

Modified *congklak* game in teaching the English second conditional: an experimental study

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ABSTRACT

The notion to nurture local culture through English Language Teaching sparks an idea to incorporate an Indonesian traditional game, congklak, into a grammar class. Oftentimes, practicing grammar in a mechanical and monotonous way makes students struggle more than they already have with attempting to grasp grammar concepts. Consequently, only those with strong internal motivation, which are often small in number, are eager to engage in the practice. This study was intended to investigate the effectiveness of congklak game in helping adult learners acquire the English second conditional. One intact class of learners in an EFL university setting (final pool: $n = 20$) was randomly assigned to two groups (congklak game and non-congklak game). A pretest and an immediate posttest were administered to measure the participant's mastery of the target grammatical forms. Results from the posttest revealed that the congklak game group significantly outperformed the non-congklak game group. The findings lends support to the possibility of adapting and modifying Indonesian traditional games as effective pedagogical means to facilitate EFL learners in acquiring grammatical forms in a much more interesting way.

Keywords: *traditional games, congklak game, the English second conditional*

Introduction

The nature of grammar which deals a lot with rules of sentence structures, not to mention its overwhelming abundance, is what generally makes teachers end up feeling both on edge and challenged and learners feeling intimidated. Furthermore, grammar books used as classroom teaching resources which are mostly designed by presenting the elaboration of the rules followed with exercises that students are to work on have been associated with grammar learning being perceived as boring. Therefore, a fun and meaningful strategy is needed to assist learners learn grammar in a more engaging and pleasing manners (Koksal, Ceklik, & Beyhan, 2014; Metom et al., 2016). In the realm of ELT, game has been one of the strategies to cope with the issue and become one of the most favorite language practice activities for learners and teachers alike (Koksal, Ceklik, & Beyhan, 2014)

Teaching grammar with a game-based approach is indeed no novelty. It has been practiced in the field of education since the second half of the late twentieth century and perceived as one of best practices that teachers can implement in their teaching process (Hajji and Kim,

2019). Many researchers and educators are highly in favors of using games in the classroom for its positive impacts, be it for young or adult learners. Tuan and Doan (2010) in their paper concluded that games are accountable for fostering learners' motivation and interaction, less intimidating class, and meaningful language practice which contribute to learners' enhancing their language acquisition and achievement. Yolageldili & Arıkan (2011) investigated Turkish EFL teachers' point of views in regard to using games to teach young learners. The study showcased the fact that most teachers perceived games as being capable of creating enjoyable, communicative, and meaningful context for grammar practice. Another study by Phuong & Nguyen (2019) revealed that board games had a major impact on the grammar retention of EFL learners. This is in line with a notion from Hadfield (2003: 4) who argued that games serve both as a memory aid and repetition drill and as a chance to use language freely.

With the aforementioned merits of using games to teach grammar, we can never argue that we benefit a whole lot from the overwhelming existence of resource books of grammar games. The same can be said about educational websites providing us with hundreds of teaching resources for free without the need to sign up. For teachers

who refuse to have dull moments especially in grammar class, those resources are like ammunition stocks to prepare for battle. Moreover, the ever-growing and fast-changing technology in the forms of software, applications, online management systems, and such has been working its magic in promoting student engagement and enhance learning.

However, many of the games that the resources offer are adapted from the traditional games of various countries, but definitely not from Indonesia, such as *pictionary*, *Snake and Ladder*, card games, and board games. It means that if we are concerned about cultural issues, promoting our own local culture in English language teaching is definitely paramount. If they can adapt those traditional games as media of learning English, it should not be unimaginable if one of Indonesian traditional games is, too, adapted as a medium of learning English. In fact, Indonesia is rich in traditional games, one of which is *congklak* or *dakon*. Now that technology-enhanced games are dominating, children playing *congklak* or many other traditional games are a rare sight these days. It might not be too exaggerating to even suppose that they are on the brink of extinction. This calls for attention as the disappearance of local culture may lead to a country losing its identity. Sudartini (2012) opines that for the sake of national identity is the reason why it calls for local culture to be inserted in language teaching. Thus, bringing *congklak* into the classroom, besides investigating its pedagogical benefits, can also be one of silver bullets in preserving this cultural legacy.

Congklak consists of a *congklak* board, usually made of wood or plastics, and seeds or stones as counters and played by two. A standard *congklak* board has 14 small holes and two big holes in the left and right ends. Every seven small hole in the side of the player and a big hole in his or her right side, which is his or her storehouse, are regarded belonging to the player. The number of the seeds for a standard set of *congklak* is 98, equally divided for the players. The seeds are to be placed in their own small holes with the same amount in each hole.

To win the game, the players must get as many seeds as they can into their own storehouse before the other. To do this, the first player takes all of the seeds out of any hole on his or her side of the board. Then, the player moves clockwise around the board and drops one shell into each hole in an effort to reach his or her own storehouse at the end of the board. The player should not drop the shell into the opponent's storehouse. When the last seed is filled in a hole having other seeds, the player is to take all the seeds and continue filling. When the last seed is dropped in an empty hole, the player gets an opportunity to take all the seeds from the hole opposite the empty hole. When the last seed ends up in the play-

er's storehouse, the other player has the opportunity to play.

As a matter of fact, previous studies have discussed how *congklak* can be incorporated into teaching and learning. In mathematics, some research revealed that the use of *congklak* was proven to yield positive results. Lestarinigrum (2018) confirmed that *congklak* had a better effect on the children's mathematical logical intelligence. It so happened because the game honed their reasoning power. In another study, the *congklak* as a teaching medium was proven to be effective in teaching *Least Common Multiple (KPK)* and *Greatest Common Divisor (FPB)* to young learners (Nurhayanti, Hawanti, and Irianto, 2016). In addition, learners also felt elated with the learning process. Likewise, Prayitno (2014) mentioned that the learning atmosphere when teaching *addition* using *congklak* to young learners was more exciting and less boring.

A satisfactory outcome was also derived from using *congklak* to teach English from several studies. One of them, by Rahmawati and Junining (2018), investigated the use of *dakon*, the term they used, as a teaching medium for young learners to learn English pronunciation and vocabulary. The finding showcased the fact the so called medium was associated with improved pronunciation as well as communicative interaction among the learners. In another study, Nurhayati and Lestari (2018) developed a teaching medium for Junior High school learners by combining three different games; *congklak*, *onet*, and *crosswords*, into one and named it C.O.C. They mentioned that the games were valued due to their ability to motivate learners to enrich their vocabulary.

Among those studies, none has mentioned about using *congklak* to teach grammar, let alone, for adult learners. Evidently, adult learners are more driven to learn English because they are aware of the reasons why they do so. One might assume that it is inappropriate and patronizing to use games to teach grammar to them as learning grammar for adults is supposed to be done in a serious mode. Adults find fun activities are as arousing as young learners do. They also enjoy learning as much as young learners do when the games are a blast. Moreover, when it comes to grammar, both teachers and students are to have fun with it (Woodward, 1997: vi). Furthermore, inasmuch as language learning is tough and requires a great deal of long-term effort, games help learners promote and sustain interest and work (Wright, Betteridge, and Backby, 2006: 1).

The decision to focus on the English second conditional was motivated by the fact that learners often struggle to produce this structure correctly. Jacobson (2012) opines that this structure gives learners in general a hard time.

The presence of two different past forms of clauses, an *if-clause* which indicates the condition of reasoning and a main clause which is conveyed as the consequence of a condition, and the "present" meaning that the sentence implies are some potential reasons to cause their bewilderment. In other words, learners usually find problems with both form and meaning. Moreover, Covitt (as cited in Orosz, 2017) found that conditionals ranked fifth among the most serious teaching problems for ESL teachers. With all the issues connected to the teaching and learning of the English second conditional, this study mainly addresses the tangible effect of *congklak* game in helping adult learners acquire the English second conditional in terms of both comprehending the meaning and producing the structure. The research question, therefore, is "Is instruction with *congklak* game more effective to teach the English second conditional to adult EFL learners than the kind of instruction with no special treatment?"

Methods

This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design. The pretest was given to the participants one week before instruction. The instructional treatments lasted two class periods spread over one week after another, with 200 minutes in total. The immediate posttest took place the following day after the completion of instruction. Each test lasted approximately 25 minutes.

This study was undertaken at a university in West Java, Indonesia. One intact class (n=29) aged between 19 and 20 in the fourth semester of English Education Department participated in the study. Each participant was randomly assigned to experimental or control groups. Group A (n = 14), the experimental group, experienced *congklak* game in the learning process, while group B (n = 15), the control group, was given no special treatment. In the syllabus, this certain target grammatical forms is taught to the learners on the fourth semester which means that the participants had never received any instruction of it since they started their study in this university.

The researcher planned the instruction of the target grammatical forms to last for two meetings in two weeks following a PPP (*Presentation, Practice, Produce*) approach for both groups. The first two stages were given at the first meeting while the last stage was on the second one. In the *presentation* stage, the researcher introduced and explained the target grammatical forms. Although many are against explaining

grammar explicitly, the researcher chose to do it for the sake of giving input to the learners. Brown (2001) opines that to explain or not to explain grammatical rules depends on the context of teaching. In an EFL context in which learners share the same native language, elaborating on detailed grammatical rules will worth something. In the *practice* stage, the researcher used incomplete sentences as a controlled practice activity, for example, *If I had a superpower, ...*. The participants had to complete the sentences so they were true to them. The last stage was where the participants used the target grammatical forms in context with the researcher giving minimal assistance. In the experimental group, the last stage was the stage where *congklak* was implemented while in the control group, instead of playing *congklak* game, the participants were given individual written exercises.

In this study, *congklak* was modified in such a way that it could be used as a grammar learning medium for students in the classroom. In this case, instead of using seeds, the researcher designed 25 small cards containing three different tasks on English second conditional to be equally filled in five holes for each player and used as counters. The first type of the task, focusing on meaning, was for the participants to comprehend and state the meaning of a second conditional; marked with letter the A. For example, the participants read *If I lived in Japan, I probably would eat ramen every day*. After reading, they had to state the meaning of the sentence. The second type, focusing on form, was for the participants to complete a second conditional sentence with the correct form of the verb given; marked with the letter B. As an example, the card says *Oxygen gives us life. If there (be) _____ no oxygen on earth, life (exist, not) _____*. The participants had to change the words in the brackets with the appropriate verb forms. The last type, focusing on the production of the target grammatical forms, was for the participants to make a second conditional sentence based on a situation; marked with letter the C. For instance, the card says *Eva is a vegetarian, so she doesn't eat meat*. The participants were to make the English second conditional based on the situation. The marking was there so that they would not be confused about the task they had to do and all of the tasks were done orally. By providing tasks constituting meaning and form, not only did the participants practice the rules of the target grammatical forms, but they also learned how to use the rules in a sentence meaningfully. These three types of tasks were also explained prior to playing the game. Basically, the rules of the game were the same as has been described previously. The only difference was whenever a player drops the last card in any hole, he or she should stop

and pick any card in that very hole and do the task on the card. After that, the turn goes to the opponent. The procedure was then repeated.

Comprising three sections, the test used to collect the data was adapted from *Grammar Practice Worksheets* on second conditional from *ESL library.com*. Section A was a test focusing on meaning, consisting of ten items, section B was a test focusing on forms, consisting of five items, and section C was a test for the participants to produce the target grammatical forms, consisting of five items. The test types were similar to the tasks practiced by the participants during the instruction which have been described above. What differs was, in section A, the participants opted for option *a* or *b* that best described the meaning of the sentence. Before the treatment, the researcher had piloted the instrument. Some adjustment dealing with the choice of words was made due to their unfamiliarity for the test takers.

As previously mentioned, the test consisted of three sections. However, the scoring procedure for each type of test was no different. One point was given for each correct answer in all sections. In section B, where the participants had to fill in the blank space with the correct verb forms, one point was given when both the *if*-clause and the main clause were grammatically correct. Zero point was given in the case of grammatical mistakes in *if*-clause and/or the main clause. This scoring procedure also applied to section C where the participants were to write down the English second conditional of a situation.

Results and Discussion

The data gathered in this study were analyzed with SPSS. To ensure internal validity in the final analysis, only those participated in all the instructional treatments and both the pretest and the posttest were counted thus leaving 10 participants for each group. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics presenting the mean scores of the experimental group ($M = 57.50, SD = 6.67$) and the control group ($M = 42.00, SD = 5.58$) which were quite distant. However, as shown in Table 2, the result of an independent-samples t-test run to compare the target grammatical forms mastery of the two groups indicated that there were no significant differences between the two groups ($t(18) = 1.78, p = .092 > .05$). This implies that the two groups were equal in terms of their mastery in the target grammatical forms before the instruction. Hence, the differences of treatment in both groups could attribute to any differences in the posttest results.

The posttest scores of the two groups were also subject to an independent-samples t-test to compare the scores of control and experimental groups regarding their mastery in the English second conditional. As seen in Table 3 and 4, a significant difference ($t(18) = 2.15, p = .045 < .05$) is reflected in post-treatment scores in experimental ($M = 85.50, SD = 4.04$) and control ($M = 70.00, SD = 5.96$) groups, that is, as a result of the treatment, the experimental group outperformed the control group. All in all, the intervention of *congklak* game is more effective to teach the English second conditional to the participants.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of pretest

	Factor	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental	10	57.50	21.11	6.67
	Control	10	42.00	17.66	5.58

Table 2. Independent-samples t-test on pretest scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
Pre-test	Equal variances assumed	1.005	.329	1.78	18	.092	15.50	8.70	-2.79	33.79
	Equal variances not assumed			1.78	17.45	.092	15.50	8.70	-2.83	33.83

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of posttest

	Faktor	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Experimental	10	85.50	12.79	4.04
	Control	10	70.00	18.85	5.96

Table 4. Independent-samples t-test on posttest scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	1.002	.330	2.15	18	.045	15.50	7.20	.36	30.63
	Equal variances not assumed			2.15	15.83	.047	15.50	7.20	.21	30.78

In response to the research question, the results proved that the *congklak* game group performed significantly better than the non-*congklak* game group in comprehending and using the English second conditional. From the classroom observation, the apparent reason for this to occur, to some extent, was due to the nature of the *congklak* game which activated what Fredricks & McColskey (2012) called as student engagement. The game made the participants engaged cognitively (i.e. they referred to their notes and willingly asked their peers when they were unsure of the answers), behaviorally (i.e. they were putting their best efforts in executing the tasks by repeating the sentences until their peers stated that they were correct), and emotionally (i.e. they enjoyed the game immensely which could be seen from their disapproval when the researcher stopped the game)

Put simply, *congklak* game brought with it the quality of nurturing student engagement in the classroom which was beneficial for language learning. This confirms a notion stating that a socially-environmental classroom in which students actively engage in a game with their classmates may facilitate students to take responsibility to build their own knowledge (Bullard and Anderson, 2014). There was also this competitive element that the game induced which triggered the students to win the game over by accomplishing the tasks. This supports Rinvolucris and Davis' (2007: x) argument that the heightened atmosphere of competitive activities is excellent

for fostering collaboration and mutual assistance within each team resulting in a lot of learning takes place without the students noticing they are 'studying'.

In sum, this study supported a long-lasting belief that games in language teaching offer pedagogical benefits in that they promote arousing learning environment and student engagement which are among many recipes of learners' successful learning. Hence, this calls for another beneficial pedagogical implication for teachers about using other possible traditional games to assist students' grammar learning instead of creating dreary and dull grammar classes where students just stay put working on written grammar exercise, while at the same time preserving local culture.

However, it should be noted that, like many others, this study is not without limitations that should be taken into consideration and addressed in future research. First, the participants of the present study were small in number. A much larger sample size might have more satisfying results on significant differences. Another important limitation is this study does not investigate the effect of the game on a delayed posttest. A future study with one is needed to examine the retention of the grammar mastery. It is also essential to point out that in the experimental group, the participants were all female. It might be interesting to examine whether or not any effect of games intervention is determined by gender.

Conclusion

The study concluded that *congklak* game has a positive effect on the learners' mastery of the English second conditional. The game contributed to students engaging themselves cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally which are of the essence for language learning attainment. The findings reflected on an insight that adapting, modifying, and incorporating an Indonesian traditional game into language teaching comes as benefitting. The pedagogical implication of the study is that *congklak* game is a useful instructional technique and medium which can support EFL learners learn English grammatical structures. This study also suggests that we might explore and come up with a lot more creative and innovative ideas to make a good use of our own culture to be integrated into language teaching as an attempt of cultural preservation.

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