

INSIGHTS INTO YOUNG LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS GAMIFIED LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Tran Quoc Thao^{1*}, Duong Thi Thanh Huyen²

¹HUTECH University, Vietnam

²Viet Anh Primary school, Vietnam

ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	11/7/2022	This paper reports a mixed methods study exploring young learners' attitudes towards gamified learning activities (GLA) in English language learning. The study was conducted at a bilingual primary school in Vung Tau city, Vietnam. A cohort of 84 students in grades 4 and 5 were involved in answering the questionnaires, and 15 of them took part in the semi-structured interviews. To analyse the data, the software SPSS was employed for the quantitative data, while the content analysis was utilised for the qualitative data. The results unraveled that young learners had positive attitudes towards GLA in English language learning. Among the three components of attitudes, young learners seemed to express their feelings and emotions and show their commitment to get engaged in GLA rather than trying to get more understanding of GLA. Such preliminary findings are hoped to shed light on the understanding of young learners' attitudes towards GLA.
Revised:	22/8/2022	
Published:	22/8/2022	
KEYWORDS		
Attitude		
Bilingual		
English language		
Gamification		
Young learners		

TÌM HIỂU THÁI ĐỘ CỦA HỌC SINH TIỂU HỌC VỀ HOẠT ĐỘNG HỌC TẬP GAME HÓA TRONG VIỆC HỌC TIẾNG ANH

Trần Quốc Thao^{1*}, Dương Thị Thanh Huyền²

¹Trường Đại học Công nghệ Tp. HCM, Việt Nam

²Trường Tiểu học Việt Anh, Việt Nam

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	11/7/2022	Bài báo này trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu hỗn hợp tìm hiểu thái độ của học sinh tiểu học đối với hoạt động học tập game hóa trong quá trình học tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện tại một trường song ngữ ở Thành phố Vũng Tàu, Việt Nam. Tham gia trả lời bảng câu hỏi gồm có 84 học sinh tiểu học từ khối lớp 4 và 5, và 15 học sinh trong số đó tham gia trả lời phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc. Để phân tích dữ liệu, phần mềm SPSS được sử dụng để phân tích dữ liệu định lượng, trong khi đó phương pháp phân tích nội dung được sử dụng để phân tích dữ liệu định tính. Kết quả cho thấy học sinh tiểu học có thái độ tích cực đối với hoạt động học tập game hóa trong việc học tiếng Anh. Về các thành tố của thái độ, học sinh tiểu học dường như bày tỏ thái độ và cảm xúc đối với hoạt động học tập game hóa trong việc học tiếng Anh và cam kết tham gia các hoạt động học tập game hóa so với việc cố gắng nâng cao kiến thức về hoạt động học tập game hóa. Kết quả sơ bộ này hy vọng sẽ giúp hiểu biết về thái độ của học sinh tiểu học đối với hoạt động học tập game hóa trong quá trình học tiếng Anh.
Ngày hoàn thiện:	22/8/2022	
Ngày đăng:	22/8/2022	
TỪ KHÓA		
Thái độ		
Song ngữ		
Tiếng Anh		
Game hóa		
Thiếu nhi		

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.6229>

* Corresponding author. Email: tranquocthaobmtc@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Gamification in English language teaching and learning has emerged as an innovative method which has been gaining popularity, and it is highly motivating and inspirational for students since there are several tasks to complete, goals to attain, and prizes to be won [1]-[3]. It is a concept that attempts to combine pre-existing successful teaching techniques with game elements such as competition, leaderboards, and advancement in order to make tasks and exercises more enjoyable, motivating, and engaging for learners [2]. Its beneficial benefits have been extensively acknowledged in a massive body of work, both philosophically and experimentally [1]. Additionally, gamification has the potential to improve student engagement, motivation, learning outcomes, problem-solving, and collaborative learning in ESL/EFL classrooms [4]. Furthermore, gamification has shown to minimize language fear, enhance student focus, and promote readiness to speak [5]. It might be argued that students enjoy a sense of autonomy and are not scared to fail.

In another aspect, learners' attitudes are thought to be one of the most significant factors in the learning process [6]-[8]. Bohner and Dickel [6] delineate attitude as the evaluation of the thinking that impacts a person's view of people, ideas, or things, as evaluated on self-report measures with three components (affectivity, cognition, and action). Obviously, when learners have good attitudes, their learning performance improves and is facilitated. On the contrary, if learners have negative attitudes, their performance and achievements in language learning may suffer [9], [10]. Attitude consists of three main components, viz. cognitive, affective and behavioural attitudes. The cognitive component of attitudes refers to the individuals' ideas, thoughts, and characteristics regarding an item [11]. Affective component refers to an individual's emotional reaction to an attitude object (e.g., the moods, feelings, emotions) [12]. The behavioural component refers to a person's response or reaction to an object's attitude. The behavioural component is intended to describe the individual's engagement in tasks as well as their behaviours with regard to attitude objects [13].

In the context of Vietnam, the use of games in English language teaching and learning seems to be not new; hence, the gamified learning activities (GLA) in English language teaching has been popular. GLA are deployed to students from primary to tertiary levels; nonetheless, there is a scarcity of research on young learners' attitudes towards GLA in English language learning. To address such a lacuna, this study aims to explore the young learners' attitudes towards GLA in English language learning at a bilingual primary school in Vung Tau city, Vietnam, and it seeks to answer the following research question:

- What are young learners' attitudes towards GLA in English language learning?

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research site and participants

This mixed methods study which collects both quantitative and qualitative data was conducted at a bilingual primary school in Vung Tau city, Vietnam, which is an affiliation of an international school including from primary to high schools. This school offers bilingual Vietnamese – English curriculum. The curriculum in Vietnamese complies the program of Education and Training of Vietnam, while that in English is Cambridge's ESL program. The teaching program is in charge of both Vietnamese and foreign teachers. Foreign teachers are recruited from various nations including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, who hold a BA / BS, TESOL / TEFL certification. They have previous experience in teaching English to foreigners. The school has been outfitted with several contemporary facilities such as the library, lab, art room, sports pitch, artificial football pitch in a well-kept playground, shuttles, dormitories, Internet, speakers, headphones, computers, projectors, televisions, etc.. Grade 4th and grade 5th students take the English as a second language (ESL) program that adheres to international standards Cambridge credentials (e.g., Ket, Pet, and FCE and IELTS). Besides, students learn General English, English-

language mathematics, English-language science, and English presentation. In the English lessons GLA including Kahoot and Quizalize were designed for both grade 4th and grade 5th students to learn and do exercises. Students played Kahoot and Quizalize in conjunction with their course books, laptops, and mobile devices. Since both grade 4th and grade 5th students were not significantly different in their characteristics in terms of age, GLA were designed similarly to facilitate their English language learning.

A cohort of 84 students were conveniently sampled. They were from grades 4 (57.1%) and 5 (42.9%). The participants had at least three years of learning English in the bilingual program, so their English language proficiency was at pre-intermediate level. Apart from the time learning English at school, students still spent less than one hour daily on English self-study.

2.2. Research instruments

This study employed two research instruments: questionnaire and interview for data collection. The closed-ended questionnaire was adapted from Khalid's [14] study and is composed of two parts: Part A asking participant's background information; Part B seeking the respondent's attitudes towards GLA in English language learning. There were 13 items with five-point Likert scale (from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree) and they were divided into three categories: Cognitive attitudes (5 items), Affective attitudes (4 items), and Behavioural attitudes (4 items). The questionnaire was designed in English, then translated into Vietnamese so that respondents did not have any difficulties in answering the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was .82, which means that the questionnaire was reliable. The semi-structured interview was designed based on the questionnaire and the study purpose in order to get an in-depth information from students' attitudes towards GLA in English language learning (4 main questions).

2.3. Data collection and analysis

Prior to the official data collection, the research instruments were piloted with five students who shared similar characteristics with those in the main study. After the modification of the instruments, the copies of questionnaire were administered to students in person. Respondents were directed how to answer the questionnaire. It took them roughly 15 minutes to answer all the items in the questionnaire. After the preliminary analysis of quantitative data, the semi-structured interviews were carried out with 15 students (7 from grade 4 and 8 from grade 5) with their consent. Each group interview (5 students) was conducted in Vietnamese and lasted around 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded for later analysis.

With respect to the data analysis, the software SPSS (version 22) was utilised for quantitative data processing in terms of descriptive statistics (Mean: M; Standard deviation: SD). The meaning of the interval mean score was interpreted as 1.00 - 1.80 (Strongly disagree), 1.81 - 2.60 (Disagree), 2.61 - 3.40 (Neutral), 3.41 - 4.20 (Agree), and 4.21 - 5.00 (Strongly agree). Meanwhile, the content analysis was for the qualitative data analysis. Based on the theoretical framework, the interview transcripts were coded, and they were read and re-read for the common themes. The interviewees were coded as S1, S2 to S15. The inter-rating was taken into account to assure the validity and reliability of data analysis.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Results

Young learners' attitudes towards GLA in English language learning

Table 1 illustrates the overall result of young learners' attitudes towards GLA in English language learning in three aspects. First, the overall mean score of the young learners' attitudes towards GLA is 3.95 (out of 5). To put it differently, the learners had positive attitudes toward GLA in English language learning. However, based on the mean scores, learners' responses to each component were not the same. Particularly, the mean score for affective attitudes is the

highest ($M=4.11$; $SD=.88$), while the lowest mean score ($M=3.65$; $SD=.88$) belonged to the cognitive attitudes. Compared with the two components mentioned above, the component of behavioural attitudes was in the second position with their result ($M=4.10$; $SD=.91$). It can be understood that young learners generally had good knowledge of gamified English learning activities, and they seemed to enjoy and be willing to participate in the GLA.

Table 1. *Young learners' attitudes towards GLA in English language learning*

Components of attitudes towards GLA in English language learning	N=84	
	M	SD
Cognitive attitudes	3.65	.88
Affective attitudes	4.11	.88
Behavioural attitudes	4.10	.91
Average	3.95	.89

Young learners' cognitive attitudes towards GLA in English language learning

As seen in Table 2, the results revealed young learners' positive cognitive attitudes towards GLA. They agreed that gamified English learning activities "[allowed them] to understand English vocabulary better" (item 1: $M=4.47$; $SD=.90$), "to read English better" (item 2: $M=4.15$; $SD=.85$), "[gave them] freedom to write English without worrying about grammar" (item 3: $M=3.58$; $SD=.80$), "[developed their] fluency in speaking English" (item 4: $M=3.51$; $SD=.99$), and "[allowed them] listen to English better" (item 5: $M=3.56$; $SD=.89$). This showed that young learners had awareness of GLA in improving their English proficiency in terms of vocabularies, reading, listening, and writing.

Table 2. *Young learners' cognitive attitudes towards GLA in English language learning*

No.	Cognitive attitudes	N=84	
		M	SD
1	Unlike regular activities, GLA allow me to understand English vocabulary better.	4.47	.90
2	GLA allow me to read English better.	4.15	.85
3	GLA give me freedom to write English without worrying about grammar.	3.58	.80
4	Through GLA, I can develop my fluency in speaking English.	3.51	.99
5	GLA allow me to listen to English better.	3.56	.89
	Average	3.65	.89

The qualitative findings supported the quantitative ones, and showed that young learners had positive cognitive attitudes towards GLA. They shared their thoughts in the interviews:

"I love the games that I played with the iPad/computer in the English lesson.... I can write and read faster...." (S1)

"I can learn and remember vocabulary fast. I don't know why but after each game I can talk about the words with my Mum...." (S3)

Young learners' affective attitudes towards GLA in English language learning

Table 3 presents young learners' affective attitudes towards GLA. It was noticed that young learners really thought that "GLA [were] fun" (item 9: $M=4.58$; $SD=.80$) and "[liked their] teachers using GLA in class" (item 8: $M=4.25$; $SD=.89$). Additionally, they "[felt] motivated in these lessons involving GLA" (item 6: $M=3.98$; $SD=.89$) and "[their] anxiety of learning [was] reduced when [they played] GLA" (item 7: $M=3.63$; $SD=.95$).

Table 3. *Young learners' affective attitudes towards GLA in English language learning*

No.	Affective attitudes	N=84	
		M	SD
6	I feel motivated in these lessons involving GLA.	3.98	.89
7	My anxiety of learning is reduced when I play GLA.	3.63	.95
8	I like my teachers using GLA in class.	4.25	.89
9	GLA are fun.	4.58	.80
	Average	4.11	.88

The interview data also shared similar findings with the questionnaire data. Young learners shared their positive affections towards GLA. The number of students who thought GLA were fun (89%) was greater than in any other field. In addition, 78% of the interviewees confirmed that they felt motivated by the gamified English lesson. Some examples are:

“In my perspective, a strong vocabulary was essential for success in the game. So, I figured if I played games like Kahoot! and Quizalize, I'd be more motivated to study so that I might do better.” (S10)

“It is enjoyable to play the games with the computer and cartoon character running.” (S4)

Young learners' behavioural attitudes towards GLA in English language learning

The results in Table 4 show that young learners generally showed their favour for participating in GLA in the classrooms. They really “[wanted] to study English lessons having GLA in the future” (item A10: $M=4.54$; $SD=.85$). They also tried to “spend more time on learning English when [their] teachers [used] GLA” (item 12: $M=4.06$; $SD=.99$), “get involved in playing GLA” (item 13: $M=3.85$; $SD=.89$), and they “would like [their] English teachers to use GLA” (item 11: $M=3.95$; $SD=.90$).

Table 4. *Young learners' behavioural attitudes towards GLA in English language learning*

No.	Behavioural attitudes	N=84	
		M	SD
10	I want to study English lessons having GLA in the future	4.54	.85
11	I would like my English teachers to use GLA.	3.95	.90
12	I try to spend more time on learning English when my teachers use GLA.	4.06	.99
13	I try to get involved in playing GLA.	3.85	.89
Average		4.10	.91

As for the qualitative data, it was noticeable young learners had positive behavioural attitudes toward GLA in their lessons. Particularly, the wish to have English lessons having GLA in the future was the most significant of students' action (86%) toward GLA. They also paid much attention to GLA by spending more time with it (79%). Moreover, the majority of them showed they wanted their English teachers to make GLA in the lesson and homework (73%) because the games were fun and attractive. Some remarkable examples are:

“I think that if I could play games online and have professors explain things to me at the same time, it may be an excellent method to learn new vocabulary and knowledge. In light of this, I am considering devoting more time to using it as a study aid for the English language.” (S12)

“...because it is too interesting, I want all of my lessons would be a game. I am just so excited to think about that.” (S4)

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that young learners had positive attitudes towards GLA in three components, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitudes. Within this study, the research participants were young learners aged 10 and 11, so they may be really interested in learning English with games. As learners are young, they learn best by learning via playing games [15]. This could be one of the plausible reasons why young learners in this study had such positive attitudes towards GLA.

Regarding cognitive attitudes towards GLA, young learners believed they could enhance their English vocabulary, reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. Since the participants in this study were bilingual students, they could gain their English knowledge and improve their English proficiency relatively easily. They had different chances in using English during their learning process, which could contribute to their English language enhancement. Moreover, as games can be easy for teachers to get students involved in learning by playing, students' language knowledge and skill enhancement can be enacted and reinforced. This finding was aligned with that of Wu and Huang [16] who have found out GLA could help students understand more about their English language skills.

As for affective attitudes towards GLA, young learners had a positive feeling of GLA. They expressed their interest in GLA because they were fun. While the learning process is taking place, emotional elements become the incentive for youngsters [3]. As discussed above, participants in this study were young and curious, so they could be easily attracted by vivid colour, dynamic sound and environment of GLA. Also, they showed their agreement with the motivation of GLA. Motivation is a critical element in gamified teaching, which is critical for learner's participation in the classroom [17]. These results were similar to Phuong's [18] research findings. Her research on Vietnamese EFL learners' online gamification technologies and their views regarding online-based gamified learning have shown that students had a favourable attitude towards gamified learning.

With respect to behavioural attitudes towards GLA, young learners responded positively to GLA. They presented their favour for the continuation of the implementation of the game in the future. There seems a connection between learners' affective and behavioural attitudes. The behavioural attitudes are the outcomes of cognitive and affective attitudes [19], but the cognitive attitudes in this study seemed not to affect behavioural attitudes much.

4. Conclusion

This study divulged that young learners in this study had positive attitudes towards GLA in English language learning. Regarding three components of attitudes towards GLA in English language learning, young learners' affective and behavioural attitudes seemed to be more significant than their cognitive ones. From such findings, some pedagogical implications are recommended. Firstly, as it was seen that the GLA in English language learning were positively perceived by young learners, it is advisable that EFL teachers should be selective in choosing appropriate games for different learning activities. Besides, teachers should be trained how to deploy the games in English language learning effectively. Secondly, students should be trained how to use games for self-study effectively and appropriately. They need to know how to balance between games and learning so that they can exploit the effectiveness of games in learning in general and English language learning in specific. Thirdly, administrators should adjust the English teaching syllabi in which more educational games should be embedded so that the teaching and learning atmosphere should be more enjoyable and relaxing.

This study still has some limitations. This study collected data from a small sample size from a single research context, and it employed self-reported instruments (interviews and questionnaires). Additionally, only attitude was the main research focus. Hence, the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts. Further studies should collect data from more participants from different contexts by using more research instruments (e.g., observation), and more research variables (e.g., learning engagement in GLA) should be considered.

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