

Sampan the Survival Game: Basic Communication Strategies for ESL Learners

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Abstract

Purpose This study investigates the potential of utilising *Sampan the Survival Game* as a means for developing holistic students by enhancing their communication skills and critical thinking abilities. By engaging them in gamification activities that encourage the use of language outside of the conventional educational environment, hence mitigating their anxiety towards speaking. **Design/Approach/Methods** The study involved the participants to engage in the *Sampan* which encompasses several characters, characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses that must be considered by the students throughout gameplay. Gamification elements like point systems and awards help *Sampan* improve communication, motivation, and critical thinking. Participants were also asked pre- and post-game questions to assess the game's effectiveness in promoting communication. **Findings** Participants were more engaged when playing *Sampan* card game, role-playing the characters, and trying to 'stay alive' in the discussion. As *Sampan* encourages interactive learning in unrestricted settings, participants are more encouraged to utilise the language because their speaking anxiety is minimised.

Originality/Value It is hoped that with this card game, students would be more motivated to learn the language and able to participate in open discussion without any fear of making mistakes or receiving criticism, as well as give and receive ideas.

Keywords Holistic Students, English As A Second Language Learners, Speaking Anxiety, Basic Communication Strategies, Gamification

Introduction

Teaching and learning English has always been a core discussion among many academics and scholars. The importance of using English in daily communication is seen as vital since English is ranked fourth among the languages spoken by most people and is considered as the most popular language for international communication. For a country like Malaysia, people here use English in most of their daily activities, including for work and leisure. However, there are

still people who still face difficulties in acquiring the language despite having spent more than ten years learning it. One of the reasons could be because of their educational background and the ability to apply the language in their context of living. For university students, similar scenarios are seen where students are not engaging well with the language and applying it in classroom learning. Students are seen to be intimidated to use the language among their peers and also the lack of confidence in using the language results in poor performance of university students in the second language learning. Thus, to increase the quality and experience of language learning especially in the aspect of communication, many approaches need to be considered.

Furthermore, university students need to acquire the language skills especially in the communication aspects to prepare them for the working world in the future once they have graduated. Thus, it is very vital for these students to be able to construct sentences and express their ideas confidently during their study to ensure proficiency and comfortability in the language use. An approach to ensure that university students are able to learn the language and be able to apply the language through communication activities is the use of language games. This fun approach to teaching and learning of English communication skills not only benefits the teachers in lessening their teaching loads, but also benefits the students especially when dealing with various backgrounds of English as a second language (ESL) learner.

In keeping abreast with the creative approach of teaching and learning, education needs to be both effective and entertaining for students of the current generations to be drawn to acquire the language effectively and confidently. Hence, it is important to ensure that ESL learners are able to master the basic communication strategies which can develop their confidence and master the language. This will allow continuous learning of the language by these students instead of merely focusing only on the purpose of examination. This research looks at how the use of card games as a fun and interactive approach to learning, helps students to enhance the use of basic communication strategies when using English language among their peers.

Problem Statement

Basic communication skills are important for ESL learners to acquire in terms of fluency and competency. This is to ensure that ESL learners are able to communicate effectively and achieve their personal, educational and professional goals in the long run. In order to allow students to acquire critical and creative thinking skills in using the language, the basic skills must be sharpened. However, scenarios in Malaysian universities display lack of competency among students of the English language in and out of the classroom. Despite learning the English language formally in class, most students are struggling to use the language in their everyday life. According to Shaila and Trudell (2010), it is important for students when developing language skills to think, reason, communicate and experience continuous learning outside the classroom. As educators, it is important to always provide a holistic and meaningful learning experience for the students especially in the academic and critical thinking skills which are necessary at both the educational and workplace levels.

Many tertiary institutions and companies have expressed their concerns towards ESL learners having strong basic communication skills in order for them to succeed in terms of academic achievements and also cater the needs of the market once they graduate. Aside from formal learning in the classroom, students are also encouraged to participate in activities that promote challenge and proactiveness in language learning. Yang (2010) found that well-

designed tasks and questioning advance the development of critical thinking skills and having higher-order tasks and questions will result in more language production than other lower-order tasks. Thus, activities or tasks with problem solving will require students to not only master basic communication skills among their peers but also to think critically along the process. Game-based activities, for example, tend to cater to solving these challenges and struggles among language learners. This is because this type of activity is not only fun and inherently creative but also meets the demand of learners to have diverse skills in order to be engaged in the overall learning experience. When students are participating in game-based activities in or outside the classroom, they are constantly communicating, listening, strategising, and navigating problems with their fellow peers.

In the context of Malaysian learners of the English language, there remains a deficiency in English proficiency among students in Malaysian tertiary education. This still occurs despite the global recognition of English as the lingua franca for communication (Köylü & Tracy-Ventura, 2022). It is therefore significant to equip Malaysians with the language skills to contribute to a high-income and economically advanced nation (Renganathan, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to prioritise the development of engaging teaching and learning activities to ensure that students enjoy the process of learning the English language. This is an integral component of the broader endeavour to establish a suitable platform for students to effectively acquire the language. Hence, *Sampan the survival game: Basic communication strategies for ESL learners* aims to facilitate the acquisition of language skills by providing students with an authentic environment. This approach seeks to alleviate any apprehension or inhibition that learners may experience when utilising the language, thereby enabling them to effectively employ the language in their everyday activities.

Literature Review

English Language Landscape in Malaysia

Throughout its history, Malaysia has implemented several language policies pertaining to the utilisation of English, starting from the era of British colonial rule up until the present day. Historically, English held a position of prominence as a language of influence, owing to its extensive usage in administrative, commercial, and governmental domains. However, Malaysia successfully achieved independence from British colonialism and afterwards prioritised the promotion of its national identity by replacing the dominance of the English language with the Malay language. According to Pillai and Ong (2018), the National Language Act of 1963/1967 designated the Malay language as the official language, replacing English in government administration and public education. The government changed the medium of instruction from English to Malay in the 1970s, but reinstated English for the teaching and learning of science and mathematics in English in 2003 to increase English competence.

Despite the anticipated positive results and advantages, the policy was discontinued in 2014 and substituted with the Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening Command of English policy or known as *Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI)* policy (Ashairi et al., 2017). This policy does not mandate the obligatory use of the English language for teaching Mathematics and Science to children. Instead, it offers schools, teachers, students, and parents the freedom to select their preferred medium of instruction, aiming to bring advantages to both the students and the country (Adelina, 2023). The Ministry of Education launched the Dual-Language Programme (DLP) to ensure that all students graduate with a solid grasp of the English language, as this is the language most commonly used in academic settings (Rashida Nasuha et al., 2020).

Ashairi et al. (2017) further explain that this policy aims to help students compete globally and improve their job prospects by providing access to knowledge and skills, to encourage students' interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education at the tertiary level, and, finally, to improve students' English language proficiency through increased exposure to the language. Even though English is not the main language in Malaysia, it is considered a crucial language for the younger generation to learn. English holds significant importance as an international, business, and corporate language. According to Szmigiera (2021), around 1.35 billion people worldwide speak English. Learning English is essential for the younger generation to be noticed and presents excellent opportunities for better job prospects. Many large corporations in Malaysia use English as their primary language of communication, making English proficiency a vital factor in securing superior job offers.

English is widely used as the primary mode of communication among major corporations in Malaysia. Therefore, possessing a high level of English proficiency is crucial in order to enhance one's prospects of receiving a more favourable employment opportunity. According to Pandey and Pandey (2014), the English language serves as a valuable asset for employability and is extensively used as a language of business. Consequently, proficiency in English encompasses not just a strong command of grammar, but also exceptional communication abilities. Proficiency in the English language has the potential to enhance an individual's communication abilities. Employers exhibit a preference for applicants that possess a high level of proficiency in the English language and demonstrate exceptional communication abilities.

Moreover, it is imperative to highlight that one of the factors contributing to Malaysia's high unemployment rate is a lack of English proficiency. According to Azreen Hani (2021) the prevailing economic conditions and inadequate English proficiency have resulted in around 232,000 unemployed graduates across the country. This observation highlights the current challenge faced by Malaysians in their pursuit of employment opportunities. The lack of proficiency in the English language, hindering effective communication and self-promotion during the job search process, has the potential to impact employability rates in Malaysia. The acquisition of English language skills is of utmost importance for undergraduate students, as it greatly improves their employability prospects, particularly in the corporate and business sectors, where employers in favour applicants who possess strong English proficiency for the global market.

English Language Anxiety and Language Learning Motivation

English language anxiety, commonly known as "language anxiety" or "foreign language anxiety," is a distinct form of worry that individuals encounter while acquiring, utilising, or conversing in a language that is not their native tongue, particularly English. Horwitz et al. (1986) defined language anxiety as a unique set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language acquisition that stem from the distinctiveness of the language process. English language anxiety is characterised by feelings of discomfort, fear, anxiousness, or worry when engaging in language-related activities, such as speaking, listening, reading, or writing in English. There are a few common reasons as to why the feeling of anxiety of learning a foreign language among learners of the second language. Learning a language other than one's native tongue can cause anxiety for a variety of reasons, such as communication apprehension, which occurs when learners have trouble understanding the instructions given by the instructor, negative evaluation, which refers to the fear of criticism and making mistakes, and finally a wide-ranging feeling of anxiety, which in this case refers to

not being able to communicate effectively and critically (Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2004; Horwitz et al., 1986; Pappamihel, 2002). In addition, Onwuegbuzi et al. (2000) suggested that students with limited proficiency in oral and written skills in their native language may be more likely to experience foreign language anxiety.

This is a problem not only for those with foreign language anxiety, but also for those acquiring and using a second language as an ESL learner. According to Charoensukmongkol (2016), students acquiring a second language, in this case English, experience language anxiety as they attempt to become proficient in the language, particularly when it comes to public speaking and interacting with others. Participating in public speaking or engaging in interactions with others using an unfamiliar or non-everyday language poses a significant challenge for individuals learning English as a second language (ESL). Individuals may have feelings of anxiety when using a second language due to concerns of potential criticism or judgement when making errors or attempting to showcase their language proficiency. Nuraqilah Nadjwa and Aminabibi (2018) claimed that learners would feel intimidated to perform speaking tasks and perceive them negatively, particularly when they must perform orally in front of their peers and participate in group discussions because speaking is both a productive and interactive skill that requires more complex skills than other language tasks. Saidah et al. (2022) also provide evidence for the notion that language learners experience language anxiety as a result of factors such as communication apprehension, fear of unfavourable evaluation, and fear of tests.

Adlina et al. (2012) claimed that class activities that provide opportunities for ESL learners to engage in authentic and meaningful interactions can serve as a source of motivation. This motivation can be categorised into instrumental motivation, which pertains to the desire to achieve success in examinations, improve job prospects, and advance in one's career, and integrative motivation, which centres around the ability to effectively communicate with individuals from the target language group. Ismail (2022) concurred that effective learning materials and methods addressing both instrumental and integrative motivation among ESL learners increase learners' motivation resulting in the success of language learning. Additionally, Noor Hanim (2022) stated that students exhibit higher levels of motivation to learn a language when they are both intrinsically driven and exposed to a stimulating learning environment. The reason for this is that an intimidating environment may hinder learners from effectively utilising the language due to their apprehension of the surrounding atmosphere and the potential unfavourable judgements and criticisms from other learners and language educators.

Gamification in English Language Settings

The main focus of language proficiency should be the ability to exchange information between individuals proficiently and without difficulty. To accomplish this, it is essential that language learners develop a high level of confidence and motivation when communicating in a foreign language. However, it is prevalent for people to be concerned about the accuracy of their language usage, which can be a substantial barrier to learning a language. Individuals who are anxious or self-conscious about their language skills may be hesitant to engage in conversations or express themselves entirely. Vadivel et al. (2022) reported that students suffer from language anxiety and difficulties speaking the language, which causes them to avoid conversations despite having studied English for a long time and having a strong vocabulary and grammatical level. This hesitation can hinder the acquisition of the language

and ultimately contribute to a lower proficiency level among students as language acquisition is a complex process that necessitates repeated trial and error.

Anxiety can disrupt language learning by causing language learners to doubt themselves and avoid practising their language skills, thereby slowing their progress. Consequently, Rao (2019) proposed that incorporating engaging language activities into classrooms can encourage students to communicate more. Learners have a natural interest to play games and frequently express a desire to play more games because they find enjoyment in them. When learners engage in these activities in an enjoyable environment, their speaking abilities improve substantially.

According to Gil-Aciron (2022), it has been observed that gamification in language learning is often implemented in digital formats. However, an alternative approach to gamification can be pursued in a traditional manner, involving the use of board games or card games that are played in real-time with participants physically present in the same area. This approach can be implemented inside a classroom environment, when the entire class collectively engages in a gamified framework aimed at accumulating points as a means of rewarding achievements. Gamification offers learners authentic environments in which they can become familiar using the language. According to Kapp (2012), the incorporation of gamification in educational settings involves the application of game-based mechanics, aesthetics, and game thinking to effectively engage individuals, increase motivation, facilitate learning, and address challenges.

This phenomenon is seen in the context of engaging in *Sampan*, when all individuals in the class participate collectively, resembling a board game or card game, with the objective of navigating and surviving a given situation by utilising their respective characters, characteristics, and useful items. As the participants engage in the game, they become actively involved and driven to achieve the ultimate objective of surviving the scenario alongside a fellow survivor. The requirement to achieve the highest scores, as indicated by the scoresheet distributed at the commencement of the game, is the determining factor for identifying the winners. Additionally, students would receive support and feedback from the instructor. The implementation of gamification in language learning has been found to enhance classroom engagement, thereby increasing learners' motivation (Figueroa-Flores, 2015). This heightened engagement is attributed to the fact that learners focus on the task at hand, thereby they are less concerned about receiving criticism or making mistakes. Additionally, the utilisation of gamification in language learning has been shown to facilitate the cultivation of students' creativity and critical thinking abilities (Oliveira and Cruz, 2018).

Methodology

This study employs a non-probability sampling approach, specifically utilising convenient sampling to obtain the data. According to Chua (2020), convenience sampling, often referred to as availability sampling, is employed when the subjects are readily accessible and in near proximity. The approach employed in this study is characterised by its simplicity and cost-effectiveness, particularly considering its focus on exploring students' perspectives towards the use of *Sampan* as a tool for enhancing their language skills. Therefore, the study included a total of 95 participants who were English as the second language (ESL) learners. These participants were from three different classes of fundamental English at a Malaysian public university. All participants gave consent with full knowledge. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw out of data collection at any time and were permitted to do so. Their responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Table 1:

Participants' Demographic Background

Factor		Frequency 95	Percentage 100
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Male</i>	60	63.2
	<i>Female</i>	35	36.8
<i>First Language</i>	<i>Bahasa Malaysia</i>	93	97.9
	<i>English</i>	2	2.1

Table 1 presents the gender distribution among the participants and their respective first language. The majority of respondents consisted of males, accounting for 63.2% of the total, while females comprised 36.8% of the total respondents. Although the distribution of gender in this study is not equal, it is important to note that the study did not specifically aim to examine gender inequalities. In terms of the respondents' first language, it is evident that a significant majority, amounting to 97.9%, reported Bahasa Malaysia as their primary language, while only 2.1% indicated English as their first language. The substantial disparity in the participants' first language proficiency is a crucial aspect to consider in this study, as it aims to examine the influence of utilising *Sampan* as a tool for enhancing English language skills. Consequently, this study tries to evaluate the efficacy of *Sampan* in facilitating language acquisition.

The study was conducted in two phases. Firstly, the participants were introduced to the card game. The participants were provided with information regarding the guidelines and regulations for participating in the game. Participants were thereafter separated into several groups, given that the game was played in a collaborative manner among all participants of the class. Subsequently, the lecturer proceeded to shuffle the cards and instructed the team leaders to randomly choose only a few of the cards in order to initiate the game. The required cards encompassed the character cards, characteristic cards, and item cards. Each group was provided with a booklet containing useful phrases and a booklet containing a scorecard. The useful phrases booklet comprises common expressions for expressing agreement, disagreement, soliciting opinions, and providing opinions. Additionally, it includes sample sentences that demonstrate the appropriate usage of these phrases within the context of communication. Meanwhile, the scoresheet booklet is intended to maintain track of the score as the game progresses in order to determine the winner.

The participants were presented with a scenario that required them to strategize and devise means of survival utilising the provided resources to their benefit. In addition, they were assigned the responsibility of selecting an additional character to endure the circumstances alongside them. By engaging in this practice, the students were able to utilise the language in a realistic manner, as they were required to inquire, seek opinions, provide recommendations, and employ other essential parts of communication. In addition to this, participants are required to engage in critical thinking in order to devise efficient strategies and solutions necessary for their survival. This would eventually provide them with an avenue for expressing their demands and desires in the target language. Following a few rounds of debate, attack, and defence, the winners will be decided based on the scores accumulated. These are the people who successfully evacuated the situation by employing *Sampan* as a mode of transportation to get away.

Secondly, upon completion of the game, participants are promptly asked to respond to a questionnaire. This measure is implemented to mitigate the potential impact of extraneous variables on participants' responses. In addition to the demographic questions, this study consists of 17 Likert scale items and six open-ended questions to investigate the perspectives of language learners using *Sampan* to enhance their language learning skills. The reliability of all 17 Likert scale items was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to quantify the internal consistency. The concept of reliability in measurement pertains to the degree of consistency and precision exhibited by the items utilised in a questionnaire (Barbera et al., 2021; Muhammad Amirrudin et al., 2020). Conversely, the absence of reliability indicates a lack of consistency and precision, which can be attributed to measurement error. Table 2 presents the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the current study, which was found to be .759. This value indicates that there is acceptable internal reliability across all the items that were assessed.

Table 2:
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.759	17

In order to ensure the accuracy of the data, it was converted to Google sheets and analysed using IBM SPSS for Windows version 26 for descriptive frequency (n) and percentage analysis (%), and then tabulated appropriately for the findings and discussions. In addition to this, open-ended questions were employed to elicit comprehensive insights from the participants. These responses were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis, enabling a deeper exploration of the participants' feedback regarding the impact of the *Sampan* in enhancing their English language communication skills.

Findings and Discussions

The objective of this study is to examine ESL learners' perspectives towards the use of *Sampan*. This survival game involves the fundamental process of exchanging information and ideas between individuals or groups. Moreover, the implementation of this card game was intended to facilitate English language communication skills among ESL learners within the context of gamification-based instructional approaches.

Table 3:
Participants' Speaking Anxiety

Factor		Frequency 95	Percentage 100
Do you ever feel nervous, anxious, uncomfortable, shy, or worried when you speak English?	Yes	57	60
	No	38	40

In order to provide additional clarification, the participants were also instructed to respond to a question regarding their level of anxiety when speaking in the English language prior to engaging in the activity of playing *Sampan*. Table 3 reveals that a significant proportion of

participants encounter anxiety when speaking English, with 60% of the entire sample reporting such experiences before interacting with *Sampan*. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Nuraqilah Nadjwa and Aminabibi (2018) as well as Saidah et al. (2022), which suggests that language learners, in this case ESL learners, commonly experience language anxiety, particularly when it comes to public speaking.

Table 4:
Students' Feedback

Item	Statement	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
SAMPAN MINIMISES LANGUAGE ANXIETY				
3	<i>Sampan</i> enhances my communication skills.	0	4.2	95.8
4	I feel confident communicating in English while playing <i>Sampan</i> .	0	17.9	82.1
5	I do not worry about making mistakes in using English while playing <i>Sampan</i> .	3.2	12.6	84.2
8	I do not hesitate to give my opinion in English when playing <i>Sampan</i> .	1.1	22.1	76.8
10	I do not feel discouraged when others disagree with my opinion.	3.2	24.2	72.6
11	I feel <i>Sampan</i> helps me overcome my anxiety.	1.1	13.7	85.3
12	I do not feel defeated when others do not understand and correct my English while playing <i>Sampan</i> .	5.3	17.9	76.8
13	I do not get upset when I have to explain my points again while playing <i>Sampan</i> .	2.1	9.5	88.4
SAMPAN MOTIVATES COMMUNICATION				
6	<i>Sampan</i> promotes motivation to acquire good communication skills.	0	3.2	96.8
7	<i>Sampan</i> helps me express my opinion better.	0	10.5	89.5
14	I am eager to participate in speaking activities in class.	1.1	15.8	83.2
16	<i>Sampan</i> makes me speak more in class.	1.1	7.4	91.6
17	I want to play <i>Sampan</i> again.	2.1	9.5	88.4
SAMPAN AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL				
1	<i>Sampan</i> is an interesting game.	0	1.1	98.9
2	<i>Sampan</i> makes learning meaningful.	0	1.1	98.9
9	<i>Sampan</i> engages all students and promotes cooperative learning.	1.1	9.5	89.5
15	<i>Sampan</i> is entertaining and educational at the same time.	0	2.1	97.9

Table 4 illustrates feedback from the participants on *Sampan*. The feedback was classified into three distinct categories, which centred on language anxiety, motivation in communication,

and its use as an educational tool. Although there are some different views regarding the effectiveness of using the card game in reducing language anxiety (as indicated in Item 5, Item 8, Item 10, Item 11, Item 12, and Item 13), most participants agreed that *Sampan* successfully minimises their language anxiety when communicating in class and with their peers. This is further demonstrated by the fact that 95.8% of respondents concurred that *Sampan* improves their communication skills (item 3). It is widely agreed upon that the participants exhibited a low level of dissatisfaction when required to reiterate their points while playing the card game, with a majority of 88.4%. Furthermore, most respondents believed that this card game helped them overcome their anxiety towards speaking in public (Item 11) as they did not worry about making mistakes (Item 5) when playing the game (85.3% and 84.4%, respectively).

Subsequently, it becomes evident that a significant proportion of students acknowledged that *Sampan* effectively enhances their communication abilities, as indicated by the response rate of 96.8% for Item 6. Although there was a minority of students (2.1% for Item 17) who expressed their disagreement with playing *Sampan* again, it is important to highlight that the majority of participants (91.6% for Item 16) agreed that *Sampan* offered them a greater opportunity to utilise the language in the classroom. This can be explained by the fact that they were better able to express their opinions (Item 7 with 89.5%), which increased their desire to partake in speaking activities in class (Item 14 with 83.2%). Previous research indicates that most ESL learners experience language anxiety, especially when speaking in public and with peers (Charoensukmongkol, 2016; Horwitz et al., 1986; Nuraqilah Nadjwa & Aminabibi, 2018), because they may receive criticism and make mistakes while using the language (Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2004; Horwitz et al., 1986; Pappamihiel, 2002). However, engaging in *Sampan* yielded a noteworthy improvement in their communication skills, with most of the participants concurred that playing *Sampan* diminished their anxiety when speaking in public or in front of their peers.

Given that *Sampan* was able to reduce the participants' speaking anxiety, resulting in their increased motivation to communicate more using the language, it can be established that *Sampan* is an ideal tool for gamification in educational contexts. Many items under this category had a high level of agreement, with Item 1 and Item 2 both receiving a 98.9% agreement rate, while Item 15 received a slightly lower agreement rate of 97.9%. The aforementioned evidence suggests that *Sampan* provides both entertainment and educational qualities. However, despite the minimal disparity, it is worth noting that Item 9 garnered an agreement rate of just 89.5%, with 2.1% of participants expressing uncertainty regarding the extent to which playing *Sampan* facilitated the involvement of all participants and fostered cooperative learning. This situation may arise as a result of unforeseen circumstances involving a large number of students engaging in simultaneous game play. Alternatively, it is possible that individual differences played a role in the decision of certain participants to refrain from actively participating in the activity. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that learners exhibit motivation to acquire language skills when presented with engaging and meaningful activities. According to Adlina et al. (2012) and Ismail (2022), these meaningful and effective learning practices affect how learners perceive the significance of language communicative ability. As they perceive that acquiring the language and mastering the language will have a significant impact on their lives, be it in the form of instrumental or integrative motivation, meaningful and interactive activities such as *Sampan* aid them in leveraging the language.

In the following step, the students were given an open-ended question and asked to provide further justification on the impact of playing *Sampan* on their communication skills. The open-ended responses were then coded and thematically analysed.

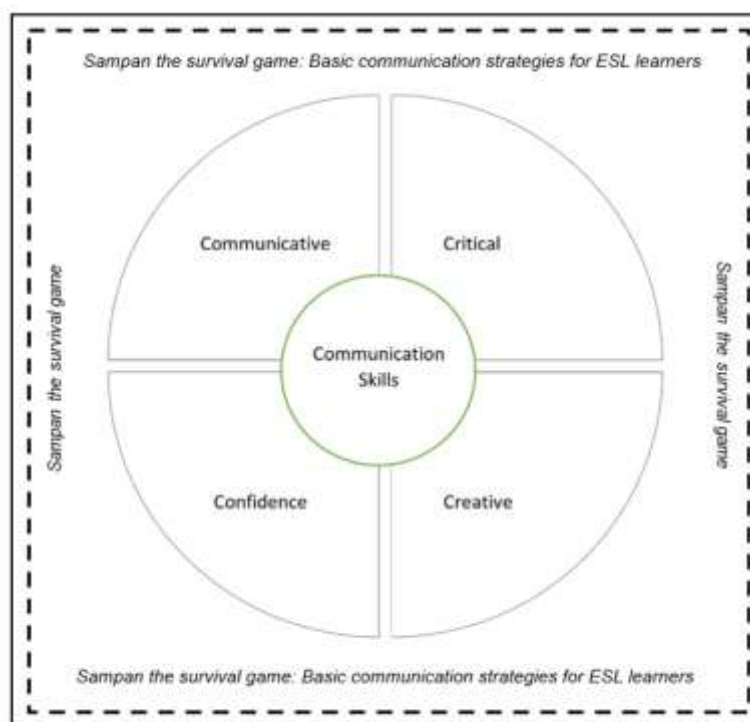


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of Sampan the survival game in assisting basic communication and critical thinking skills

Figure 1 illustrates the themes derived from the responses provided by the students, which can be classified into four main categories. The main themes discovered in this context are communicative, critical, creative, and confidence.

Table 5:

Main themes on the impact of *Sampan the survival game: Basic communication strategies for ESL learners*

Code	Theme	Items
C1	Communicative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because you can learn several ways of communicating among your friends who are experts in speaking English. It urges students to participate in communication during the game. Give me a chance to speak in English. <i>Sampan</i> gives you that one crucial part where individually you speak and communicate in front of all your friends, and you get to not only interact with them but also normalise yourself in communicating with them all.

- Because we are talking to each other to get our opinion.
- It helps me to speak spontaneously.
- We need to argue with other people in English.

C2 *Critical*

- It enables you to think critically and come out with an impromptu idea, as well as having the right skills to deliver your points so that others are able to comprehend.
- Makes me think in a crucial situation.
- The *Sampan* game helps students to throw their ideas to defend themselves.
- Make my brain work.
- Great. I love strategy games.
- I feel that it is a good way to debate and help defend ourselves.
- People have different perspectives.
- Brainstorming ideas and listening to other people's opinions thoroughly.
- Critical thinking and finding words to use.
- Think deeply about all the possibilities. And be careful with the people that wants to take advantage of you
- Survival skills and should think outside the box.

C3 *Creative*

- Fun learning
- I enjoy this game. It helps me to communicate with people.
- *Sampan* helps us to be creative with what was given.
- Debate can increase soft skills.
- It helps us speak in a more open and fun way.
- We could learn something while having fun that makes us forget our anxiety.
- I discovered others while they're talking, what words do they use in order for me to talk back without hesitation.
- I think in a positive way of the outcomes.
- Satisfied as the game is the best platform to enhance our communication skill.
- Excited to know other people's opinions.
- Happy and release stress.
- I am very excited.

- I want to play a game that seems like this again.

C4 Confidence

- Confident in speaking English in the class.
- Courageous to speak and give opinions in English.
- Feel a little bit confident speaking English.
- It makes me feel more confident to give my opinion to others.
- More comfortable to speak.
- I realised that I could speak in English in front of people.
- I feel more confident with myself when communicating in English.
- I want to express more of my opinion.
- I feel wow since I can speak although not too fluently.
- My confidence level is increasing, and I need to think outside the box.
- A bit confident since all my classmates are very supportive.
- I feel more confident even though my English was not that good.

It is evident that the students reached a consensus regarding the significant impact of playing *Sampan* on their communication skills (C1 - Communicative). Most participants expressed that this game provided them with the opportunity to express their opinions in a spontaneous manner. This engaging language activity gave adequate space and opportunity for learners to exploit their linguistic ability, given that Rao (2019) is certain that such classroom activities motivate learners to speak more. *Sampan* offers individuals an opportunity to freely utilise language, hence promoting the normalisation of language usage in effectively conveying their thoughts to others.

In addition, effective communication necessitates the development of critical thinking skills, enabling students to enhance their ability to think critically (C2 - Critical). According to Oliveira and Cruz (2018), the implementation of gamification in the language classroom has been found to promote the development of critical thinking abilities. *Sampan* provided students the opportunity to practise their critical thinking abilities by demanding both the defence and attack of opponents during playing. The majority of students expressed agreement with the

concept that critical thinking skills can be strengthened through engagement in play, as it necessitates the ability to give compelling rationales and justifications for each decision made. Furthermore, it was necessary for them to formulate strategies and develop a comprehensive plan of action to ensure their survival over the duration of the game.

During the process of devising and formulating a plan to secure their survival through playing *Sampan*, the students will inevitably encounter circumstances that demand the use of their imaginative capabilities in order to generate creative ideas and approaches (C3 - Creative). This process is expected to enhance student engagement by encouraging communication and collaborative discussion of ideas among team members. In addition, due to the nature of this game involving spontaneous reactions, it is imperative for students to possess the capacity to engage in highly imaginative and resourceful thinking in order to effectively mitigate potential risks. Oliveira and Cruz (2018) asserted that the use of game play in language classrooms fosters creativity, thereby liberating learners from a restrictive environment. Ultimately, this enables learners to fully articulate their thoughts and feelings, a crucial aspect in mitigating the experience of speaking anxiety resulting in a sense of satisfaction and motivation to use the language frequently.

The fact that the students had fun while playing *Sampan* and that they were given the room to express themselves through language contributed eventually to an increase in their levels of self-confidence (C4 - Confidence). During the process of engaging in discussions and interactions with their team members, students are required to actively challenge and contest the perspectives of other groups, while simultaneously pledging for and safeguarding the priorities of their own group. They would also be awarded points in order to assure their survival and victory in the game. According to Figueroa-Flores (2015), the incorporation of interactive activities in the classroom setting has been found to significantly improve overall student involvement. This increased engagement subsequently fosters a sense of confidence and willingness among students to actively employ the target language, hence alleviating the challenges associated with language acquisition. Language learning should be enjoyable so that students feel comfortable using the language in real-world situations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is apparent that *Sampan* offers effective opportunities for learners to enhance their English language proficiency, communication abilities, and critical thinking skills. It is imperative to ensure that learners possess not only the ability to communicate effectively, but also the capacity to develop into holistic individuals capable of critical thinking given the increasingly complex nature of the present world. In addition to this, it is evident that gamification has been employed in language learning to incorporate game features and mechanics into language learning activities and resources. The objective is to enhance the level of engagement, enjoyment, and motivation experienced by learners during the process of acquiring knowledge. By implementing game elements like points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, and rewards, language educators and developers may create a more interactive and immersive learning environment to promote language learning. The acquisition of a language should not be confined just to the acquisition of rules and grammar; rather, it should be an engaging and purposeful activity that promotes meaningful learning. The purpose of this interactive game play is to ensure that learners cultivate a sense of motivation, whether instrumental or integrative, to encourage the use of the language. Hence, given the situation where learners are afforded the opportunity to employ the language in an unconstrained context, they would be immersed in an authentic environment to effectively utilise the

language, free from the fear of making mistakes or encountering criticism from other students.

The use of language gamification in language learning deserves greater attention, as the process of acquiring a new language should not be perceived as an overwhelming effort but rather as an engaging and interesting experience. This study promotes the implementation of language gamification as a means to improve students' motivation to acquire language skills. By offering an enhanced learning experience, language gamification aims to foster increased engagement and utilisation of the target language. This can be achieved by providing students with opportunities and exposure to employ the target language beyond the confines of a structured context, such as the classroom. As a result of this, they may have increased motivation to actively engage with the language. This is due to the absence of restrictions and a lack of scrutiny regarding their language accuracy. Given the prevalent influence of electronic devices in the modern era, where written language has come to dominate the communication process, this research aims to enhance students' motivation to frequently employ the target language through improved language learning engagement. *Sampan the survival game: Basic communication strategies for ESL learners* is hoped to provide learners with sufficient resources and expose them to the language in order to prepare them for the working world, where they will require the language to further broaden their possibilities of obtaining employment. However, it is essential to acknowledge that although gamification has the potential to enhance language acquisition, it should not substitute other fundamental components of language pedagogy, including grammar instruction, communicative exercises, and cultural immersion. The integration of gamification alongside conventional language learning techniques is frequently regarded as a very effective strategy for cultivating language ability and fluency. Lastly, the findings of this study indicate that gamification is still relevant to be used as a medium to assist and enhance students' proficiency of the language in and out of the classroom setting. This allows other parties to be motivated to design and construct various types of language gamification products to further assist the teaching and learning of the language.

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Declaration Of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical statement

All participants provided informed consent. All participants have knowledge of their rights and were granted the option to abstain from participating in the data gathering process at any given point. The participants' responses will be maintained in an anonymous and confidential manner.

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