

Tailored RPG as a Supplementary Reading Pedagogy for Teaching English

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Abstract: Even though English has become the main foreign language in Indonesia, *The Ministry of National Education* in Indonesia decided to remove English from the main subjects in elementary level due to the difficulties of teaching and learning. Hence, this study investigates the effectiveness of employing computer games as a supplementary pedagogy in English teaching to improve students' reading ability and to reduce students' learning anxiety. This study will be expected to shed the light on how to prepare creative reading materials by using computer games for English teachers, private or public schools, cram schools, and researchers. Ninety four students in a private school in west Indonesia were recruited as the participants. A mixed-research design was employed and twelve games were introduced to the students for six weeks. Moreover, a RPG workshop was presented to the English teachers for 4 weeks. Four research questions were developed, and the data were collected through pretest and posttest, classroom observation, teacher interview, and teaching reading strategy questionnaire. The results showed that the p-value of the t-test is $< .0001$, indicated that the RPG works as an effective supplemental teaching strategy. The students' English proficiency improved significantly after the RPG intervention. The result also pointed out that RPG helped the students to be more focused on their assignments. Simultaneously, the English teachers perceived that RPG increased the students' motivation to learn English. Therefore, all teachers agreed that RPG could be an alternative strategy for teaching English. They commented that RPG helped them to prepare the materials by using virtual characters to create meaningful dialogue, so the students could learn English more easily in a more interesting way. Overall, it can be concluded that RPG worked as an effective supplementary reading pedagogy in English teaching.

Keywords: Role Playing Game, language learning, English teaching

1. Introduction

Since English has become the main foreign language in Indonesia, Indonesian students have to learn English started from grade 4 (Lauder, 2008). Lately, even though there are some changes of policy regarding elementary English curriculum, English is still the most popular and most frequently used foreign language around the world. Therefore, the researcher of current study realized that English education is important major for Indonesian.

Santoso (2006) mentions that "In the context of the Indonesian multilingual society, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), such bilingual program has become a significant breakthrough, encouraging the use of English in non-English subjects." (p. 1). According to Rothschild (2008), the study of *The Instructional Design of an Educational Game* found that the learning outcomes by using an educational game increased 500 vocabulary words over the course of 10 levels and improved player use of word learning strategies by providing instruction and practice some activities in that game.

Moreover, the study of *The Effect of Quest Types and Gaming Motivation in Role Playing Game*, found that the bounty-collection quest (expedition to get the reward) significantly affected the procedure knowledge of subjects with high immersion motivation (Lee & Yi Chao, 2009). Consequently, this current study expects to employ computer games to improve students' reading ability as well as to reduce students' anxiety of learning English.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of applying RPG as a supplementary reading pedagogy for teaching English. This current research aims to explore the effectiveness of using digital role-playing games (RPGs) as a supplementary reading pedagogy in English classes. Confidently, RPG as a supplementary reading pedagogy can be a creative way to teach English in Indonesia.

1.2 Research Question

To determine the effectiveness of using tailored RPGs to support English lessons, four questions are established below:

- Can tailored RPGs improve students' reading skills?
- What are the teacher's perceptions regarding tailored RPGs?
- In what way and to what extent, tailored RPGs can assist the students' learning?
- Can RPG act as a supplementary reading pedagogy for teaching English?

2. Literature Review

2.1 RPG for Language Learning

Tychsen (2006) clearly provides an analysis of the RPG (Role Playing Game) indicating two parts, the process and the aspect of playing. All features of the RPGs show important roles in building imagination. In addition, computer games are able to facilitate the knowledge construction through the problem-solving tasks such as game quests (Lee & Yi Chao, 2009).

Moshell, Li, Makwana & McDaniel (2007) also mention that the RPG creates important relationships with language learning. The experiment also proved that there are several modes of interaction that could benefit for language learners. Therefore, their experiment can be seen as one inspiration of this study.

2.2 The Influence of Technology in Education

As Kamil, Intrator, and Kim (2000) confirm in their study, technology is highly motivational for students. Besides, computer software has been credited as an effective tool for teaching reading to students who suffer from reading difficulties.

On the other hand, McKenna, Reinking, Labbo, and Watkins (1996) also note that the interactive benefits of the computer and multimedia are that students can enjoy playing and be less frustrated when they are using the computer to improve their reading. Moreover, computers and other technology provide the practice, support, and motivation for students who have reading difficulties (Meyer & Rose, 1998).

2.3 Teachers' perceptions of computer technology as language learning

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) in language classrooms entails various issues of language teaching, such as pedagogical approaches, language skills, learning styles, students' target language proficiency levels, and motivation. Teachers identifies that computers support their integration of meaningful and authentic communication into language-teaching curriculum (Warschauer, 1996).

Meskill, Mossop, DiAngelo and Pasquale (2002) report that technologically experienced teachers tend to focus more on student learning and student empowerment than teacher instruction. Miller and Olson (1994) and Cuban (2001) also point out that the use of computers has been believed to transform teachers' pedagogical practices from teacher-centered to student-centered.

3. Method

To explore the function of RPG as a supplementary reading pedagogy for teaching English, this current study investigates the effectiveness by using four instruments to collect data. In order to answer the four

research questions, the data are collected through pretest and posttest assignments, classroom observations, teacher interviews, and teaching strategy questionnaire.

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study are beginning-level English learners in Indonesia. This current study recruits around 94 students which are divided into four classes of 4th grade from a private elementary school in Indonesia. The participants in this current study are around 9-10 years old, who were studying in the spring semester of the 2012/2013 academic year.

3.2 Material and Procedure

Twelve RPGs are created by using RPG Maker VX 1.02. The software has been purchased by the researchers' academic school department. The major treatment is 12 digital role playing games created based on the school curriculum content and the English coordinator's lesson plan. A syllabus is created to support the researcher in designing the games. The researcher creates the syllabus and lesson plan by combining the national syllabus curriculum and the school curriculum. Consequently, it needs six weeks and 12 meetings to teach the topic. Furthermore, a RPG workshop was presented to the English teachers for 4 weeks based on the teachers' request.

3.3 Pretest and posttest

This current study applied the test based on the forms that the school employed. The researcher utilized two test forms, multiple-choice and vocabulary translation, to construct the pretest and the posttest. The materials used in pretest and posttest are identical. Both tests contained 22 picture-cued tasks, 28 reading comprehension questions and 50 vocabulary words tasks. Total number of questions in the pretest and the posttest is 100. The results from the pretest and posttest were employed to answer the first research question.

3.4 Classroom observation

The researcher created seven coding criteria to analyze the observation results, such as; actively engaged in activity, self-distracted, engaged with the reading, engaged with teacher, engaged with peers, student achievement and student compliment. The researcher explored how the students learned - how they interpreted and made sense of the RPGs, when they stumbled and how they solved the problem in reading when they did not understand the materials and so on. The observation field notes were collected and analyzed to answer the second question.

3.5 Teacher Interview

A semi-structured interview was given to the English teacher to comprehend the teacher's perception of using the RPGs as an alternative strategy in the class. Ten interview questions were provided and all items were constructed in English.

3.6 Questionnaire of Reading Instruction

The researcher employed open-ended questionnaire for five English teachers in Elementary class to identify their opinions on teaching English by using RPG. The selected English teachers was chosen by the principal. Before the survey, five English teachers were trained about how to create the RPGs for English teaching. This mini workshop was conducted in March 2013 for 4 meetings. Each meeting had one discussion topic.

Moreover, seven coding criteria, "teacher personal information", "teachers' opinions regarding the RPG as an alternative strategy for learning English", "teachers' opinion regarding RPG design", "teacher opinion regarding the beneficial of using RPG", "teachers' difficulty in creating RPG" and "English teaching process by using RPG" were set by the researcher to analyze the results.

3.7 Tailored RPG & the Syllabus

The basic competency of this syllabus is to assist the students to be able to identify the vocabulary words and able to use the simple infinitive in the text. Consequently, the students should be able to comprehend the short story. The goal of the syllabus is that the students can identify the information through the reading.

The materials used in the RPG include simple dialogues, short stories and vocabulary words. The activities appeared in RPGs are to identify the meaning in the dialogues, and to identify the meaning of the vocabulary words. As to the evaluation modes in the tailored RPGs, there are multiple-choice questions and true/false questions. All the twelve games are presented by using different stories. As shown below, figure 1 is part of a virtual classroom, and figure 2 presents an example question in the TV studio setting.



Figure 1. The virtual classroom



Figure 2. A question in TV studio

3.8 Data collection and procedures

To analyze the pretest and posttest assignment results, the researcher employed paired sample t-test. All data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The field notes were employed in observation, and analyzed based on the seven coding criteria. The participants' reactions were also recorded by using a camera. The English teacher was interviewed by using semi-structured interview questionnaire to analyze the teacher's perception. Krueger framework analysis was employed for data analysis.

The researcher also applied the Questionnaire of Reading Instruction for five English teachers and the seven questions were analyzed by using the questionnaire coding criteria. Subsequently, the researcher connected the three of data collections; observation, interview and questionnaire into data triangulation.

4. Results & Discussion

Researcher describes the findings according to four research questions: pretest and posttest assignment, teacher interview, classroom observation and Teaching Reading Strategy Questionnaire.

4.1 Pretest and posttest assignment

The p-value is $< .0001$ smaller than α at $.05$. In another word, the RPG worked as an alternative strategy. This result reveals that the ability of students' reading skill strongly related to students' reading strategy.

4.2 Teacher Interview

The interview results aimed to identify the target teacher's opinions on learning English by using RPG. The target English teacher was the one of the English teachers taught in grade 4. During the research, the English teacher helped the researcher to observe the students in the class. Ten questions were presented by the interviewer (I) to the English teacher (ET). The content of interview was recorded and analyzed by using Krueger framework analysis. The researcher interpreted the data based on the descriptive statement of the raw data (Krueger, 1994).

To answer the research question regarding teacher's perceptions of RPG, the findings show that the English teacher had a positive perception that RPG could increase the students' motivation to learn English. The advantage of using RPG was that the students could learn from intriguing games. Moreover, RPG enhanced the students-teacher's interaction during learning time. Furthermore, RPG could be an effective strategy for problem solving in English teaching. It could help the students to concentrate more in learning English. Hence, the teacher could use RPG as a supplementary teaching for one or two meetings. However, the teacher stated that the difficulty of arranging the computer lab schedule, the unexpected technical problems and the time-consuming game-making process, all may hinder the teachers to use RPG in their regular classrooms.

4.3 Classroom Observation

The third research question, "In what way the RPGs, as an alternative strategy, assist the students to improve reading skills?" aimed to investigate the results of teachers' perceptions regarding RPG for teaching English. The data were analyzed according to seven coding criteria which were mentioned before. The analysis was portrayed by explicating the narrative of coding. This current study described the analysis of observation based on the class division: class 4A, class 4B, class 4C and class 4D.

The findings indicated that RPG could help students to be more focused on their assignments. They were engaged in the reading passages and the activities. The RPG also could increase students' motivation to learn English through the games. Students were able to answer the questions correctly and read the passage loudly. The finding also showed that the students were engaged with the peers and the teachers during the learning time.

4.4 Teaching Reading Strategy Questionnaire

The fourth research question, "Can RPG as a supplementary reading for teaching English?" was employed to investigate different perception regarding RPG as an alternative strategy for improving students' reading skill and for teaching English. The data were analyzed based on ten coding criteria such as; student competency, interest, teacher's compliment, teacher's difficulty; the benefit of RPG, the appropriateness program, teaching style, rejection, pause and English teaching process in RPG. The analysis was portrayed by explicating the narrative of coding. This current study described the analysis of Teaching Reading Strategy Questionnaire based on the opinions of 4 teachers.

Interestingly, all the teachers agreed that the benefit of using RPG was to acquire the contextual meaning of new vocabulary words by using the pictures and animations. They described that the virtual animations, dialogue, reading comprehension, the narrator and the questions were the parts of facilitating English learning process. They agreed that RPG could increase the students' motivation and attracted students' attention in learning. All teachers predicted that RPG could help them to prepare the materials by using the dialogue in virtual characters' conversation. Hence, the students would learn English easily. However, All teachers commented that they had a difficulty in designing RPG due to they have not mastered the program yet. Overall, all teachers agreed that RPG could be a supplementary pedagogy for English teaching.

5. Conclusion

According to the findings, four research questions were answered properly. Students' reading competency improved after the intervention of RPG, and the target English teacher had a positive perception regarding RPG. Moreover, RPG enhanced the interaction between teachers and students. Hence, it can be concluded that RPG can be a supplementary English teaching strategy for improving students' reading skill. It can help the students to be more focused on their assignments, and to increase the interaction between students and teachers. Moreover, RPG was a strategy for problem solving in learning English and it could be an alternative strategy in teaching English.

However, this study has a limitation. In the mini workshop, the teachers commented that they had a difficulty in designing RPGs because they have not mastered the program yet. Therefore, it is suggested that if the school does not have enough time to train the teachers, the school could hire programmers to design the games based on the curriculum content.

The second context is that RPG can be employed in private learning or it can be used as supplementary English textbook. It is hoped that the current research could shed light on choosing the alternative strategy to improve students' reading skill. Overall, the findings from this research confirmed the effectiveness of using RPG as an alternative strategy in English reading curriculum and for problem solving.

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