

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS, GRAPH DESCRIPTION SKILL DEVELOPMENT, AND CHALLENGES IN USING THE KNIGHT OF KINGDOM LANGUAGE BOARDGAME (KOKLAB)

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Abstract: *Boardgame-based learning has garnered attention in language education due to its ability to motivate students and promote meaningful communication. The objective of this study is to examine students' perceptions of the boardgame in learning to describe graphs and charts, investigate its impact on confidence and emotional responses, and identify challenges encountered by students. This study employed a qualitative design to explore students' experiences in using the Knight of Kingdom Language Boardgame (KOKLAB) as a complementary learning tool in a tertiary-level communicative English classroom. Five students were selected as participants as they had experienced using KOKLAB. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain in-depth perspectives. The interview transcripts were analysed thematically to identify recurring themes. The findings indicate that students generally perceived KOKLAB as familiar and accessible due to its interactive element, which supported active engagement. Students reported having opportunities to practice the language forms and functions of describing graphs and charts during the gameplay. Several impacts were identified including improved confidence, and positive emotional engagement although some experienced pressure related to time constraints and the competitive elements. The findings suggest that the use of boardgame can contribute to an effective learning environment with careful consideration of task design and pacing.*

Keywords: *Game-based learning, language boardgame, communicative English, tertiary-level education, qualitative study*

Introduction

English has become the dominant language of international communication, media, and the internet, and it is widely used worldwide. It plays an important role in education, social interaction and career development. English is used widely and globally for educational and professional purposes (Richards, 2024). According to Azman (2016), in the Malaysian educational system, the language is used as the second official language and as the second-most important medium of instruction.

Communicative English courses are offered in Malaysian TVET higher education institutions to different semesters. This study aims to examine an advanced Communicative English course offered to semester 4 and semester 5 students depending on the program. The primary emphasis of the course is the topic “Description of Graphs and Charts,” which focuses on students’ ability to present data using appropriate language forms and functions. This topic trains students to describe graphs and charts accurately in English.

Oga-Baldwin et. al (2025) agreed that educators play crucial roles in creating a conducive learning environment by supporting students’ interest in foreign language that contributes to successful learning. Students in traditional learning environments are often passive recipients in the classroom nevertheless modern learning environments are usually more active and engaged. The use of interactive learning like language boardgames can encourage interaction and engagement among students. The purpose of implementing language boardgame in the lesson is to encourage students to converse with one another while engaging in the activity.

Educational psychology perspectives also suggest that emotional engagement and social interaction influence language learning experiences. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impacts of using Knight of Kingdom language boardgame (KOKLAB) as a teaching tool to support learning in a more enjoyable and less stressful environment.

Research Objectives

RO1: To explore students’ perceptions of KOKLAB

RO : To examine how KOKLAB supports students’ skills to describe graphs and charts.

RO3 : To investigate the impacts of KOKLAB on students’ English language use on confidence and emotional learning experience.

RO4 : To identify the challenges students encounter when using KOKLAB.

Literature Review

Game-Based Learning in Language Education

In recent years, game-based and interactive learning has continued to gain attention as an effective approach in language education, particularly for promoting learner engagement and active participation. Although previous studies consistently report that game-based learning improves participation and engagement in ESL classrooms, most studies primarily focus on digital learning platforms rather than physical language boardgames. This indicates a need for further exploration of face-to-face boardgame interaction in tertiary-level communicative English classrooms (Chan, 2024; Hafiza & Pratolo, 2024). Interactive activities and competitive elements may help reduce students’ anxiety to participate and motivate them to communicate meaningfully with their friends.

One of the characteristics of language boardgames is their emphasis on face-to-face interaction and collaborative learning that has been identified as valuable instructional tools in language classrooms. Unlike digital games, boardgames enable students to discuss meaning directly with peers, which supports genuine language use (Poole, 2025). Recent findings suggest that boardgame-based activities can contribute to improved vocabulary use, oral communication, and classroom engagement by creating a flexible and interactive learning environment (Chi et al., 2025). These features make boardgames particularly suitable for tertiary-level language instruction as the students are in independent learning mode.

Communicative Language Learning and Skill Development

The importance of meaningful tasks that reflect authentic language use has been emphasized through communicative language teaching. Students are expected to apply language forms and functions in practical environments rather than relying solely on rote memorisation learning (Richards, 2024). Students were given opportunities to involve interactive tasks where they can practise communication skills through problem-solving, discussion, and information exchange.

For the selected topic, Graphs and Charts Description, students are required to use specific skills such as identifying trends, making comparisons, and explaining data clearly. Students have encountered difficulties in identifying graphs and charts elements due to insufficient exposure in applying them in real-world situations (Hyland & Shaw, 2024). Therefore, the implementation of language boardgames allows students to learn the course in a less threatening environment by allowing repeated practice of these skills. As a result, students can strengthen both content knowledge and language use simultaneously.

Affective Factors in Language Learning

Affective factors such as motivation, enjoyment, and anxiety play a significant role in second language learning. Students with stronger language proficiency may exhibit positive engagement during the gameplay. In contrast, learners who have a high level of anxiety may be less willing to participate in classroom interactions, which can hinder language development. Oga-Baldwin et. al (2025) highlighted the importance of creating positive learning environments that promote enjoyment and confidence to support students' willingness to communicate.

Language boardgame has enabled students to engage with their friends that positively influence emotional responses by reducing anxiety. When learners perceive activities as enjoyable rather than evaluative, they are more likely to participate actively in language use (Chi et al., 2025). Nonetheless, recent research has also noted that competitive elements and time limitation may create pressure for some students (Chan, 2024). Hence, it is important to examine both the positive and challenging impacts of game-based learning, particularly in tertiary-level communicative English classrooms.

Educational Psychology Perspectives in Game-Based Language Learning

This study is supported by educational psychology perspectives that emphasize emotional engagement and social interaction in learning. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis explains that learners acquire language more effectively when anxiety levels are low and motivation is high. Positive emotional environments may encourage learners to participate actively and communicate with greater confidence. In contrast, stress and pressure may hinder language learning by increasing emotional barriers.

In addition, Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory highlights the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning in knowledge development. Learning occurs through communication, peer interaction, and shared experiences. In the context of this study, the Knight of Kingdom Language Boardgame (KOKLAB) encouraged students to interact, exchange ideas, and practise language collaboratively during gameplay. Therefore, the boardgame environment supported both social learning and communicative engagement.

Methodology

Research Context

This study was conducted within the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) context in Malaysia. By combining formal and informal learning environments, TVET helps to equip students with knowledge and skills for students' future career. In supporting students' communication skills, English plays a vital role in this context, both for academic and workplace-related tasks.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted to examine students' perceptions and learning experiences related to the use of a language boardgame in an English classroom. This study aimed to obtain in-depth insights and the exploration of the participants' experience, therefore a qualitative approach was considered more appropriate rather than quantitative measurement. Also, qualitative research is appropriate for exploring participants' perspectives in depth, particularly when the goal is to understand lived experiences (Tracy, 2023; Silverman & Marvasti, 2024).

Participants and Sampling

This study employed convenience sampling due to the accessibility and availability of participants during data collection process. This approach is regularly used in qualitative research when the aim is to obtain powerful and contextualized insights (Etikan et al., 2023).

Five students who had already learned and been exposed to the topic of Description of Graphs and Charts were selected to provide important and significant responses related to the focus of the study.

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection instrument. Semi-structured interviews are effective in qualitative research as they allow researchers to obtain in-depth information while maintaining flexibility during the interview process (Ruslin et al., 2022). Greater detail from participants' responses is gained throughout the interviews which provide rich data to this study.

Data Collection Procedure

Five respondents were involved and took approximately one hour to complete the session individually. The semi-structured interviews were conducted allowing in-depth sessions with participants. This allows participants to engage in a flexible environment. (Johnson & Christensen, 2023). The interviews were conducted at different times based on participants' availability. Detailed explanations of their experiences were gained and contributed to data collection. The data obtained were later examined and interpreted in relation to the research objectives.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the interview procedures. Participation was voluntary, and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. All participants provided their consent to take part in the study. For reporting purposes, participants were identified using pseudonyms (S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5).

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Students' Perceptions of the KOKLAB (RQ1)

Question	Students' Responses	Emerging Theme
Can you describe your overall experience playing the KOKLAB?	Students described the game as familiar, enjoyable, and easy to follow, like common boardgames.	Familiarity & Accessibility
What were your first impressions when the boardgame was introduced	Participants expressed curiosity and excitement, accompanied by initial nervousness.	Initial Anxiety & Interest

As presented in Table 1, students generally perceived the Knight of Kingdom Language Boardgame (KOKLAB) as familiar, accessible, and enjoyable. Most students reported that the gameplay was easy to follow due to the clear explanation of rules and the familiar structure of the boardgame. Students who initially felt nervous gradually became more comfortable as the gameplay progressed. Overall, the findings indicate that the KOKLAB created a positive learning experience that supported students' engagement during the lesson.

These findings are consistent with recent studies which suggest that familiarity and clarity in game-based activities can positively influence learners' perceptions and willingness to participate in language classrooms. Similarly, well-organized boardgames with clear rules help students to enjoy and engage more comfortably, particularly in ESL and EFL learning environments (Chan, 2024; Hafiza & Pratolo, 2024).

Table 2: Section B: Skills in Describing Graphs and Charts (RQ2)

Question	Students' Responses	Emerging Theme
In what ways did the boardgame help you understand graphs and charts better?	Students learned to identify graph types, labels, titles, and trends through gameplay.	Conceptual Understanding
What specific skills did you practise while playing the game?	Students practised describing trends, identifying graph components, and using correct language forms.	Language & Analytical Skills

Table 2 summarises students' responses regarding the skills developed using KOKLAB. The findings show that students were able to practise identifying graph types, labels, and trends while responding to the game tasks. In addition, students reported applying appropriate language forms when describing graphical information. These results suggest that the boardgame reinforced both content knowledge and language skills related to graph and chart description.

This finding supports recent research in communicative and academic English learning, which highlights the importance of interactive and task-based activities in developing students' ability to apply language forms and functions in context. Hyland and Shaw (2024) noted that students often struggle with describing graphical information when opportunities for guided and repeated practice are limited. The use of a boardgame in this study provided such opportunities in an engaging and structured manner.

Table 3: Students' Perceived Impacts of the KOKLAB (RQ3)

Question	Students' Responses	Emerging Theme
Did the KOKLAB encourage you to use English during the activity?	Students expressed active use of English when answering questions and interacting during gameplay.	Language Use
How confident did you feel using English while playing the boardgame?	Some students initially felt pressured, but many revealed increased confidence as the game progressed.	Confidence Development
How did you feel while playing the KOKLAB?	Students experienced enjoyment, excitement, and a sense of challenge during gameplay.	Emotional Response
Did the competitive elements of the game affect your learning experience?	Competition improved motivation for some students but created pressure for others.	Engagement and Anxiety

Table 3 indicates that participants actively used English throughout the gameplay to complete the task. Students were required to respond to prompts, discuss answers, and communicate ideas during the activity. Although some of the students initially felt pressure when using English, many of them agreed that their confidence level increased as they play together. This indicates that the encouraged use of language within a supportive climate contributed to greater communicative confidence.

The findings indicate that KOKLAB created an interactive learning environment that encouraged students to communicate actively and collaborate with peers during gameplay. While some students experienced anxiety due to time pressure and competition, many gradually developed greater confidence in using English. Similarly, Chan (2024) expressed that although competitive game elements may introduce tension, they can still contribute positively to the learning environment when properly managed. These findings align with recent research suggesting that game-based learning climate can promote active language use while motivating

students' confidence and participation. Chi et al. (2025) agreed that boardgame-based activities encouraged communication and gradually reduced learners' anxiety over time.

This reflects Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of emotional factors in language learning, as well as Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which highlights the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning experiences. Overall, the findings suggest that the KOKLAB had a positive impact on both the communicative and affective aspects of students' learning experiences.

Table 4: Challenges in Using the KOKLAB (RQ4)

Question	Students' Responses	Emerging Theme
What challenges or difficulties did you face while playing the boardgame?	Students highlighted stress, anxiety, and difficulty recalling answers.	Cognitive & Emotional Load
How did the time limitation influence your ability to answer?	Time constraints increased anxiety and reliance on memorisation.	Time Pressure

Table 4 presents the challenges experienced by students when using the KOKLAB. The findings indicate that time limitations and difficulty recalling information under pressure were the main challenges faced during gameplay. These challenges contributed to increased anxiety and reliance on memorisation for some students. From the perspective of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, increased pressure and anxiety may temporarily hinder students' confidence and language performance during communicative activities. Despite these difficulties, students continued to participate actively, suggesting that the challenges did not outweigh the perceived benefits of the activity.

Table 5: Overall Impact and Reflection

Question	Students' Responses	Emerging Theme
Did the boardgame help improve your understanding of the lesson content?	All students agreed that the boardgame enhanced understanding while maintaining enjoyment.	Perceived Effectiveness
Would you recommend the boardgame for future classes?	Students expressed willingness to recommend the boardgame despite its challenges.	Instructional Value

As illustrated in Table 5, students' overall reflections indicate that the Knight of Kingdom Language Boardgame (KOKLAB) was perceived as effective in supporting their understanding of the lesson content. Students identified the interactive elements of the boardgame as one of the factors that facilitated their learning during gameplay. Despite the challenges of time pressure, limited comprehension, students continued to finish the game and mentioned the willingness to recommend the boardgame for future use.

Based on the overall impact and reflection, boardgame is viewed as a valuable supplementary teaching and learning tool in tertiary education. Poole (2025) and Nguyen and Yukawa (2023)

similarly highlighted that students experienced meaningful and balanced learning engagement with their friends while playing with boardgame activities. Overall, the results suggest that the KOKLAB holds instructional capacity when integrated thoughtfully into communicative English lessons

Conclusion

This study examined the impacts of using the Knight of Kingdom Language Boardgame (KOKLAB) in a tertiary-level communicative English classroom, with particular focus on students' perceptions, skill development, and learning experiences related to describing graphs and charts. Overall, the findings indicate that the use of the boardgame supported a positive learning environment by promoting engagement, dynamic language use, and satisfaction among students.

Students' willingness to participate in boardgame activities is due to the game's familiarity and accessibility. The boardgame also promoted students' skill development, opportunities to identify and describe elements of charts and graphs. This suggests that integrating content-based tasks into gameplay can reinforce both language and analytical skills in communicative English instruction.

In addition, the study highlights the role of game-based learning in influencing students' emotional responses. While some students experienced initial anxiety and pressure, particularly due to time limitations and competitive aspects, these challenges did not hinder participation. Instead, the enjoyable and interactive nature of the boardgame appeared to support confidence and maintain participation during the lesson.

The findings also highlighted that the task design and pacing when using boardgame need to be carefully considered despite the positive results. Flexible time allocation may help reduce unnecessary pressure and motivate students to be involved in the activities.

In conclusion, the Knight of Kingdom language boardgame exhibits potential as a complementary teaching tool in tertiary-level communicative English classrooms. Future studies may consider involving a larger number of participants, exploring different language skills, or examining the long-term effects of boardgame-based learning to provide further insights into its effectiveness.

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