Using a customized board game to improve English learning's experience and effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

English language learning is an integral part of basic education in Indonesia today. However, not all students have equal opportunities to learn English. Elementary school children in Kucur village, in particular, are among those who lack sufficient access to learning English outside the classroom due to their family circumstances. Fortunately, there is a Learning Center called Cakrawangsa managed by the local youth organization (Karang Taruna) in Krajan hamlet, Kucur village. This center provides educational assistance to students. However, the center lacks permanent human resources to support students in learning English. In 2021, the community engagement team from Ma Chung University conducted once-a-week fun English learning sessions. Based on the evaluation results of the program, the participants greatly enjoyed the fun learning approach delivered by the Ma Chung University community engagement team. However, some students still struggled to memorize English vocabulary and pronounce it accurately. Therefore, the proposing team suggests a supplementary English learning program using an enjoyable method that has the potential to enhance vocabulary mastery. Based on conducted studies, the proposing team has developed a relevant board game tailored to the students' environment as an engaging and effective tool to support English language teaching.

1.   INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization demands English language proficiency, both active and passive. This condition requires quality resources capable of communicating in various foreign languages, especially English. Therefore, the introduction to the English language has been initiated from an early age (preschool/early childhood education) to facilitate the English learning process. According to Hammerly (1982), the education and learning of a foreign or second language is best initiated at an early age. Kusumaningrum and Dwitantyanov (2019) state that given the importance of English language mastery, early introduction to children is crucial. Jazuly (2016) further emphasizes the importance of English language education to improve children's future careers.

In the context of education in Indonesia, this has been implemented for over 20 years, evident in the inclusion of English language lessons in primary education. Sutarsyah (2017) elaborates how the

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English language education can be implemented successfully in Lampung urban and rural areas. This is also true for schools in rural areas, including the Public Primary Schools and Islamic Primary Schools in the village of Kucur, Dau sub-district. Elementary school children in this village also receive English language instruction at school.

However, due to challenging home environments, children often lack assistance when facing learning difficulties. Most residents of the village of Kucur work as farmers, factory employees, or domestic helpers. Fatigue after a day's work and lack of familiarity with elementary school learning methods prevent parents from assisting their children's studies. This challenge became more prominent during the 2020 and 2021 pandemic years, with full online learning making it even harder for parents to support their children's education (Al Hakim & Azis, 2021; Astuti & Harun, 2021; Manik et al. 2022; Wulandari et al. 2021)

Prior to the pandemic, the youth organization (Karang Taruna) in the village of Kucur initiated the establishment of learning centers in each hamlet to assist children's studies. Several volunteers, who were members of Karang Taruna, organized these learning centers voluntarily to help elementary school students in the village of Kucur review school lessons and overcome difficulties with their homework. During the pandemic, when online learning made studying more challenging, these learning centers in the village of Kucur greatly assisted students in their studies.

In the context of English language learning from early childhood to elementary school, the learning centers in the village of Kucur have also assisted students. One such learning center, called "Sanggar Cakrawangsa" located in Krajan hamlet, the village of Kucur, collaborated with the Community Service Team of Ma Chung University to provide English language teaching once a week (1-hour duration). This activity took place for 8 months in 2021 and offered solutions, including: (1) The availability of English language teaching volunteers involving Ma Chung University students; (2) An increase in student participation due to the enjoyable learning environment; and (3) The provision of English language teaching modules and materials (Sukaton et al., 2022).

After learning with the Ma Chung University Community Service Team in 2021, it was found that the challenges faced by children learning English at Sanggar Cakrawangsa were memorizing vocabulary and pronouncing words correctly. Various fun learning methods were implemented in the Community Service activities conducted by Ma Chung University's team in 2021, including singing, playing memory games with cards, and word-guessing games with prizes to motivate students to learn enthusiastically. However, the family and community environment did not fully support English language practice, as participants predominantly used the Javanese language for daily communication. This presented a challenge for the Ma Chung University Community Service Team (faculty members and students) to continuously seek effective teaching techniques to facilitate vocabulary memorization in English.

In reference to the Medium-Term Development Plan of the village of Kucur (RPJMDes), the priority of this activity is to support educational development, particularly enhancing the community's understanding of the importance of early childhood education, preschool, primary and secondary education, and higher education.

Based on the identified issues at Sanggar Cakrawangsa Learning Center, the proposed solutions are as follows: (1) Utilizing board games in English language learning to enhance vocabulary memorization among students; (2) Modifying existing board games to make the content more relatable to students' daily lives, enhancing the enjoyable aspect; (3) Teaching the use of board games to the volunteer team at Sanggar Cakrawangsa Learning Center, encouraging occasional use of board games during other learning days.

The vocabulary learning method involving board games was selected based on conclusions drawn from existing studies. Ratminingsih (2018) found that using board games in English language teaching for grades 4, 5, and 6 yielded better learning outcomes, both quantitatively and qualitatively, compared to not using board games. Specifically, Dwi (2017) emphasized that using the Pictionary Board Game yielded better quantitative and qualitative vocabulary mastery outcomes. Lastly, based on a study conducted in Malang regency, Lukitaningtyas et al. (2019) found that using Scrabble in just two sessions significantly improved vocabulary mastery. Ummulkhair et al. (2021) highlight the effectiveness of using vocabulary quizzes in order to boost elementary school children's vocabulary in a relatively short period. Considering these studies, the proposing team concluded that using board games has the potential to create an enjoyable learning experience and enhance students' mastery of the English vocabulary they are learning.

2.   METHODS

Here are several stages that will be carried out in implementing community service at Sanggar Belajar Cakrawangsa.

Table 1. The method is based on identifying problems, solutions, and target outcomes

Problems	Solution and Targeted Outcome	Approach
Unconducive learning atmosphere	Creating English language learning classes using board game methods	Continuing the learning with additional use of board games
Engaging learning media is not yet available.	Creating a board game for learning media.	Inviting volunteer/youth group companions to occasionally use board games during mentoring on other days.

From the activity stages in Table 1, the community engagement team will involve students from the English Literature Program to serve as instructors using the board game method. The participating students are those who have been involved in teaching during the community engagement activities at Sanggar Belajar Cakrawangsa in 2021. Meanwhile, the board game method will be developed by the supervising faculty member and then utilized as a teaching medium. In alignment with the goals of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative, the participating students will receive recognition through a conversion system determined by the supervising faculty member.

The implementation plan/stages of the activities are as follows: (1) Selection of volunteer assistants (from English Literature students at Universitas Ma Chung); (2) Socialization of the mentoring plan and Training of Trainers (ToT) for the assistants; (3) Implementation of the mentoring activities; (4) Modification of the board game to suit the learners' environment; (5) Training of volunteers/Karang Taruna from Dusun Krajan to occasionally use the board game during other mentoring sessions; and (6) Playing the board game on a weekly basis.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation in 2022, all face-to-face (offline) activities conducted during the mentoring at Sanggar Belajar Cakrawangsa must strictly adhere to the Health Protocol regulations. Efforts for mentoring and learning will still be carried out maximally by limiting the number of students in attendance during mentoring sessions (half of the learning center's capacity and group division). Additionally, throughout the mentoring process, the 3M measures will be enforced: wearing masks, washing hands, and maintaining physical distancing.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main output of this community service program is a board game that can serve as a teaching aid to support English language learning, making it engaging and not monotonous. However, this board game must also be effectively used for practicing word production in English. Therefore, the designed board game should be accompanied by instructional elements that enable players to engage in oral production in English. The key elements of the Kucur Adventure board game include location cards (landscape), body part cards, activity cards (verbs), game tokens, and a snake-and-ladder game board. The mentioned elements will be discussed in more detail one by one.

Object Cards

The location cards are used to train students' vocabulary in recognizing objects around their living area. There are a total of 10 cards, each with a red-colored background on the back as an indicator. As seen in Figure 1, the selected locations are those that can be found around the Village of Kucur. A mosque, a school, a spring, a swimming pool, an orange plantation, a coffee plantation, a waterfall, a hill, a market, and a town square are the target vocabulary that is expected to be produced orally by students while playing the board game. The reason for choosing these locations within the village of Kucur is to enable students to quickly associate words with the concept of places, as these locations are already familiar to the students of Sanggar Cakrawangsa.

Figure 1. Places cards

Body Parts Cards

As we can see in Figure 2, the body part cards are used to train students in producing vocabulary that identifies parts of their body in English. These cards have a green-colored background on the back as an indicator. The target vocabulary that is expected to be produced by students includes ears, hair, nails, eyes, hands, mouth, feet, nose, cheeks, and neck. Recognizing body parts is a fundamental language skill typically acquired by children at an early age. Therefore, cards that train oral production in identifying body parts must be included in the game. Some of the images on the cards, as observed in Figure 2, have the potential for dual meanings. For instance, the image of "nails" could possibly be interpreted as "fingers." However, as long as the produced vocabulary doesn't deviate significantly from the actual image, it can still be accepted.

Activity Cards (Verbs)

The Activity Cards are used to train students in recognizing and constructing simple sentences using the vocabulary listed on the cards, as seen in Figure 3. These cards have a yellow-colored background

on the back as an indicator. As we can see in Figure 3, these Activity Cards contain vocabulary such as: write, drink, laugh, draw, cook, watch, eat, swim, sweep, and read. Unlike the two previous sets of cards, the Activity Cards have clear labels and do not have the potential for misunderstanding. With these labels, students are expected to create simple sentences orally using the vocabulary on the cards. The vocabulary used can also be employed to practice grammar taught in class, such as simple present tense or present continuous.
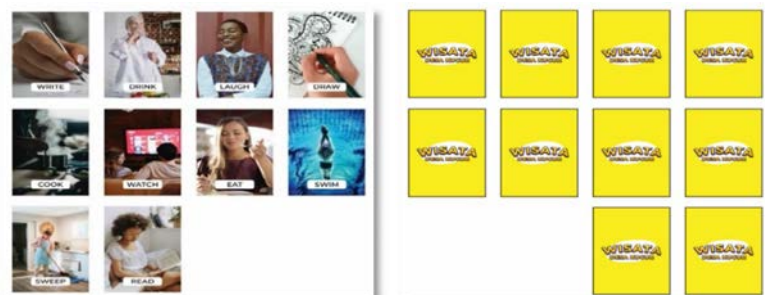

Figure 2. Body parts cards

Figure 3. Activity cards (verbs)

Game Tokens

The token designs in Figure 4 are used to represent players in the Kucur Adventure board game. As a result, the maximum number of players in a single game is 4 people. These token designs are crafted in a way that allows students to practice cutting, folding, and assembling the token models shown in Figure 4. Students are expected to become skilled in these activities, which can also stimulate their motor skills development.

Snakes and Ladders Game

The initial concept of the Kucur Adventure board game is a modified version of the traditional "Snakes and Ladders" game. The choice of "Snakes and Ladders" is due to its widespread popularity among Indonesian communities. Furthermore, the basic premise of the game is simple enough for students at Sanggar Cakrawangsa to play. However, the concept of "Snakes and Ladders" used for this board game has been modified to facilitate oral production practice for the students of Sanggar Cakrawangsa. In Figure 5, we can observe that the design of the Kucur Adventure "Snakes and Ladders" differs from the typical version. On certain squares, specifically numbers 5, 20, 29, and 36, there are green, red, or yellow circles. The same applies to the snake's tail on squares numbered 17, 27, 42, and

47. These circles feature special activities that players must complete to continue the game. The game rules will be further explained in the subsection on game rules.

Another aspect that makes this "Snakes and Ladders" board unique is the selection of colors and characters. The board is dominated by primary colors, which are generally favored by young children. This is intended to capture students' attention and motivate them to engage in the board game activity. Additionally, the characters, including children, animals, and vegetables, are designed in a cute and appealing manner, with the hope that students will visually enjoy the board game.

Figure 4. Token cards
Figure 5. Kucur adventure snakes and ladders board game

Game Rules

All cards available in the Kucur Adventure board game set are grouped by color, shuffled, and placed beside the "Snakes and Ladders" board. All players place their game pieces at the starting point, and the youngest player is allowed to start first. If all participants are of the same age, the player who goes first is determined by rolling the dice. The player who rolls the higher dice number will start the game. Each player takes turns rolling the dice and moves their game piece according to the number rolled. If a player lands at the base of a ladder on squares numbered 5, 20, 29, or 36, the player must draw a card from the stack of cards provided, according to the corresponding color. The player must perform the instruction on the card drawn (e.g., if a red card is drawn, the player must state the location printed on the card in English). If the player successfully completes the task, they are allowed to climb the ladder. If the player fails to complete the task within 10 seconds, they are not allowed to climb the ladder. The drawn card is placed at the bottom of the corresponding color stack. If a player lands at the tail of a snake on squares numbered 17, 27, 42, or 47, the player must draw a card from the stack of cards provided, according to the corresponding color. The player must perform the instruction on the card drawn (e.g., if a red card is drawn, the player must state the location printed on the card in English). If the player successfully completes the task, they are allowed to remain at the snake's tail. If the player fails to complete the task within 10 seconds, they must move down to the snake's head. The drawn card is placed at the bottom of the corresponding color stack. The player who reaches the FINISH spot (not square number 50) is the winner of the game. If a player rolls the dice and the number exceeds the FINISH spot, the player must move backward according to the remaining steps.

These are the basic rules of the Kucur Adventure board game. Rule modifications can be made based on agreement among educators and players. Examples of rule modifications include using different tenses for the sentences on the Activity (Verb) Cards, such as simple present tense, simple past tense, present continuous, etc. Another example of a rule modification is allowing all players to pass through the FINISH spot before ending the game.

Training and mentoring of volunteers

In order to make sure that the program runs smoothly, recruiting capable volunteers is a must. Student's volunteers are recruited and underwent a rigorous training program before they could go to *Sanggar Cakrawangsa*. As a result, five volunteers were chosen to teach in Sanggar Cakrawangsa to implement the board game method as shown in Figure 6. The training for volunteers included, but not restricted to, how to teach vocabulary in the activity, body parts, and places cards, how to teach the board game rules, and how to teach expressions that can be used during playing the games.

Figure 6. Teaching assistants who volunteered from Ma Chung University

Playing the board game

Due to the fun nature of playing board game, students showed more enthusiasm toward learning English. Most of the students were looking forward to Saturday, the schedule for English lesson in *Sanggar Cakrawangsa*, because they wanted to have more time playing the board game. Figure 7 illustrates how enthusiastic the students are when they are learning English by playing with the board game. Some *Karang Taruna* mentors can be seen playing the board game as well on Figure 7 (the one wearing a green shirt and the other one wears a white cardigan).

Figure 7. Students and volunteers are playing the board game

Discussion

The process of creating the Kucur Adventure board game went smoothly without significant obstacles. Everything planned during the pre-production phase (brainstorming and conceptualizing the board game) was executed well by the board game production team. It is hoped that this board game can serve as an effective teaching aid for English language learning at Sanggar Cakrawangsa. The support from the participants, shown by their high enthusiasm for playing the board game, also played a crucial role in the success of this program. However, there are several challenges that need to be addressed for the sustainable implementation of this program.

In practice, one main challenge to the smooth execution of the program is the readiness of the participants to play the game in a structured manner and according to the established rules. Many of the participants at Sanggar Cakrawangsa are still young and may have difficulty following the game rules completely. For instance, they might not follow rules number 4 and 5 from the game instructions. Often, they play the game using rules they are already familiar with. Elementary school children need extra guidance and possibly extensive training in order to be able to play more complex board games (Chen & Chi, 2022). Additionally, some participants may follow the game rules, but their English language production does not meet the desired outcomes. To address this, the proposed solution is to appoint a referee/game master who can enforce the rules and is proficient in intermediate-level English production. Apart from volunteer students from Universitas Ma Chung, the mentors from *Sanggar Cakrawangsa* should also be equipped with the skills to act as game masters to ensure the participants can continue playing the Kucur Adventure board game. Fortunately, the mentors from *Sanggar Cakrawangsa* are willing to cooperate and undergo training to become game masters.

Another issue that needs attention is the storage of the Kucur Adventure board game assets, which are delicate by nature. The primary material used for the assets is art carton, which is not water-resistant and can easily get wrinkled or damaged. Sanggar Cakrawangsa has a small cabinet typically used for storing teaching materials. Thus, a suitable storage place is available. However, since the game is played mostly by children aged 5-8 years, who may not be able to regulate their emotions, there is a possibility of unintentional damage to the game assets. Currently, the solution involves relying on the game master to ensure the proper condition of the board game assets entrusted to Sanggar Cakrawangsa. This can be improved by selecting more durable materials or adding additional layers to the game assets, such as laminating. Another option is to provide special packaging for the board game, ensuring that it remains in optimal condition before and after use.

Despite the challenges mentioned, the Kucur Adventure board game has numerous positive impacts on the participants. Firstly, there is an increase in the number of participants at Sanggar Cakrawangsa due to the desire to play the Kucur Adventure board game. Some participants share their game experiences with their friends at school, leading to an increase in the number of participants as reported by the *Karang Taruna* volunteers. Secondly, there is an increase in speaking activities among participants because the game requires active engagement for it to continue. This aligns with Krashen's (1981) suggestion of maximizing input to achieve effective language acquisition. Thirdly, there is an increase in the participants' interest in preserving the local area around their residence. Many participants were not familiar with the potential tourist destinations in Kucur. With the introduction of this board game, participants become more aware of the local attractions in Kucur and develop a sense of responsibility for preserving their local environment.

4.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This community engagement program aims to provide added value to English language instruction at Sanggar Cakrawangsa, which has been in operation since 2021. With the introduction of the Kucur Adventure board game, participants at Sanggar Cakrawangsa have a language learning activity directly linked to their surroundings, enhancing the effectiveness of their English language acquisition. The Kucur Adventure board game also serves as a means of exposure for Sanggar Cakrawangsa to attract new participants. The main factor contributing to the success of creating this teaching aid is its user-friendly gameplay, coupled with the additional benefit of practicing English pronunciation. The Kucur Adventure board game is also expected to stimulate participants at Sanggar Cakrawangsa to preserve the local tourism potential in Kucur Village. Therefore, participants are anticipated to become

ambassadors, disseminating information about Kucur's tourism potential to the community. For the mentors at Sanggar Cakrawangsa, the hope is that this board game will continue to be utilized to actively stimulate participants in using the English language.

Guidance for Sanggar Cakrawangsa still needs to be conducted periodically, even though there are now modules and the Kucur Adventure board game. This is to ensure that the English class program every Saturday afternoon continues to run. Without external support, this class program may not run every week. This is due to the limited number of mentors at Sanggar Cakrawangsa and the availability of the village's Karang Taruna group. As for the board game itself, ongoing guidance is necessary until the participants and members of Sanggar Cakrawangsa can independently engage in the game.

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