# Post Covid: The Integration of Board Games Back into Teaching And Learning Modes in Classrooms

Angeline Ranjethamoney Vijayarajoo, Kuldip Kaur Maktiar Singh
*Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia*

## Abstract

*The poetry genre was part of the Literature Component which was introduced into the Malaysian English Language Secondary School Syllabus. Studying literature can be challenging for ESL learners, more so during online learning. With post covid and the opening of schools, interesting modes of delivery need to, and can be incorporated into the teaching and learning of literature, in face- to- face classroom sessions. In order to fill the gap for an interactive, engaging and fun way to teach literary texts (poems), the researchers had designed a board game five years before the Covid pandemic. The board game became a tool to facilitate learning the poetry selections before the Covid period. Feedback from students and teachers then, showed that the majority of the students and teachers responded positively to such an innovation. The objective of this study is to revisit board games post- covid and assess if these are effective and well received by students after purely online teaching and learning. A survey was carried out among students in two schools, whereby this innovation was found to be well received and an effective tool for teaching and learning of poetry, after online classes. Hence, with post-covid, innovations which are not digital or technologically driven, can and should be integrated into classroom teaching and learning modes, where possible. The authors suggest a combination of methods – digital and non- digital means, while being able to meet in face- to- face situations in classrooms, in the teaching and learning curriculum in schools. Hence, the case for the integration of board games, into the post-Covid era.*

*Keywords: literature, poetry, board game, language game, face-to-face interaction, communication, hands-on*

## 1. Introduction

Board games were used in classrooms from time to time before the Covid 19 crisis. This was a fun way to introduce aspects of learning to students. This was especially so for language classes. Due to the pandemic, all teaching was conducted online. Board games were kept in storage and there were no means to use these. The pandemic period took two years, whereby students and teachers were forced into online teaching and learning. During this time, all efforts were focused on digital l earning and a multitude of ways and platforms to teach and learn online. There were disruptions in terms of technology, lack of readiness on the part of both parties, students and teachers, in embracing this, among other challenges. However, measures were taken to cope with the sudden situation. According to Bates [2], the Covid 19 crisis brought forth a plethora of advice aimed at teachers with tips and tricks, mostly without contextualizing knowledge needed to gauge what would work and where, considering the location of students and the varied levels of cognitive abilities. Amidst this was the lack of pedagogical guidance for teachers despite efforts in trying to support them. This paper focusses on the learning and teaching of the poetry genre in an English Language Syllabus, shedding light on perceptions of students' experiences in playing a board game devised by the authors, in face-to-face environments, in comparison to learning and teaching poetry through online modes.

## 2. Research Rationale

ESL students studying literature have been reported to say that it is difficult and boring [4]. Students prefer interactive teaching and learning literature-environments [7], [17]. Otter [14] reports that students in online-only classes (which was the case during the Covid 19 pandemic), felt more disconnected from their peers and teachers, less aided by their teachers, than their teachers believed them to be.

Technological expectations of online study also caused students to feel daunted [10], [23]. While many studies have focused on the efficiency, content and delivery methods that teaching staff have developed [13], [15], [19], the perceptions and experiences of the students themselves have been largely neglected [1], [10], [11]. This study looks at the perceptions and experiences of students themselves, in an increasingly digital landscape of school education and focuses on their face-to- face perceptions in playing board games in classrooms in poetry learning, post covid.

## 3. Literature Review

This literature review will begin with local work done on poetry learning and teaching among Malaysian students and teachers. One of the recent

studies reported are by the researchers themselves. This will then proceed to a brief review on learning via hands-on face-to-face games.

## 3.1. Local School-Based Studies

Wan Kamariah [21] reported in her study that poems are not preferred because students were unable to understand, hence unable to interpret, the figurative language found in literature. Students also found it difficult to understand foreign contexts of the poems, and the poems referred to in this study, are all foreign to Malaysia. Siddu [16] found in her study that students stated that class activities were teacher-centered, uninspiring and uninteresting. These added to the already negative perceptions of students towards the poetry genre. Wan Kamariah also added that students had a negative attitude towards class activities which were centered on memorization of facts and teacher- provided interpretations of the poems, for the purpose of answering questions and getting these answers "right". Added to this was a study conducted by Siti Norliana Ghazali et al. [18], which found that students did not like literature taught in classes, with a special mention of the poetry genre. The reasons attributed were that the students found these to be challenging due to the difficult language used. In keeping with these findings, a study undertaken by Fauziah and Jamaluddin [6] reported that students' motivation in literature was enhanced with student-centered activities.

These studies and the numerous complaints from both, students and teachers, on the teaching and learning of poetry for the Malaysian English Language Syllabus, drove the researchers to devise a poetry board game, four years ago. The researchers also spoke to students and teachers at random, from rural and urban schools in two states in Malaysia - Melaka and Negeri Sembilan. Most of their responses resonated previous research.

The purpose for designing and putting together a board game, was firstly to introduce the fun element into the learning and teaching process in classrooms. Secondly, the researchers wanted to introduce student-centered activities, as this was found to be desirable from previous research findings. Thirdly, the researchers hoped that learning would take place via a game. Once, this task was complete, the researchers tried out these games in the two states in Malaysia, mentioned earlier. In their research findings from their study, Vijayarajoo et al. [20], found that both, students and teachers enjoyed the "Poetry Board Games" that they, the researchers, had designed. The perceptions of both, students and teachers were positive. The outcomes, in terms of their school tests also showed marked improvement. One of the findings from the interviews with students and teachers, was that the students were so motivated to play the game and to win, that they constantly referred to the poems, in order to understand the questions and work out the answers from their own understanding. This was certainly a breakthrough with the students, in terms of poetry learning. For the teachers, it was a break-through in terms of being able to sit back and allow the students to take charge of their learning with facilitation from time to time, without the stress of much explanation and teacher centered teaching. Additionally, the teachers played the game themselves and found it to be inspiring. They were also taken aback with the excitement and competitive spirit shown among the students, while learning was taking place, incidentally.

## 3.2. Learning and the Use of Games

Gee [8] claims that schools are in a dilemma as to how to get young people to learn something that is challenging and to be able to enjoy it too. Now, that schools have re-opened, it is a good time to bring back games into the classrooms as a complementary form of learning and teaching with a more balanced focus between digital learning and physical games in classrooms. While the Covid 19 crisis did not allow for physical games, the opening up schools does. This is a time to bring back successful and fun ways of learning, into the curriculum.

Many studies have shown that games help to develop non-cognitive skills which are fundamental in explaining how we learn. Gee [9] also states that skills such as patience and discipline, which students should acquire as children, are acquired when engaged in games. Even though Gee was referring to video games, these ideas were a result of actual hands-on physical games, which he supports. Students should be prepared for life, beyond the classrooms. Hence, games, among many others, including that of the authors of this study, was found to have developed these skills and should be brought back into the classrooms, Post Covid.

Going back to our own childhood, board games played a big role in our competitive spirit with better communication, patience and learning taking place simultaneously. Similarly, Bauer [3] remembered how his youth was filled with collaboratively building, taking risks and having fun while playing games. While working with the new, one should not forget the old, but instead find ways to integrate both in classrooms.

## 4. Theoretical Framework Behaviourist Learning Theory

In learning, the use of instructional cues, practice and reinforcement can be attributed to strategies recommended by behaviorists as a means to build and strengthen stimulus-response associations [5],

[22]. Language games of both traditional and digital varieties, in particular, employ positive and negative reinforcements that serve to provoke desired behaviours [12]. These reinforcements help learners remain motivated and emotionally invested in the language games that they play.

In the poetry board game, created by the researchers, the players are motivated to reach the Finish tile first. Hence, the need to get as many correct answers as possible. Additionally, the element of luck introduces the surprise element by way of Chance cards, which help one to move forward. The opposite is so with Doom cards, where the function is punitive and one has to move backwards. The rules of the game, the goal and the knowledge of the poems help students achieve the objectives of the game.

## 5. Methodology

This paper is employed a case study involving 50 students and 2 teachers, from two schools, located in one of the states in Malaysia. The study involved qualitative methods of analysis.

### 5.1. Participants

The 50 participants of the study were divided equally, from an urban and rural school. The researchers asked two of the teachers of the school if they could run the board game with their students as the researchers wanted to know if board games would still fulfill the purpose of learning and teaching the fun way, in classrooms, after a totally digital mode of learning. The teachers were willing to participate in the study as they were looking for some "hands-on" ways of teaching and learning, since the students were physically back in classrooms.

### 5.2. Instruments

The first instrument used in this study was the board game that the researchers had devised 4 years ago, and were used in classrooms then. The board game is called "Poetricks". This game was created by the researchers as an alternative to the conventional ways of teaching poetry in schools. A total of two poems from the Malaysian syllabus were used for Form Five students. The poems were, 'A Poison Tree' and 'What Has Happened to Lulu?'. As noted, both poems are foreign in contexts and authorship to the Malaysian scene. The next section gives a brief explanation of the game.

These two poems provided the content for the questions on the cards. The players held individual tokens to represent themselves. A dice was thrown and the tokens moved along the board according to the number shown on the dice. The board had pictures depicting the two poems mentioned above. Apart from that, there were also Chance and Doom tiles, with cards, on the board. If the token landed on a poem card, there were a stack of that poem cards, with questions, for the players to answer. Likewise, if the token landed on a Chance or Doom card, the players had to follow instructions written on the card. Usually

Chance cards meant that players could proceed forward by a varying number of spaces while a Doom card would spell disaster, of moving backwards by varying number of spaces. The winner of the game is the one who reaches the Finish tile first. This means, the more poem questions answered correctly and yes, the luckier players were, if they landed on Chance cards, they had a better chance of getting to the Finish tile sooner. How did players know if the answers were correct? An answer key was provided for all the questions which were numbered. The students referred to the answer key card with the same number. Where an answer was given incorrectly, the player missed the next turn, remaining where he was. All used poem cards went back into the bottom of the card stacks, to keep the game going and to provide a revising platform for those who missed these questions earlier. If the token landed on a Doom tile, depending on the instructions, the player would have to move his token backwards. Wrong answers to the poems and Doom cards meant delaying reaching the Finish tile. The rules of the game were printed on the box and the poems were laminated and available for students to refer to. The first player to reach the Finish tile was the winner followed by the subsequent players. If the game took too long, the winner was the one closest to the Finish tile.

Semi-structured Interviews formed the other instrument of this study, which was conducted as soon as the schools opened doors to receive students. Hence, it was somewhat a chaotic situation but having two supportive teachers who were friends of the researchers, was helpful in running a preliminary study, post- covid. The students were asked about their perceptions on learning poetry online, as during the Covid 19 crisis and that of their experience playing the board game, on returning to classrooms. All 50 students were interviewed, and their responses recorded and transcribed.

## 6. Findings

Each of the poetry board games played were video recorded, as well as observed while the researchers made observation notes. What was common in all the game experiences were the excitement, high noise levels and much enthusiasm. Within the noise levels were much negotiations on

the poem contexts and frequent referencing to the laminated cards with the printed poems on it. Well, if it was difficult to get students to read the poems before, this

game fixed that and the students – 4-5 played at any one time, were trying to get hold of the poem copy. Each game had only one set of the two poems in laminated cards. All the players wanted to read the poem or look for specific information, at the same time. There was a scramble for the poem card. The students were reading aloud, pointing to the lines and sharing interpretations with each other, while asking and answering questions as well. This was the similar thread across ALL the games played in both schools.

The interview questions on how they felt about poetry learning online during the pandemic, showed 48 out of 50 who said that it was 'boring', that they 'did not bother to read', 'switched off' during class time and preferred to do 'other things' during that time. When probed further on online teaching, some of the students' responses ad verbatim were as follows: - Teacher give notes - Teacher ask questions, nobody wan answer teacher - teacher play recording someone reading poem - so boring lah - don wan to learn lah – sleepy.

Two students reported having read the poems, the notes and references given by the teacher. When asked more, it was noticeable that their language competency and proficiency was far above the level of the other students. Hence, these were factors that also influenced their perceptions of learning poetry and what more, online.

The students were then asked about their present experience of learning poetry via the poetry board game. 38 replied along these lines and some phrases are reported ad verbatim below:

- Fun, enjoy, happy, like, wan like this more, read and understand, friends help teach me, can ask friend, teacher no near us, we happy children. Eight of the students replied along these lines and some phrases are reported ad verbatim.

- Understand better poetry, like to learn, can play every day, learn already, enjoy talking, sometimes about poem, sometimes other things, feel free, like to win, so must learn lah. Two of the students replied along these lines and some phrases are reported ad verbatim.

- Too noisy lah, cannot hear, all talk together, all shouting lah teacher. Two of the students replied along these lines and some phrases are reported ad verbatim.

- Ok, also, prefer to read alone, like to read notes online, got lots online.

The last two students who reported a preference for reading alone were the students who preferred the online classes and found retrieving information on the poems online, to be useful.

## 7. Conclusion

Our observation from this preliminary study shows that post-covid should be prepared to integrate board games into face-to-face classrooms. What the researchers suggest is a combination of learning modes – with digital and hands-on board games to better prepare students for lives outside the classroom. The researchers have often found students interacting with gadgets and computer screens for long periods of time without much verbal communication with one another or with the teacher. Going fully into online learning due to the Covid 19 Crisis was a necessary makeshift solution, but there are other factors that need to be considered, especially since, students are back to physical classroom settings.

Presently, this study shows that online learning of poetry may not have been the best way to go, in terms of student perspectives. However, this was a sudden move due to a crisis and teachers were also at a loss as to how to present poetry lessons best online. These are initial findings and much more research has to continue to make a definite statement. As mentioned, this is a preliminary study and the limitations of too few students, teachers and schools are just some to mention. There should also be more data via other instruments and together, these will help procure more accurate results for the betterment of 21st century learning.

## 8. References

[1]Alexander, S., (2001). E-learning developments and experiences. Educ. Train. 43, 240–248. doi:10.1108/00400 910110399247

[2] Bates, A.W., (2020). Advice to those about to teach online because of the corona-virus. 9 March. https://www. tonybates.ca/2020/03/09/advice-to-those-about-to-teachonl ine-because-of-the-corona-virus/. (Access Date: 30 April 2022).

[3] Bauer, M. I. and John, B. E., (1995). Modeling time-constrained learning in a highly-interactive task. Proceedings of CHI, 1995 (Denver, Colorado, May 7-11, 1995) ACM, New York. pp. 19-26.

[4] Doris Boo and Navinder Kaur, (2000). The literature component in English, Form Four. Bangi: Pelangi Sdn. Bhd.

[5] Ertmer, P.S. and Newby, T.J., (2013). Behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism: Comparing critical features from instructional design perspective. http://www.uwplatt. edu/files/ttc/idarticle.pdf. (Access Date: 21 March 2022).

[6] Fauziah Ahmad and Jamaluddin Aziz, (2009). Students' Perception of the Teachers' Teaching of Literature Communicating and Understanding through the Eyes of the Audience. European Journal of Social Sciences 7(3): 17-26. https://shidaedu702eportfolio.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/ejss_7_3_02.pdf.

[7] Fauziah Ismail et al. (2008). Literature in English Language Teaching: A Revisit in the Malaysian Context. In Noor Abidah Mohd Omar (Ed.). Research In English Language Teaching (p.53-69). Kuala Lumpur: UTM Press.

[8] Gee, J.P. (2003). What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy. In Computers in Entertainment. 1 (1). pp. 20, http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/950566.950595.

[9] Gee, J.P. (2008). What's a screen mean in a video game? Proceedings of ACMIDC08 Interaction Design and Children, 2008, p.06. http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1463689.1463698.

[10] Holley, D., and Oliver, M. (2010). Student engagement and blended learning: portraits of risk. Comput. Educ. 54, 693–700. doi: 10.1016/j.compedu.2009.08.035.

[11] Ituma, A. (2011). An evaluation of students' perceptions and engagement with e-learning components in a campus based university. Active Learn. High. Educ. 12, 57–68. doi: 10.1177/1469787410387722.

[12] Lepe-Salazar, F.(2015,November). A model to analyze and design educational games with pedagogical foundations. Paper presented at the 12th International Conference on Advances in Computer Entertainment Technology, Iskandar Malaysia. http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2832932.2832951.

[13] O'Neill, K., Singh, G., and O'Donoghue, J. (2004). Implementing elearning programmes for higher education: a review of the literature. J. Inf. Technol. Educ. 3, 313–323. http://jite.org/documents/Vol3/v3p313-323-131.pdf.

[14] Otter, R. R., Seipel, S., Graeff, T., Alexander, B., Boraiko, C., Gray, J., Sadler, K., et al. (2013). Comparing student and faculty perceptions of online and traditional courses. Internet High. Educ. 19, 27–35. doi:10.1016/j.iheduc.2013.08.001.

[15] Rossman, M. H. (1999). Successful online teaching using an asynchronous learner discussion forum. J. Asynchronous Learn. Netw. 3, 1–8.

[16] Siddu,G.K., (2003). Literature in the language classroom: Seeing through the eyes of learners. Ganakumaran,S. and Edwin M.(eds). Teaching of literature in ESL/EFL contexts. Petaling Jaya: Sasbadi Sdn.Bhd., 88110.

[17] Tina, A., Mohammad, H.Z., Fauziah, I., Fara, A. and Marzilah, A.Z., (2007). A new teaching model to teach literature for the TESL pre-training service programe in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Retrieved from http://eprints.utm.my/3970/1/75167.pdf.

[18] Siti Norliana Ghazali, Roszainora Setia, Chittra Muthusamy and Kamaruzaman Jusoff, (2009), ESL students' attitude towards texts and teaching methods used in literature classes. English Language Teaching, 2(4): p. 51-56.

[19] Twigg, C. (2003). Improving learning and reducing costs: new models for online learning. Educause Review, Sept/Oct, 28–38. http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm0352.pdf.

[20] Vijayarajoo, Angeline Ranjethamoney et al., (2019). Poetricks A Game to Engage Malaysian Secondary School ESL learners in Understanding Poetry. Social and Management Research Journal, (S1) V 16, n 1, p. 55-72, June 2019, ISSN 0128-1089.

[21] Wan Kamariah Baba, (2009). An investigation into teachers' and students' attitudes towards literature and its use in ESL classrooms: A case study of at a Matriculation centre in Malaysia. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis.

[22] Winn,W.(1990). Some implications of cognitive theory for instructional design. Instructional Science, 19, p.53-69.

[23] Zhang, W.-Y., and Perris, K. (2004). Researching the efficacy of online learning: a collaborative effort amongst scholars in Asian open universities. Open Learn. 19, 247–264. doi: 10.1080/0268051042000280110.