FERRET FOODIE: A NUTRITIONAL CARD GAME FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THAILAND

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Ferret Foodie is an improved version of the Food Mission nutritional card game for elementary school students in Thailand. The design of this card game is very colorful, attractive and appealing to the elementary school students. The game can be played in six different variations with the varying degrees of challenges. Three postgraduate students test-played and validated the card game playability. Two elementary school teachers from a private elementary school in Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand, validated the content and playability of the card game. 142 six graders then participated in the study. Classroom observations and interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A simple questionnaire was administered to the students to gauge their response towards the Ferret Foodie card game. The results show that the postgraduate students felt that the Ferret Food card game was age appropriate and was a good way to encourage the students to use simple English language. The elementary school science teachers became more confident in using card games in the classroom. The Ferret Foodie card game has to some extent helped the students to acquire new vocabulary, read and spell simple words, ask and answer simple questions in English. This article further discusses the implementation of Ferret Foodie card game in the classroom. It also recommends some guidelines for the teachers on how to use game-based learning in teaching new vocabulary to elementary school students.

Keywords: game-based learning; elementary school teachers; vocabulary; teach English language

Introduction and Background Overview

Game-based learning is increasingly gaining popularity in elementary schools of Thailand. Nevertheless, teaching/learning of English vocabulary is still predominantly teacher-centered and text-book oriented. Teachers are often burdened with paperwork, limited in their knowledge in game-based learning and hindered by the large class size

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(which is inconvenient when it comes to using games in the classroom). Game-based learning has many advantages for students. Literature review suggests that students pay more attention in learning (Vernon, 2009), benefit in their cognitive, motivational, affective and sociocultural domains (Druckman, 1995; Plass et al., 2015), academic achievement (Trajkovik et al., 2017) and problem-solving skills when games are actively used. Games can be a good edutainment tool (Mostowfi et al., 2016) since they teach students new vocabulary and make it easier for them to remember (Bakhsh, 2016). It can also be used as an assessment tool (Kirikaya et al., 2010) for evaluation of students' acquisition of new vocabulary and its meanings. Contrastingly, some literature review argue that game-based learning is not the most superior learning method (Druckman, 1995).

In this article, the researcher will explore the educational value of using the Ferret Foodie card game in teaching new vocabulary in English language to grade six of the elementary school in Thailand. Perspectives from three postgraduate students, two elementary school teachers and responses from the elementary school students themselves are investigated.

Research objectives

This research project has three key objectives:

- to investigate the quality of the Ferret Foodie card game in teaching new vocabulary to grade six elementary school students from the postgraduate students' point of view;
- to investigate the quality of the Ferret Foodie card game in teaching new vocabulary to grade six elementary school students from the elementary school teachers' point of view;
- to investigate grade six elementary school students' response towards the Ferret Foodie card game in helping them to learn new vocabulary.

Research questions

This research project attempts to answer the following three research questions:

What is the response of the postgraduate students towards the quality of the Ferret Foodie card game in teaching new vocabulary to the grade six elementary school students?

What is the response of the elementary school teachers towards the quality of the Ferret Foodie card game in teaching new vocabulary to the grade six elementary school students?

What is the response of the grade six elementary school students towards the Ferret Foodie card game in helping them to learn new vocabulary?

Significance of the study

Teaching vocabulary in English language to elementary school students in Thailand can be a challenging and daunting task. The learning environment in the classroom is mundane and does not support the acquisition of new vocabulary.

Games can be popular among the elementary school students because students learn best when they play (Lewis & Bedson, 1999). Students can interact, discover and experiment in their learning environment (Bakhsh, 2016).

Also, games allow students to explore and make mistakes. With games, students can learn new vocabulary fast and also retain the words better (Uberman, 1998; Huyen & Nga, 2003). If the students want to be able to speak in English fluently, they need appropriate

learning aids to stimulate the acquisition of new vocabulary (Harmer, 2008). Game-based learning can be an effective tool to teach vocabulary to students (Vernon, 2009).

Although there have been some efforts to promote the use of games in the classroom in Thailand, there was limited research that directly studied the use of card games to teach elementary school students vocabulary in schools. This research can have a significant contribution in helping students to acquire new vocabulary if proven that the Ferret Foodie card game can influence the students' learning.

Methodology

Research participants

The research participants were three post-graduate students, two elementary school teachers, and 142 six-graders studying in a private school in Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand.

Research materials

The Ferret Foodie card game itself is used as the key research material in this study. This is an improved version of the Mission Food card game. The cards are more colorful, attractive and durable. Six variations are included with different degrees of challenge in the game. A simple questionnaire with emojis was used to gauge the elementary school students' response towards the Ferret Foodie card game. The questionnaire was administered at the end of the game play.

Data collection and data analysis

The researcher contacted the postgraduate students and elementary school teachers via LINE informing them about the research purpose. The researcher later sought approval from the school principal to conduct the research directly in the classroom. The duration of data collection was three months, from February to April 2021.

The Ferret Foodie card game was first test played to assess its playability with postgraduate students. These postgraduate students were selected because they are lovers of card games overall. They spend a lot of time playing card games and they also have sufficient knowledge in game-based learning. After that, the elementary school teachers test played and validated the game contents. Once the contents were verified, the elementary school teachers carried out the in-classroom implementation.

They first familiarized their students with the game rules by pre-training them before the actual implementation. Each game play lasted about 20-30 minutes in a class of 35-40 students.

Classroom implementation was completed in two months and was video-recorded. Interview transcripts were transcribed and coded for further data analysis.

Results

Perspectives of postgraduate students towards the Ferret Foodie card game.

During the test play, the postgraduate students gave the following comments:

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“I think The Ferret Foodie card game is good for the students. I like it because the rules are simple. Students can learn new words in the English language” (Postgraduate Student A).

“I think the Ferret Foodie card game can make the students learn new vocabulary” (Postgraduate Student C).

“It is good that words are printed on the cards. Students can read and say the words in English” (Postgraduate Student B).

“The students can ask questions in English. They can become confident in using English” (Postgraduate Student A).

“This card game is fun. Students will not be bored. If I am the student, I want to play it many times” (Postgraduate Student C)

“The students are young. So, you need to make the cards beautiful and colorful” (Postgraduate Student B).

“The size of the card is important. The students have small hands” (Postgraduate Student A).

“Students can learn to spell the words in English” (Postgraduate Student C).

“If the students have played the game before, like UNO. I think they will know the rules. They can enjoy the game” (Postgraduate Student B).

“The words on the cards need to be big. So, the students can read and spell the words” (Postgraduate Student C).

The interview data with the postgraduate students revealed a number of interesting points. They agreed that the Ferret Foodie card game was fun to play. The rules are simple for the students to follow. The pictures are colorful and child-oriented. They appreciated the educational values included in the card game like reading and spelling the words, speaking and asking questions in the simple English language.

The attitude of elementary school teachers towards the Ferret Foodie card game

During the test play, the elementary science teachers commented as follows:

“The Ferret Foodie card game is interesting. It introduces many new words to the students. They can learn to read and spell the words. The students need to learn new words because they are speakers of English as a second language or maybe their third language” (Teacher A).

Teacher B stated that:

“The card game is a fun way of learning not just the new words. I think students will enjoy the card games because they can use the English language freely”.

During the classroom implementation, Teacher A allowed the students to play the Food UNO. She said that”

“The Ferret Foodie card game is very fun and easy for the students to do in class. The Food UNO is easy for the students because it is similar to how you play UNO, and UNO is a very popular game for this age. They already know the rules, they can focus on learning new words, asking questions in the English language” (Teacher A).

Teacher B felt that the Ferret Foodie card game was very useful for teachers to engage the students in class. He said that,

“The Ferret Foodie card game is very helpful for students and it’s like a big help for teachers to introduce the game to students. My students can have fun and at the same time, they are learning and engaged throughout the entire period” (Teacher B).

Both teachers reported that the Ferret Foodie card game was an appealing way for them to capture the students’ attention in learning new vocabulary and speaking English in the classroom. It was a fun way of teaching and learning.

Teacher B added that:

“Actually, Go Fish, [...] and UNO, they like that game because these games are popular. One thing that our game is different from the game outside is, it is educational. Students can read and spell new words. Another thing is they can develop their speaking skills like when they ask, “Do you have some ...”, “Do you have any ...” (Teacher B).

Findings from the classroom implementation and the interviews revealed that Teacher B appreciated the educational values in the card games. He was pleased that the students were practicing their English language speaking skills. After using the card game in the classroom, both teachers agreed that the Ferret Foodie card game “*is a good help for classroom instruction*” for the students “*to do away with the textbooks*”.

Elementary school students’ response towards the Ferret Foodie card game

A simple questionnaire with emojis was provided to the students. The students read the items independently. The teachers explained each item to them in Thai.

Tab. 1 tabulates the results obtained from the students.

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Table 1 - Elementary Students' Responses to the Ferret Foodie Card Game
(source: results of author survey)

		n	%
1	I like this card game	142	100
2	The rules are easy	130	72
3	I like the pictures	133	93
4	I can read the words	123	87
5	I learn new words from the game	122	86
6	I want to play the card game again	142	100
7	The card size is just right	132	93
8	The game is challenging	127	89
9	I can ask simple questions in English	120	85
10	I can spell some of the words	115	81
11	I can answer in English	121	85
12	I can remember the words that I learnt	119	84
	Total number of students (n = 142)		

Based on Table 1, all the grade-six elementary students enjoyed the card game (items no.1 and 6) and they wanted to play the game again. 72% of the grade six elementary students agreed that the game rules were easy (item no. 2), while 89% said that the game was challenging (item no. 8). 93% of the elementary students found that the card size was just right for them (item no. 7). More than 80% of the elementary students thought they benefited in learning new vocabulary; they learnt new words (item no. 5), they could read the words on the cards (item no. 4), asked simple questions in English (items no. 9 and 11) and spelt the words (item no. 10). Overall, 93% of the elementary students liked the pictures on the cards (item no. 3). 84% of the students remembered the words they learnt (item no. 12).

Conclusion

To conclude, the postgraduate students felt that the Ferret Foodie card game was age-appropriate and student-oriented. The elementary school teachers had an increase in their confidence and knowledge in using games in the classroom. They reported that the Ferret Foodie card game provides greater opportunities for students to learn new vocabulary in a fun and game-oriented manner. Grade six elementary school students benefited in learning new vocabulary, read and spell the words, ask and answer simple questions using English. The research concluded that the game rules, prior knowledge and challenge were the key features which attracted the surveyed students to the Ferret Foodie card game.

Limitations

The findings of the research could be biased since the researcher here has been sole researcher, observer and interpreter at the same time. The respondents could have also behaved differently due to the fact of classroom observations, thus influencing the results of the study.

Recommendations and future research

This research provides suggestions for further use of the Ferret Foodie card game and game-based learning in schools of Thailand. School administrators should encourage the use of game-based learning in the classroom. They can support elementary school teachers by setting aside special budget for professional development and purchase of various materials to develop such educating games. Elementary school teachers should learn how to use games to help students acquire new vocabulary in English and other languages.

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