

## GAME-BASED ENGLISH LESSONS FOR SLOW LEARNERS IN SDIT HIDAYATULLAH, YOGYAKARTA

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### ABSTRACT

*Slow learners have been a part of inclusive class in Yogyakarta. This type of learner appears to be fairly normal in general; however, at times of learning process, they find it quite hard to cope up with the average pace applied in class. It needs a lot of efforts in designing learning material for slow learners, since these learners have limited attention span, low basic skills, and sometimes, careless with their works. This study proposes the use of game in bridging the aforementioned shortcomings. Nowadays, games have been widely used and accept in English classes for the purpose of enhancing vocabulary mastery. This approach is adapted in Kelas Amanah (inclusive class specially designed for students with learning disabilities) in SDIT Hidayatullah, Yogyakarta. This study examined the use of game, especially among slow learners and its effectiveness to enhance their vocabulary mastery. The study conducted in the inclusive class of the school in which the students are mostly slow learners. The writers observed 5<sup>th</sup> grade students during lesson before decided the material that would be delivered in class. In the agreed time, the students were given review of the previous meeting, with pre and post-test treatment. The result of the study shows that students enjoyed game-based lesson and involved actively throughout the process. The games used helped students to memorize the vocabulary better.*

**Field of Research:** Games, English lessons, Slow Learners.

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### 1. Introduction

Inclusive class has been part of Indonesian Government's policy for years, as stated in 1945 National Constitution article 31 paragraph 1 and Regulation No. 20/2003 on National Education System. In addition, a separate regulation on inclusive class has been made by issuing Ministerial Regulation No. 70/2009. These regulations provide access to equal education for students with special needs or abilities. The Government mainly aims at qualified, humanistic, and democratic education service for these special students. Thus, primary and secondary schools are encouraged to fight discrimination by providing equal chances for these students. Additionally, schools are also given the chance to adapt and to modify, if necessary, their curriculum. A common form of inclusive class which takes place in Jogjakarta Special Province is regular class with addition of student(s) with special needs. The student(s) also gets a special teacher called *Guru Pembimbing Khusus* to assist him/her during classes. A special case occurred in SDIT Hidayatullah (Hidayatullah Islamic Primary School). In this school, instead of placing student with special needs in each regular grade, the school decided to have the students learnt in a class arranged specifically for them. The class called *Kelas Amanah*, a mixed-grade class handled by two teachers. There were about 12 students in the class with various learning

disabilities. Teachers of *Kelas Amanah* defined students' common problem in class as difficulties in concentrating. The teachers stated that their students should finish school's main tasks, memorizing Quran verses and learning general knowledge, painstakingly. The students tended to lost interest as soon as the lesson started and unable to reflect on what had been learnt. The teachers also mentioned that most of their students were slow learners. The term 'slow learners' attached to students who are not disabled students. They just find traditional academic demands in regular class much more challenging (Ramlakshmi, 2013). In general, slow learners have poor self-esteem as a result of their problems with coordination, tendency of being quiet and shy, trouble in making friends, and short attention span.

Since the academic year of 2013/2014, English in primary school is no longer a compulsory lesson. Ministry of Education and Culture removed English—along with Physical Education and Information and Communication Technology lessons—in its 2013 curriculum. These subjects become extracurricular activities in which each school can freely manage the subjects according to the school's needs. In SDIT Hidayatullah, English class is conducted in grade 4, 5, and 6. Each week, students learn English for two school hours (70 minutes) underlining on vocabulary and grammar mastery. Students in *Kelas Amanah* were given English textbooks which contained thematic lessons with vocabulary and grammar as part of the lesson. As observed during English lesson in *Kelas Amanah*, the teachers tended to follow chapters in the textbooks and repeated the material several times to make sure the students caught the essence of the material taught. Very limited variation used in class, including the use of games to enhance students' understanding.

Thus, this study aims to examine the use of games, especially among slow learners, in English lessons of *Kelas Amanah* and its effectiveness to enhance their vocabulary mastery. The writers conducted the study under the university's community service program. The writers choose SDIT Hidayatullah as the partner for it is the nearest primary school which implemented inclusive class. The school has also worked with some of the university's research projects and community services. This study wishes to contribute in giving real illustration on the use of games in English lessons for slow learners.

## 2. Game-based learning

Game-based learning is one of teaching methods which puts theory into practice in fun ways. This method will then be described in lesson plan. There are so many opportunities for the teacher when they want to efficiently initiate activities throughout students' learning times. Game-based learning will help the teacher to determine what games that is suitable with the discussed materials, so that the students can understand the materials easily. Game-based learning refers to the borrowing of certain gaming principles and applying them to real-life settings to engage users (Trybus, 2015, in Pho & Dinscore, 2015). Here, students can involve in a playful and dynamic way. This method will give a new atmosphere for the students; moreover, it helps to strengthen students' memory. Besides, playing also contributes significantly in children's cognitive development. Piaget (1962, in Plass, Homer, & Kinzer, 2015) asserts that play activates children's schemas in ways that allow children to transcend their immediate reality. In a language class, for instance, teacher can give a Q-Card which contains vocabularies and pictures, so the students can get the meaning easily when they see the pictures. Here, students not only visually recognize the objects, but also linguistically obtain the vocabularies.

## 3. Slow learners

Slow learners share similar characteristics as momentarily aggressive behavior, disinterest in the learning task, short attention span and poor concentration which all resulted in below the average expected academic performance (Ramlakshmi, 2013; Vasudevan, 2017). These learners are mostly children who has low learning achievement that they need to be treated quite differently from regular students. Slow learners also tend to be more reserved and shy; they are not mentally retarded and are not classified as normal children. However, slow learners are different from mentally retarded learners. slow learners can actually achieve the standard among regular learners, although they require longer time to accomplish it. Their main academic weaknesses are in terms of reading, speaking, remembering,

socializing and behaving. There are some strategies to work with slow learners, such as, providing a space with minimum distraction, giving continuous praise and support, dividing a lesson into some short work periods, varying the class routines with games, puzzles and other techniques, designing materials that is not too hard or too easy, and creating a continuously fun learning (Ramlakshmi, 2013).

#### 4. SDIT Hidayatullah

SDIT Hidayatullah (Hidayatullah Islamic Primary School) YOGYAKARTA is a private school under As-Sakinah foundation, Yogyakarta. It established in July 1998. SDIT Hidayatullah is located in Balong, Donoharjo, Sleman, Yogyakarta. This school has about 60 items to be references in all aspects of character building habituation. For instance, aside from learning in class, they learn in groups (*khalaqah*) on Qur'an recitation, life lesson from the stories of Prophet Muhammad and his companions, and how to be pious Salafi generation. The students of SDIT Hidayatullah also study with Thematic Learning, as regulated in the 2013 Curriculum. Additionally, they periodically have entrepreneur class and excursion/outbound. SDIT Hidayatullah has one inclusion class namely *Kelas Amanah* with a number of children with lower pace of learning. There are about 12 students from grades 1 to 6 that learn together with two teachers in one classroom. This class is said to be the inclusion because it contains children who need a more specialized approach to learning. English in this inclusion class is only given to students in grade 4-6. The inclusive model that SDIT Hidayatullah adopt is in-line with 'Group Coupled to School' model. Here, students with learning difficulties learn in a separate class; whenever possible, students in this class can participate in activities of the regular classes (Pijl & Hamstra, 2005).

#### 5. Methodology

This study was conducted under the university's community service program. It employed qualitative approach to collect as well as to analyze the data from the field. Creswell (2014) mentions some characteristics of qualitative study that match with the nature of this study. These characteristics are collecting the data in natural setting, gathering the data through documents, and participants' behavior and response, relying on multiple data resources, and interpreting the participants' meanings upon certain problem or issue. SDIT Hidayatullah is located approximately 3.2 km from the campus of Islamic University of Indonesia. *Kelas Amanah* which became the subject of the study had 12 students, ranging from Grade 1 – 6. The number of the students could change throughout the academic year, according to progress and adaptability of each student. At the time the study carried out, the number of students observed were 3 students as English was taught only to Grades 4 – 6. The writers conducted the service program in two steps. First, the writers observed the English lesson conducted in *Kelas Amanah*. The following week, based on the observation data, the writers composed materials that would be delivered in class, including pre and posttest to measure students' comprehension. After getting the data from the teaching session, the writers analyzed the findings and discussed them. The results were then summarized and reported in this paper.

#### 6. Findings & Discussion

##### 6.1. Findings

Observation was conducted in 11 January 2018. In *Kelas Amanah*, there were 12 students; 11 male students and 1 female students. The class taught by Ms. A and Ms. D. The tables were in U-shape, facing their teachers. Students learnt in turn, according to their grades and subjects. According to the teachers, the students were mostly hard to concentrate. The class looked like other regular classes, with significant addition of toys by the back of the class. Students freely played with the toys as they waited for their turn. When a student got his/her turn, he/she would have paper and pencil ready, as well as school's textbooks for the lesson. Class was a bit chaotic since each teacher can only handle 1 or 2 students at a time. The rest were sitting and playing the toys at the back of the class or even sleeping in the play mat. While observing for the English lesson, Ms. A who handled English lessons for all grades,

mainly used Grammar-Translation method in delivering the materials. She needed quite some time to get the students ready. In the middle of the lesson, she kept repeating key vocabularies and asked her students to write down the sentences she dictated in their notebooks. Occasionally, she also asked students to write down sentences on the whiteboard. No game involved by the beginning, middle, or end of the class. The lesson's preparation and transition obviously overwhelmed the teacher.

Teaching practice was conducted in 18 January 2018. Ms. A allowed us to conduct a lesson with the 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Materials for teaching based on the theme used the previous week, *At the Bookstore*. The writers provided Pre and Post-tests in which each test consists of 10 questions. Here, students should match pictures with provided words. There were 3 students, named R, F, and A. Each student should work on the pre/post-test separately. However, A refused to work individually. Consequently, A worked with R and F work by herself. Following the pre-test, materials were all delivered through games. The games emphasized on vocabulary mastery and divided into 3 levels, such as, words, phrases, and sentences. Snake and Ladder was the first game that points out common vocabularies used in theme learnt. The words covered two types of parts of speech, Noun and Verb. The writers prepared 20 cards which contained pictures about bookstore. Each of the students took turn to roll the dice and guess the word that described the pictures. They were considered excited in playing the game.



Figure 1. Activity in Game 1: Snake and Ladder

The next game was matching pictures with the provided words. This game was a continuation of the previous game and put emphasis on phrase formation. The writers prepared 4 worksheets containing pictures that could be combined into phrases. Students worked in-group to put word under each picture. This game was quite a challenge to the students since each phrase required two words and students tended to be a bit mixed up.



Figure 2. Activity in Game 2: Matching Pictures with Words

The last game was sentence formation. The writers planned to provide another worksheet that each student should fill out (with provided picture in each blank space) with the correct words or phrases. Nevertheless, due to time constraint, the third game could not be implemented.

## 6.2. Discussion

As the writers conducted teaching practice in *Kelas Amanah*, there are two focal points that can be taken into account. First of all, the use of games in this class surely raises students' interest. Students enjoyed game-based lesson and involved actively throughout the process. Nevertheless, seeing the circumstances in *Kelas Amanah*, it is understandable that teachers have limited option of learning strategies. In terms of language learning, slow learners may have had negative past experiences of learning and consequently lost interest; they may also be characterized by the inadequate use of learning strategies (Paul, 2016). The second point of aforementioned statement highlights a problem that the writers found in class. The number of students that the teachers have to handle and psychological problem that each student has are some issues that may hinder the teachers to try out and to adapt more suitable learning strategies. As mentioned in the first part of findings, the writers point out on dictating technique that Ms. A used. It didn't take long time to make students bored and automatically followed by loss of interest.

Secondly, the games used helped students to memorize the vocabulary better. It can be observed from the result of pre and posttest. The writers gave 10 questions on vocabulary mastery related to *At the Bookstore*. The result of the pre-test showed that F made 4 correct answers; while R and A made 5 correct answers. Materials then delivered through games that kept repeating the same vocabularies, with a little variation in the phrase part. After that, post-test conducted to see the result of the given treatment. F, R, and A managed to correctly answered all of the questions. Here, the writers see games conducted in-between pre and post-test significantly help the students to recollect the vocabularies. Even though F, R, and A were mostly unsuccessful in winning the game in first try, they kept showing enthusiasm in playing the game. This concept is in-line with the argument that game-based learning highlights the ability of games itself to engage and motivate players by providing experiences that they enjoy and want to continue (Plass et al., 2015). Additionally, Raptivity (2018) correspondingly states that the combination of instructional design and multimedia has stimulated the creation of exciting gaming environments for engaging the learners with ease. Therefore, retention of the lesson taught can be managed without any difficulty.

## 7. Conclusion and Future Recommendation

To sum up, the study conducted in two steps, namely observation and teaching practice. From the observation, the writers found out that students were mostly hard to concentrate, class arrangement and handling did not meet the students' overall needs, and learning strategy used commonly led to disinterest. Furthermore, teachers found it challenging to handle lesson preparation and transition. From the teaching practice, three 5<sup>th</sup> graders of *Kelas Amanah* joined us. They worked on only 2 out of 3 games that the writers had prepared. Here, they enthusiastically played the game and managed to finish the task assigned to them. However, the students still found difficulties in arranging phrases and tended to get a bit mixed up. In general, the result shows that students enjoyed game-based lesson and involved actively throughout the process and the games used helped students to memorize the vocabulary better.

Accordingly, the writers encouraged the teachers of *Kelas Amanah* to start employing game as a learning strategy that may benefit their students in a long run. A training on designing game-based learning, especially for slow learners, is a follow up activity that the writers propose to conduct with *Kelas Amanah's* teachers. Unfortunately, the school has a strict rule upon the use of gadgets in class. Hence, the writers need to explore alternative approach in applying game-based learning which is not greatly relied on technology.

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