

USING WORDWALL TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN ESL CLASSROOM




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ABSTRACT

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This research was conducted to investigate the use of Wordwall to improve students' engagement in an ESL classroom. The objectives are to identify the impact of using Wordwall on students' participation in the ESL classroom and to examine the students' perception of using Wordwall in the ESL classroom. This study was designed based on a mixed-method research by using quantitative and qualitative data. Twenty-four students from a secondary school in Kuala Nerus, Terengganu participated in this study. The instruments used in data collection include video recording transcription, and survey. The findings revealed that incorporating Wordwall into the classroom has a beneficial impact on the students' participation in class. According to the findings of the study, the implementation of a Wordwall can improve students' understanding of the English language learning process as well as students' engagement in ESL classrooms. Additionally, the study recommends for bigger sampling size could be used.

Contribution/ Originality: This study looks forward to assist ESL teachers to improve students' engagement by using Wordwall. Teachers who had doubts of using Wordwall in their teaching will be at ease now as the results indicate that Wordwall is able to improve students' understanding and engagement in an ESL classroom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the COVID-19 outbreak has forced schools all across the world to close their doors. Over 1.2 billion children are out of school around the world. As a result, education has undergone significant transformations, with the rise of e-learning, or Online Distance Learning (ODL), in which teaching is done remotely using digital platforms. Many pre-service and in-service teachers were obliged to switch their lessons to online teaching in order to continue teaching and learning. This arrangement posed new obstacles for teachers who were teaching an online course for the first time, especially those who were learning how to use online platforms.

Minister of Education Mohd Radzi Md Jidin said on June 6, 2020, that all Malaysian schools will implement home-based teaching and learning for the new school year commencing in mid-June 2020. The decision was reached after considering the current COVID-19 situation, which saw Malaysia go under "total lockdown" from June 1 to

June 14. Channel News Asia (2021) reported that since the COVID-19 outbreak began in Malaysia last year, the country has recorded 610,574 COVID-19 cases and 3,291 deaths. As a result of the alarming pandemic situation, the Ministry of Education has urged all schools and teachers to prepare for online teaching as a new way of educating students during the lockdown.

Previous studies have shown that the use of learning platforms to teach online learning was used by teachers to improve the students' learning. Nasution, Surbakti, Zakaria, Wahyuningsih, and Daulay (2021) said that online learning was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent contact between students which can cause the spread of the virus. While Brown (2018) stated that teaching online requires a steep technological learning curve and needs to create a much more rigorous instructional design process than is required for face-to-face instruction. This is because one of the central online teaching issues that teachers can face is that it can make students into passive learners during an online learning rather than face-to-face learning in which teachers can just observe students physically. Therefore, the use of online learning platforms was emphasised by the previous researchers to increase students' learning and participation.

Game-based learning provides an opportunity for teachers to incorporate active learning into an online English lesson, as it can increase student interest and engagement while also providing rapid feedback on performance. Besides, the use of online game-based learning platforms can allow teachers or organisations to set up fun web-based learning for the students to give students excitement in learning English lessons. As such, Wordwall, which is one of the online game-based learning platforms, is deemed to be suitable for teachers to use in an English classroom to engage students in learning the language. It has been proven to be an excellent digital tool in ESL classroom teaching and learning.

This research centres on the practice of using Wordwall as a game-based learning platform in an online English classroom and the impact of using Wordwall to improve students' engagement. It intended to identify the students' participation through the use of Wordwall and their perceptions of using Wordwall.

1.1. Problem Statement

Students are less likely to participate in an online English classroom since it is harder for students and teachers to meet face-to-face in an online English classroom. Students who have struggled with online learning in the past may find it challenging to learn through online learning. The fact that students cannot participate in the activities taking place in an online classroom will negatively impact their performance. They will have difficulty comprehending the English lesson and will lose interest in studying the language. As a result, when students begin learning English in a regular classroom setting, they will have considerable difficulty understanding the English lessons.

Online game-based learning platform such as Wordwall contains a variety of mini-games that can be utilised in the classroom to review theory, ideas, and terminology. As stated by Hasram et al. (2021), Wordwall can assist and enrich students' experience and retain their attention. As a result, students' participation in the lesson can be enhanced and improved. In addition, passive learners can become active when they participate in minigames or quizzes to fully comprehend the lesson which is provided in the Wordwall platform. Therefore, the focus of this study is to identify the impact of using Wordwall on students' participation in the ESL classroom and to examine the students' perception of using Wordwall in the ESL classroom.

1.2. Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of using Wordwall on students' participation in the ESL classroom. Besides, the researcher carried out this study to examine the students' perception of using Wordwall in the ESL classroom.

1.3. Research Questions

This research is conducted based on the following questions:

- i. Does Wordwall improve students' participation in an ESL classroom?
- ii. What are the students' perceptions of using Wordwall in the ESL classroom?

1.4. Significance of the Research

This research allows both the pre-service and in-service teachers to have insights about the use of Wordwall and its impact towards the students in the English language classroom. By looking into the impact of using Wordwall, teachers are able to create more creative and interactive activities to enhance the students' participation in the English classroom.

1.5. Limitations of the Research

There are several limitations found in this study. First of all, there were 8 participants who could not attend the online class and could not join the learning platform conducted throughout this action research. They were not involved in joining the game-based learning platform from online learning during my practicum. For instance, during the conduction of using Wordwall, some participants could not join due to internet problems and poor device functions. Some participants had to leave the classroom abruptly and some could not use the learning platform. Thus, the uneven number of participants may affect the reliability of the data obtained by the researcher.

Moreover, the participants did not know how to use Wordwall as they are not familiar with the game-based learning platform because it was their first time learning online. Due to that, the researcher had to consume quite some time to explain the use of Wordwall to the participants, so that they would be able to understand how it works and conduct the lesson smoothly.

Furthermore, the researcher did not video record the introduction of the online class because of the device's sudden malfunction. Due to the technical problem of the researcher's recording device, the video recording process for the introduction part of the lesson could not be recorded. The video was only recorded at the pre-lesson where the use of Wordwall was introduced by the teacher. Hence, this may affect the reliability and validity of the data obtained from the interventions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Game-based learning has gained a number of teachers' interest in incorporating it in the online class as to improve students' engagement. According to [Portela \(2020\)](#), the use of gamification is critical for increasing student participation and engagement in a class. This being said, students are more attentive to the online lesson when they find it enjoyable. As a few other studies have shown that language games also help students gain confidence and achieve better results as the use of games can assist in resolving the issue of maintaining their attention ([Anderson-Cooper, 2020](#)). Adding to the point, the use of games can significantly help students to better maintain their attention as the focus of using games can bring students to achieve better results. The studies also stated that games are great learning tools because they present learners with a fictitious environment in which they can experiment with different options without the fear of failure. Students are given more opportunities to correct their mistakes when using the game-based learning platform, which in addition can increase the students' interest in learning the language. Along with the studies done by [Chapman and Rich \(2018\)](#), they believe that students can use the online game to help them solve problems and participate in interactive learning by combining critical thinking with gaming dynamics. Through the use of a game-based learning platform, students can also improve their cognitive abilities.

Numerous studies indicate that when technology is included into an instructional activity, students are more likely to remain engaged ([Felszeghy et al., 2019](#)). According to [Tapia-Nunez \(2021\)](#), he defined engagement as

students being involved and actively participating in daily activities. However, he believes that although students may be engaged during game-based learning, the actual learning process may be hindered because students are frequently distracted by the game's goals rather than the concept being learned. This conclusion differs from the study by Anderson-Cooper (2020) who discovered that games can provide opportunities for active student engagement, especially when they are carefully planned and structured to students' interests.

Other research discovered that using game-based learning platforms was enjoyable, engaging, and motivating, assisting students in maintaining their attention during class while also improving their comprehension of the topic (Cameron & Bizo, 2019). They believe that game features contribute to the vocabulary learning experiences of ESL learners by engaging, motivating, and fostering enthusiasm. Moreover, Green (2020) believes that games can be useful in the classroom for promoting creativity and collaborative problem solving and allows students to understand while motivating students. While game-based learning can have a positive effect on students' language learning while they are immersed in the game, students can also perceive the ability to be creative, explore and take-action in the game. Thus, he believes that schools should create embedded course curricula objectives that centre on using game-based learning technology to teach English. In addition, Dichev and Dicheva (2017) defines motivation as a psychological process that gives behaviour purpose and direction. Thus, students' motivation varies depending on the situation or context of the task as it not only increases students' motivation, but also serves as an incentive and stimulus to use the language.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this research, the researcher employed a mixed-methods approach to achieve the research objectives. The use of mixed-methods approach was to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data in the same study. According to Shorten and Smith (2017), this approach involves a purposeful mixing of methods in data collection, data analysis, and evidence interpretation. The researcher employed this method as it could be used to gain a better understanding of connections and contradictions between qualitative and quantitative data.

The instruments used were video recording for qualitative method and survey for quantitative method. The researcher used video recording to observe the classroom as it provided concrete evidence as the video could be replayed to see the occurrence during the lesson. This evidence could support productive feedback conversations between the teacher and the students. The video recording will examine the impact of using Wordwall to the students in the English classroom. To ensure the validity of data collection, chat transcription from the Google Meet is included in this research to identify the student's engagement and participation. The researcher used the transcription from the video recording from pre-lesson stage and closure stage where Wordwall was used.

The survey for this research was to identify the students' perception of using Wordwall in the ESL classroom. Part A, Part B, and Part C are the three sections of the survey.

- Part A is where the respondents' information is gathered.
- Part B consists of five questions about using Wordwall in the English classroom.
- Part C has ten items and contains questions about the students' perceptions of the use of Wordwall in the English classroom.

The survey used a 5-point scale with responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The respondents were asked to rate how much they agree or disagree with the statements in the instrument.

The research was conducted in a secondary school in Kuala Nerus, Terengganu where 24 students in form 1 participated in this study. The data obtained through the video transcription instrument were analyzed using thematic analysis while the survey was analyzed using descriptive analysis. The transcription will be excerpted and analyzed based on the themes found in the transcription. The responses of the participants for the survey are categorized according to each item and then tabulated. The data collected will gather insights on how Wordwall can improve students' participation.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The Impact of using Wordwall on Students' Participation in the ESL Classroom

To help to achieve this first research objective, the data from the video transcription was gathered and analysed. Based on the transcription, the researcher found that students participated and engaged more when Wordwall was used. It also increased the student's motivation in joining the English classroom. The number of students participating during the lesson has increased after Wordwall was introduced. It engages the students' participation after students play the game quiz and answer the questions. This shows that more students are engaged in the classroom activities after the use of Wordwall. The observation also showed that students are more motivated in joining and participating in the online classroom as students get more open and comfortable. The feedback from the students showed that the class was interesting, fun and exciting. The teacher does not receive any negative feedback from the students and this shows that using Wordwall can motivate students to join and participate in the ESL classroom in the future. This then gives the confirmation that students have more participation in the ESL classroom due to the use of Wordwall. This correlates to [Felszeghy et al. \(2019\)](#) that claims when technology is included into an instructional activity, students are more likely to remain engaged.

4.2. The Students' Perception of using Wordwall in the ESL Classroom

To achieve the second research objective for this study, students in form 1 Arif participated in a survey done by the researcher to ascertain their perceptions toward the use of Wordwall.

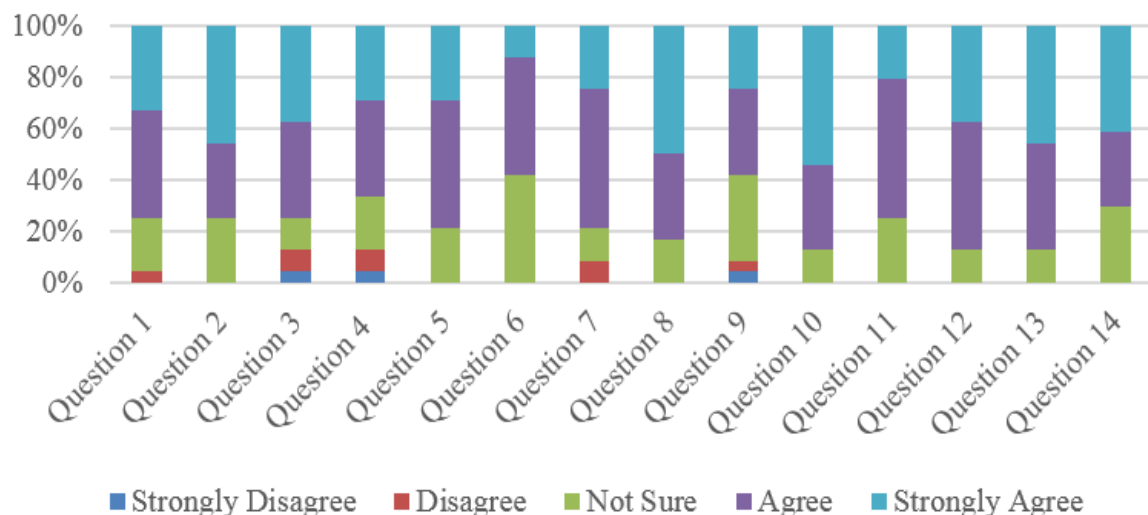


Figure 1. Students' perception of using Wordwall in the ESL classroom.

According to [Figure 1](#), there are 42% of the respondents that believe Wordwall can help them engage more effectively in class. This demonstrates that, while participating in the activity, Wordwall can help to engage students in the classroom more effectively. Additionally, 46% of the respondents highly feel that Wordwall can enable students to work independently as Wordwall provides clear instructions for completing the quiz (50%) and provides answers immediately after finishing the quiz (54%). While there are an equal number of respondents agreeing (38%) and strongly agreeing (38%) that Wordwall can assist students in developing confidence as they learn English as it allows them to check the leaderboard to see their score (46%) and allows students to play more than twice (42%). Moreover, 38% of the respondents also agree that Wordwall is effective at teaching vocabulary, with 50% of the respondents believing that the Wordwall can aid students in better understanding the lesson. The results showed the improvement of learning vocabulary and understanding the language with the use of Wordwall. Furthermore, 46% of the respondents agreed that Wordwall enables the students to engage in interactive learning and 54% of the respondents agreed they get more motivated to join the class when Wordwall is being used. In

addition, 33% of the respondents indicated uncertainty towards the use of internet data in using Wordwall while another 33% believes that Wordwall does not consume a lot of internet data. There are also 54% of the respondents that agreed the use of minigames in Wordwall can attract students to participate in the classroom as the design of Wordwall is deemed interesting as gathered by 50% of the respondents. These are the items on which the majority of students agreed. The overall response to the questions was highly favourable on the use of Wordwall in the English classroom.

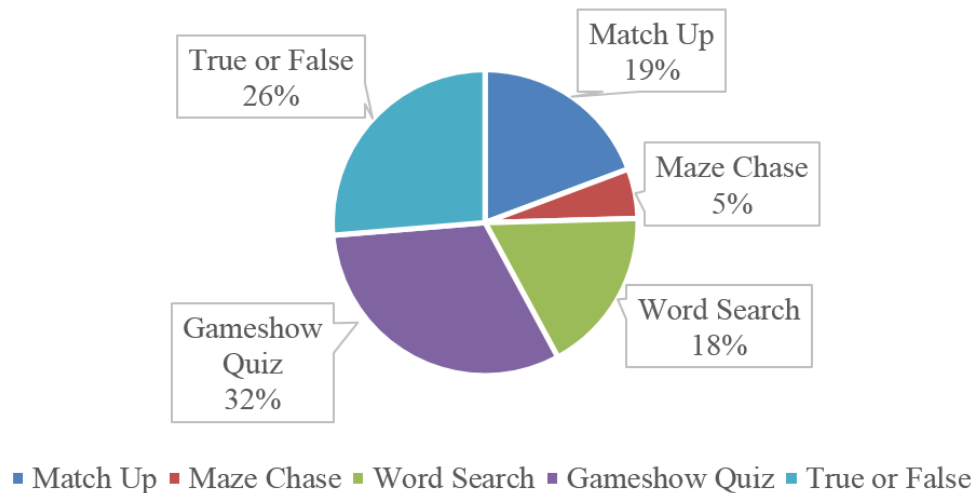


Figure 2. Students' preferences of Wordwall activities.

Figure 2 showed the percentage of the students' preference of Wordwall activities. It revealed that 32% of form 1 students, which is a total of 18 respondents, preferred gameshow quiz activity as the main use in Wordwall. While 15 respondents (26%) preferred the true or false activity. Next, 11 respondents (19%) preferred match up activity while 18% or 10 respondents preferred the word search activity. Lastly, only 5% which is 3 respondents that chose maze chase activity to their likings. The findings showed that students favour the utilisation of game show quizzes among other activities.

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research intends to look into the impact of using Wordwall on students' participation in the ESL classroom and how it affects students' participation through the video classroom observation and survey. Based on the results obtained from the video transcription and survey instruments, it could be concluded that the use of Wordwall has positive impacts in improving the students' participation in the ESL classroom.

For the first research question, students are able to actively participate in the discussion after Wordwall was used in the lesson. In addition, students are more likely to answer questions from the teacher and actively give their opinions. Moreover, students are more comfortable and engaged in the classroom discussions where most students contributed in answering the questions that have been used in the Wordwall. Also, students are more motivated to learn the lesson when Wordwall is used. Some comments from the students also include their excitement on the use of Wordwall in the classroom.

For the second research question, the majority of the students think that the use of Wordwall can aid students in better understanding the lesson because Wordwall provides answers immediately and it allows students to play more than twice. Besides, the use of Wordwall also enables students to work independently as it provides clear instructions for completing the quiz and allows its players to check the leaderboard to see their score without the teacher monitoring them. The researcher also found that using Wordwall can help students to be more engaged in

the classroom as it enables them to be engaged in interactive learning. Wordwall also attracts students to participate and is effective at teaching vocabulary. Students also get more motivated to join the class when Wordwall is being used. When it comes to preferences, students favour the utilisation of game show quizzes more than true or false, match up, word search and maze chase. The data shows that students enjoy participating in a competitive activity that requires them to be more precise in answering the quiz through the platform.

5.2. Implications

Through conducting this research, the use of Wordwall in improving the students' engagement in the ESL classroom is revealed. This research implicates that half of the students have uncertainty towards the use of internet data in using Wordwall. Some students also think that the use of Wordwall consumes a lot of internet data when learning online. Hence, teachers should prepare a worksheet or use another learning platform that does not consume a lot of data to the students that cannot participate in the activity using Wordwall. This is so that the students can obtain the same information from the lesson and understand better.

Furthermore, this research reveals that the types of Wordwall activity can affect the students' interest in learning English. Among the five types of Wordwall activity which the researcher has collected from the form 1 students, most students have a great interest in game show quiz activity. Hence, it is inferred that game show quizzes are the most interesting minigames to the students in this research. As a matter of fact, teachers should consider designing interactive activities based on the students' interest in order to improve their participation in the ESL classroom.

Nevertheless, this study is only a small-scale study which involved only 24 students as the samples for the research. Thus, the result of this study was the opinion of certain respondents and it did not represent the opinions of all the students in the class or school. This is because students from different classes or schools may have different perceptions towards the use of Wordwall on improving students' engagement in the ESL classroom.

5.3. Recommendations

Further research is recommended to investigate more on the use of game-based learning platforms in the classroom. Different types of learning platforms should be considered to support a wide range of analyses that aimed at increasing student engagement in the classroom. For a better outcome, this current study could be expanded to include different types of learning platforms in the classroom.

Besides, semi-structured interviews could be used as one of the research instruments in this study. This is because interviews could help the researcher to better understand and explore respondents' opinions on the use of Wordwall in the ESL classroom. In the future research, it is also suggested to prepare relevant open-ended questions as it can help to collect more in-depth information from the respondents.

Moreover, this research is only a small-scale study, so it is proposed that a bigger sampling size should be used to widen the study in the future. For future research, the researcher should involve other classes or different schools. This is because a bigger sampling can be helpful for the generalisation to become more valid for the data.

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