators to set goals for the language game and to ensure the goals are met.
- b) Obstacles: the language game should also consist of many levels, ranging from easy to difficult.
- c) Collaboration or competition: the game should also initiate a form of collaboration or promote healthy competition among students.

Lazarro (2004) on the other hand talks about the insertion of psychological element in an educational game in which the researcher describes them as:

- a) Hard fun: to allow players (students) to feel sense of accomplishment after completing all tasks of different level.
- b) Easy fun: to attract potential players (students) to participate in the game
- c) Altered states: every level of difficulties must cater different emotions of the players (students) so that players' satisfaction can be fulfilled.
- d) The people factor: to allow players (students) to initiate sense of competition and / or collaboration with other players.

Few essential elements can be summed up in the diagram below based on the given traits of educational games in previous studies:

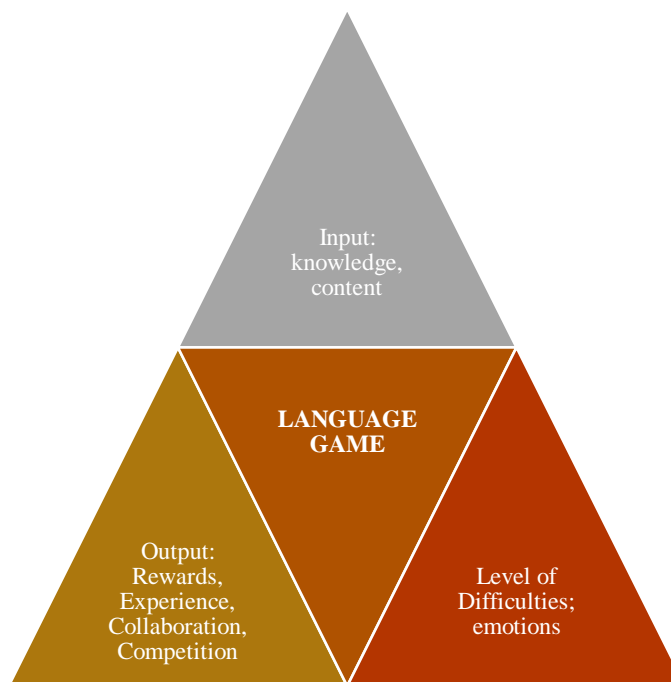


Figure 4: Essential elements of an educational game

A language or educational game must adhere certain characteristics although different context of a game may have different set of features. These characteristics, once pre-determined, are good in ensuring the validity and reliability of the game that is being developed. A good educator will use the chosen traits to his or her advantage in terms of future research especially in designing the best framework for an educational or language game.

In addition, Lazarro (2004) in her research mentions the integration of emotions in designing a game so that the process of creating language game will not be monotonous. Among the emotions are:

- a) Fear,
- b) Surprise,
- c) Disgust,
- d) Pride,
- e) Personal Triumph,
- f) Gloat over misfortune of the rival,
- g) Wonder.

5. Designing Language Game

Müller, Reise and Seliger (2015) proposes seven steps in designing a language game. The diagram below portrays the seven proposed elements:



Figure 5: The seven steps of language game design

The first step (love) requires the game developer (in this sense, the educators) to ‘fall in love’ when designing the game or the game will be a failure. Next, the second step which elaborate strategy and get ready would require the game developer to get as much knowledge as possible in designing the game and to investigate the needs of the player (in this sense, the students). Then, the third step (visualise the Why, What and Who) is the step where the game developer must understand the player as well as to identify which learning experience that the learners require. Step 4 which is exploring a new world is where the game developer designs the themes and the storyboard of the language game. In this step, game developer is required to be creative so that the language game will be more interesting and exciting. The fifth step which is leveling up the mechanics, the game developer is required to use gaming features such as the use of icons or avatar, badges for reward system, progressing bar and scoring board in the game. These features function not only to motivate the players but also to convey information pertaining to the game’s purpose. Next, step 6 which is upgrade the graphics, entails game developer to upgrade the surface of the game to an eye-catching appearance which will arouse the interest of the players. Finally, the last step which is repeated play tests would require the game developer to test and re-test the end-product in order to ensure its validity and reliability.

The above proposed steps are always interchangeable. Game developers are advised to read in depth on more studies done in this are to produce better and reliable language game design.

6. Language Gamification and Its Impact

In acquiring a second language, what matters the most to educators is to ensure the content of the lesson is delivered effectively. With recent researches in language gamification, researchers now realise the values that gamification brings to learning language are significant and therefore, they start to mention the benefits of this idea. Bruder (2014) further explains in her research the impacts of gamification in language learning which are:

- a) boosts enthusiasm,
- b) lessens disruptive behaviours,
- c) increases cognitive growth,
- d) improves maturity,
- e) increase attention span.

Müller, Reise and Seliger (2015) states the abundant advantages in gamification especially concerning language acquisition such as experiential learning, activity engagement, focus, critical thinking and participation. Myhre (2015) also elaborates on

the notion of gamification advantages in her study. She explains that, gamification has become more effective that in certain countries in Europe are beginning to adopt to this T&L strategy in the classroom. She further claims that gamification has also helped to increase the students' participation in classroom activities because of its features that are similar to the one of games at home.

In different context, Perry (2014) states that some educators use game-like activities to gauge students' scores. These scores are now replacing the conventional method of assessment such as test, quiz, and final exams.

Certain researchers may be indifferent in terms of the benefits that gamification in language may hold. However, it is understood that the differences may not affect the purpose of designing language game.

7. Conclusion

The ubiquitous learning technologies has somehow given a major shift in teaching and learning throughout the world. Language educators sometimes not only face the challenge of new technologies in learning but also to embrace the fact that students are now resourceful and adaptive. Without disregarding the idea of conventional methodology, educators must overcome the fear of trying new strategies in teaching. They should be more adaptive, open and willing to learn and discover new things in teaching as how the students do in learning. Language gamification provides a platform for educators to become one.

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