

# Teachers` Perspectives on Digital Game-Based Language Learning for Arabic Language in Malaysian Primary Schools

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## ABSTRACT

The interest in using digital games in language learning has increased in recent years. Researchers and education practitioners are turning their attention towards serious games for education or game-based learning to attract more students to learn effectively. This paper aimed at exploring teachers` point of view on the necessity of designing digital game-based language learning for Arabic Language in Malaysian primary schools. The data of the study were collected by using a questionnaire and analysed descriptively. Findings showed a significant data that most of the respondents agreed to use mobile digital learning in their classrooms. The respondents also proposed several types of games and other requirements to ensure the effectiveness of the games. An innovative technological application in learning Arabic language in Malaysia primary schools is much needed to enhance the Arabic language proficiency among the students.

**Keywords:** *Digital Game-Based Language Learning, Teachers Perspective, Malaysian Primary Schools*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, technological advancement has brought new possibilities learning [1,2]. It refers to the development and practice of physical technologies and software for educational purposes in multiple contexts and various types of media [3]. With specific regard to the technologies found within the educational context, the intended purpose is to provide educational learning support. Utilizing technologies can contribute to a more efficient teaching and learning process [3].

One of the innovations is a digital game-based language learning that applies various language acquisition theories to improve students` language proficiencies to an accepted level, such as second language acquisition [4] and Krashen`s hypothesis on lowering affective barriers to language learning [5]. Students may benefit from the experience of playing games while learning because they are acquiring target knowledge in an interactive manner that is also motivating. Digital game-based language learning facilitates language learning process by [6]: (a) providing visual and auditory exposure to the target language; (b) emphasizing specific language knowledge; and (c) promoting engagement/involvement in language learning and practice.

Game-based learning is also a virtual world game where a mix of playing and learning is applied to students. The fun in such activity causes students not feel they are learning. This situation can generate students' skills and motivation to increase whereby it can attract students and make learning more meaningful and effective [3]. The focus is also given to what they are learning to help improve students' learning strategies and capabilities. Moreover, today`s students live in a media-rich environment with their pastime firmly rooted in technology. There are so many benefits when game-based learning is applied. Game-based learning provides a promising approach to engage students in acquiring knowledge, initiating behavioral change and content understanding, just to name a few outcomes. Games in mathematics learning also help students to better understanding [7]. They will learn more effectively when their senses are stimulated and they are actively involved in using the software. In attempts to make games for education more enjoyable and effective, the researchers are increasingly turning their attention to serious games for education or game-based learning.

### **1.1. Arabic Language Learning In Malaysia**

The Arabic language is spoken by nearly 500 million people worldwide [8] and it is considered as a foreign language in Malaysia. In the 14th century, Islam was introduced to the Malay people by traders from Islamic countries which later spread among and embraced by the Malays. Since then, the Arabic language has become of great value and importance among them [9]. Nowadays, Arabic is among the six official United Nations languages; used in sermons for over 1.2 billion of non-Arabic Muslims. It is used for formal reading and writing, for international and national news broadcast, and spoken by the educated Arabs [10]. Furthermore, Quranic verses are recited in the Islamic prayers and Quran is a holy book that every Muslim should learn to read.

The Ministry of Education, Malaysia under the Education Act 1996 has placed the Arabic language as a foreign language that can be offered in schools and students starting from the primary level learn the language based on four skills, namely listening, speaking, writing and reading [11]. Foreign language learning and teaching refers to the teaching or and learning of a non-native language outside of the environment where it is commonly spoken [12]. The implementation of learning and teaching the Arabic language in primary schools is one of the Ministry of Education's efforts to increase the quality of national education. Therefore, every primary school needs to change and embraces the rapid development to match the education world today and the basis of a foreign language such as the Arabic language should be enforced from primary schools.

Although the Arabic language has been introduced in Malaysia for decades, the mastery of the language among Malaysians should be a concern. In Malaysia, the significance of learning Arabic is regarded as part and parcel of the Malay Muslim's religious duties. However, a lot of students views the Arabic language as a challenging subject. Hamidin [13] found that a few factors for lack of students' interest in the Arabic language are textbooks, curriculum structure, teaching methods, instructional aide and teacher's lack of proficiency in Arabic. At the same time, the literature on Arabic materials and resources used for educational purposes are still scarce and fall far behind other languages [10]. This will makes Arabic education lag behind other languages.

### **1.2. Problem Statement**

Although Arabic has been studied as a subject in primary and secondary schools, a large number of students in Malaysia still cannot speak Arabic. Awang [14] stated that students did not have the confidence to use Arabic in and out of the classroom. Ghani [15] believed that the weakness in the Arabic language had resulted in the quality impairment in the teaching and learning of Arabic in Malaysian schools. Researchers have identified that among the problems faced by students in learning Arabic or other second language is related to vocabulary [15,16].

Vocabulary is an important aspect because it is the first step in learning any language. Without vocabulary,

learning language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing cannot be realized [16]. In other words, vocabulary is an essential part of language. Ghazali [17] argued that poor knowledge of Arabic vocabulary limits the ability of students to communicate, write, read and listen to materials in Arabic.

Rosni [18] believed that the teaching and learning of the Arabic language in Malaysia presently is facing enormous challenges as most Arabic language teachers still use the traditional method of teaching, the teacher-centered approach. This situation has led to a lack of interest in Arabic which is considered as an unwanted subject by Malay students [19] because of poor motivation [20]. Therefore, Noor [21] state that in order to encourage students to learn Arabic, teachers need to introduce interesting learning strategies such as independent and active learning through the use of electronic materials. Thus, the focus is on learning Arabic vocabulary only as a first step in learning Arabic language through digital games that provides more convenient and attractive learning process [22].

Meanwhile, the use of digital game-based language learning (DGBLL) to aid English as a second language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is not a new approach to a prove how educational technology can support language learning [23]. Over the past decades, although some studies yielded mixed results [24,25], more studies reported that DGBLL was effective for the learning of English vocabulary [26,27] pragmatics [28,29], grammar [30,31], writing [32,33], and speaking [34]. Although extensive empirical evidences for DGBLL have been collected, there is a paucity of reviews with a focus on applying DGBLL in other languages especially in the learning of Arabic language in primary schools. It is important to canvass the literature on how DGBLL can be used to develop and increase student motivation to learn the Arabic language in an interesting way, particularly because language learning using digital games over the implementation of non-digital strategies has received increasing attention [35,36].

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

It was aimed to conduct a study exploring teachers' point of view on the necessity of designing digital game-based language learning for Arabic Language in Malaysian primary schools. Therefore, a survey among 463 teachers around Malaysia was conducted using purposive sampling intended at those who taught the Arabic language in Malaysian primary schools.

A Likert Scale was used for the items in the questionnaire adapted from Ghalib [37], and Sahrir [38]. The Likert scale is a common way to examine the extents of the respondents' agreement on the statements given in the questionnaire. For this study, a 5 point Likert scale was used. The scale was anchored by (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Nature, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly agree. To fulfil the study's objective of exploring the necessity of designing a digital mobile game for learning Arabic language skills, the data from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively. Prior to distributing the

questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted in order to test the reliability of the instrument.

The researcher also consulted five Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from various public universities in Malaysia to validate the items in the instrument. The questionnaire consisted of three components:

- 1- Teachers` views on student performance in Arabic language classrooms
- 2- Suggestions on types of contents
- 3- Suggestions on types of games.

### 3. RESULTS AND FINDING

#### 3.1. Demographic Information

**Table 1.** Demography of Respondents

Num.	Item	n	%
1	<b>Location</b>		
	Urban	255	55.1
	Sub urban	208	44.9
2	<b>Gender</b>		
	Male	123	26.6
	Female	340	73.4
3	<b>Teaching Experience</b>		
	< 5 years	85	18.4
	6-10 years	136	29.4
	11-15 years	157	33.9
	16-20 years	36	7.8
	21-25 years	27	5.8
	26-20 years	11	2.4
Above 31 years	11	2.4	
4	<b>Smart Phone Operating Systems</b>		
	Android	381	82.3
	Apple iOS	51	11.0
	Windows	1	0.2
	Others	30	6.5
5	<b>Experience in Language Apps</b>		
	Yes	236	51
	No	227	49
<b>Total</b>		<b>463</b>	<b>100</b>

The respondents in this study were 463 primary school teachers – teaching Arabic at the primary level – who were purposely selected by their schools from several provinces in Malaysia. More than half of the respondents (55.1%) of them were from the urban area and 51% of them had experience in using language applications on the web. Most of the respondents (81.7%) had less than fifteen years of teaching experience. As for the gender of the respondents, 26.6% are male, while the other 73.4% are female. Most of them used Android as their smart phone operating system.

#### 3.2. Needs Analysis Survey

Table 2 shows the results of the needs analysis survey on teachers` views on students` performance in Arabic language classrooms:

**Table 2.** Teachers` views on student performance in Arabic language classrooms

Items	N	Mean	SD
1 I always have problems with students did not pay attention in Arabic class	463	3.32	1.050
2 Students have problems in memorizing the Arabic words.	463	3.62	0.982
3 Students are not interested in learning the Arabic language	463	3.01	1.104
4 Students lack confidence in speaking the Arabic language	463	3.83	0.920
5 Students have problems in reading materials in the Arabic language	463	3.36	1.024
6 Students have problems to write the Arabic language	463	3.36	1.018
7 There is little interaction in Arabic language between students and teachers.	463	3.75	1.003
8 Students prefer the use of technology in learning the Arabic Language	463	4.08	0.709
9 I expect that Arabic digital game-based learning will help students in acquiring Arabic vocabulary	463	4.26	0.691
10 I expect that Arabic digital game-based learning will enhance the students` motivation in the teaching and learning of the Arabic language.	463	4.26	0.658

The findings indicate that teachers still face problems with student performance in Arabic language classrooms. The major problem detected was lack of confidence in speaking the Arabic language among students. As mentioned earlier in the literature, this is related to the lack of Arabic vocabulary that also affected the students` competencies in speaking, writing, and reading skills. This was why teachers complained that they had had less interaction with students in the Arabic language. Other problems were students` lack of attention and interest in Arabic classes.

The findings also indicate that teachers had positive expectation towards using Arabic digital game-based learning as a tool in helping students acquire Arabic vocabulary. They also believed that such game would enhance student motivation in Arabic classrooms and would eliminate the problems that the students were facing. The main factor is the students are in the digital age and prefer to use the technology in learning activities especially in learning the Arabic language.

#### 3.3. Suggestions on Arabic Language Contents

Table 3 explains the results on suggestions on Arabic language contents to be integrated in the digital Arabic language game-based learning:

**Table 3.** Suggestions on Arabic language contents

Num	Items	N	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Vocabulary	463	4.15	0.787	1
2	Phrase	463	3.97	0.856	4
3	Grammar	463	4.03	0.850	2
4	Dialog	463	4.01	0.859	3

In order to make the Arabic Digital Game-based Learning a reality, the researchers included some questions about language contents that can be integrated in the digital game. As shown in the table above, the vocabulary is the main content of the game. This was followed by grammar, dialog, and phrase. These suggestions were made with the teachers' perspective on the Malaysian context to ensure that the students gain maximum benefits from such games.

### 3.3. Suggestions on Game Genres for Arabic Language Game-Based Learning

Table 4 illustrates the results of the needs analysis survey based on Types of Suggested Mobile Games to be integrated in the digital Arabic language game-based learning:

**Table 4.** Types of Suggested Mobile Games

No	Items	N	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Jigsaw Puzzles	463	4.18	0.738	1
2	Adventure	463	4.05	0.787	4
3	Problem Solving	463	4.02	0.783	6
4	Simulation	463	4.03	0.772	5
5	Strategy	463	3.97	0.786	8
6	Role Play	463	4.08	0.808	3
7	Poison Box	463	4.13	0.823	2
8	Super Hero	463	4.01	0.863	7

Types of suggested mobile games were ranked as follows: Jigsaw Puzzles, Poison Box, Role Play, Adventure, Simulation, Problem Solving, Super Hero, and Strategy. This shows that teachers are very concerned about the need for games that can help students increase their vocabulary and solve the problems that they faced before.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The digital game-based language learning in the teaching and learning the Arabic language is well-received by Arabic language teachers in helping students acquire Arabic vocabulary and also increase their motivation in learning the Arabic language. More importantly, this study suggests several types of games

and contents that can serve as guidelines to game developers in creating an interactive digital game-based language learning that meets the needs of Arabic language students in Malaysian primary schools.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

**Ghazali:** Conceptualization and supervision. **Siti Rosilawati:** Visualization and corresponding author. **Noor Azli:** Methodology and formal analysis. **Muhammad Sabri:** Investigation and Writing -Original Draft. **Effendi:** Writing -Review and editing.

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