NON-DIGITAL LANGUAGE GAMES TO CREATE MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Anastasia Sastrikirana, Wahyu Pramudita
The National Institute of Public Administration of the Republic of Indonesia
kirana.sastri@gmail.com, wahyupramudita@gmail.com

Abstract: *Civil servants are expected to be professional and competent because they have to be able to work well and to tackle challenges in VUCA conditions. To improve their competitiveness, opportunities to continue to higher level of education are given. Those who take these opportunities should attend TOEFL Preparation classes held by the Language Training Center of the National Institute of Public Administration. In order to help them learn TOEFL, three non-digital language games were developed and applied in the classroom to help them learn. To obtain data whether these games could create meaningful learning this research was conducted. Data were gathered from online questionnaire whose questions were revolved around five attributes of meaningful learning and also from classroom observation. The results showed that all attributes of meaningful learning which were active, constructive, intentional, authentic, and cooperative were achieved. The games enabled them to actively and enthusiastically played the non-digital language games with their classmates. They also shared common knowledge that they could use to answer Structure and Written Expressions questions. They also mentioned that the games helped them construct their initial knowledge and the new knowledge they learnt in the classroom. They also agreed that the games enabled them to obtain a clear description of the real TOEFL Structure and Written Expressions.*

Keywords: non-digital language games; meaningful learning experience; adult learners

INTRODUCTION

Civil servants must continually enhance their skills to navigate the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) environment. According to the Ministry of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform's Circular Letter Number 28 Year 2021 (*Surat Edaran Menteri Pendayagunaan Aparatur Sipil Negara dan Reformasi Birkorasi Nomor 28 Tahun 2021 tentang Pengembangan Kompetensi Bagi Pegawai Negeri Sipil Melalui Jalur Pendidikan*), civil servants can advance their competencies through formal education, including higher degrees, which aims to bridge competency gaps and contribute positively to their institutions and the nation (Badan Kepegawaian Negara, 2022). Those pursuing higher education must prepare for English tests like IELTS or TOEFL. This research focuses on TOEFL, a globally recognized test accepted by approximately 12,500 universities in over 150 countries (ETS, 2023). In Indonesia, TOEFL is often required for scholarships from organizations such as AMINEF (American Indonesian Exchange Foundation) and LPDP (Indonesian Endowment Fund for Education Agency).

The Language Training Center (LTC) of the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA), as per NIPA Regulation Number 11 Year 2020 (*Peraturan Lembaga Admininstrasi Negara Nomor 11 Tahun 2020 tentang Organisasi dan Tata Kerja Balai Pelatihan Bahasa*),

provides language training, including TOEFL Preparation Courses for civil servants. Unlike university or private institution classes, which are typically shorter and conducted more frequently, LTC NIPA offers extended classes—three consecutive days with eight hours of instruction per day. To combat potential boredom and disengagement from long sessions, non-digital language games were introduced to make TOEFL ITP learning more engaging. This study focuses on the Structure and Written Expressions section of the TOEFL ITP due to its complexity and the difficulty learners often face with it compared to other skills.

Language games are widely used in English teaching, with studies by Syafii, Kusnawan, and Syukroni (2020), Marzuki and Kuliahana (2021), and Hutabarat and Zaidi (2021) showing their effectiveness in improving students' English skills. However, these studies did not focus on TOEFL or adult learners. Research by Widiantoro, Dukut, & Murniati (2018) and Pratiwi et al. (2023) explored game use in TOEFL classes, but they only examined digital games. This highlights a gap in research on non-digital language games for TOEFL, particularly in the Structure and Written Expressions section. Unlike previous studies, this research aims to explore whether non-digital language games can facilitate meaningful learning rather than measuring score improvements.

Meaningful learning, as defined by Michael (2004), involves "learning with understanding," where learners not only acquire information but also learn to apply it to solve problems. It occurs within the learner as they integrate and use knowledge in real-life situations. Facilitators must provide opportunities for learners to achieve this understanding through various methods. Non-digital language games, which are teaching resources developed without digital technology, offer a practical way to engage learners in applying their knowledge to TOEFL questions. According to Udosen & Ekpo (2016), instructional games include both non-digital forms like board and card games and digital formats such as online games.

Table 1. Non-Digital Language Games Used in TOEFL
Structure and Written Expression Session

1	Program	:	*English for Smart Ekoners : TOEFL Preparation Course*
2	Learning Subject	:	*Structure and Written Expressions*
3	Time Allocation	:	8 learning hours
4	Description	:	This training course equips participants with grammar and sentence analysis skills to answer questions in the Structure and Written Expressions session in a TOEFL test. The methods used are classroom discussions, group discussions, games, and interactive lectures.
5	Outcome	:	After joining this program, the participants will be able to apply grammar and sentence analysis skills to work on Structure and Written Expressions questions in a TOEFL test.
6	Indicators	:	After joining this program, participants will be able to:

168

			a. apply grammar and sentence analysis skills to answer multiple choice questions in the TOEFL Structure and Written Expressions session. b. apply grammar and sentence analysis skills to answer error analysis questions in the TOEFL Structure and Written Expressions session.

7	Non-Digital Language Games	:	1. An Alphabet Game
			  • Purpose: to refresh vocabulary that learners have learnt and to gain new vocabulary that they have not learnt.
			  • Procedures/rules:
			    a. The learners stand in a circle.
			    b. The trainers would give an instruction for example, mentioned English words that start with the alphabet 'Y'.
			    c. Next, the trainers would ask a participant to mention an English word that starts with 'R' (e.g.reject). Then, the next participant should mention an English word that starts with 'T' or the last alphabet from the previous work.
			    d. The trainers then review the meaning of the words that have been mentioned by the learners and connect it with the next game which is a Quartet Game.
			  • Feedback: Feedback was given according to participants' answer when playing the game. The relevancy of the game to the learning objective is also elaborated.
			
			2. A Quartet Game
			  • Purpose: to improve learners' knowledge about parts of speech and how the knowledge could enable them to analyze sentences more quickly.
			  • Procedures/rules:
			    a. The trainers explain that words in English have their categories (nouns, verbs, linking verbs, adjectives, adverbs) known as parts of speech and explain that understanding parts of speech could help them answer Structure and Written Expression questions.
			    b. The learners work in a group of four and are given a set of cards.
			    c. The learners have to collect cards containing words of the same categories (parts of speech)
			    d. The learners who are able to collect most sets of cards are the winners.
			  • Feedback: Trainers give feedback about the words written on the cards and why learners have to understand them. For example, verbs and linking verbs affect the words that follow them; they can be adjectives or adverbs.
			
			3. Classifying Adjectives and Adverbs
			  • Purpose: to help learners memorize adjectives and adverbs and to be a bridge that led to the explanation about different use of adjectives and adverbs
			  • Procedures/rules:
			    a. The learners work in a group of four.
			    b. Each group would get a set of words.
			    c. The learners work together with their teammates to classify the words into adjectives or adverbs.

Teaching civil servants differs significantly from teaching young learners, primarily due to their distinct learning and professional experiences. According to Knowles (1990), adult learners are oriented towards relevance and seek understanding of how learning processes can aid their personal or professional growth. They also tend to adopt a problem-centered approach, avoiding unnecessary theories, and have a self-concept that emphasizes responsibility for their own lives and decisions (Knowles et al., 2014, as cited in Purwati, 2022). Trainers should avoid treating adult learners as children and should minimize one-sided instruction, as adult learners often have substantial prior experience.

Harmer (2001) highlights that adult learners' past experiences, both positive and negative, shape their views on teaching and learning methods. Trainers must consider these experiences to ensure that learning is comfortable and accommodates the complex lives of adults, who juggle work, family, and other responsibilities, limiting their time for study (Malone, 2014, as cited in Mali, 2017).

Meaningful learning encompasses five key characteristics: active, constructive, intentional, authentic, and cooperative (Wong, 2015). Active learning involves engagement in real-life tasks to assess performance. Constructive learning fills gaps between existing and new knowledge, gradually forming a comprehensive understanding. Intentional learning means being aware of one's learning process and goals. Authentic learning requires that knowledge be relevant to its natural context. Cooperative learning occurs through discussions, where learners negotiate understanding and problem-solve together, gaining new perspectives and insights.

METHOD

Before the study on non-digital language games, trainers prepared a detailed lesson plan outlining the game's procedures and printed separate sets of cards for the quartet game and the adjectives and adverbs game to facilitate distribution. The games were designed to align with adult learners' characteristics, aiming to determine if they could foster meaningful learning. Seventeen learners from the TOEFL Preparation Course at the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) participated, all from NIPA and none from other ministries or institutes. Data were collected via an online questionnaire on Google Forms, distributed through a WhatsApp group, consisting of ten closed and nine open questions to explore the five attributes of meaningful learning: active, constructive, intentional, authentic, and cooperative. Results from closed questions were tabulated, while open-ended responses were analyzed descriptively.

To complement the questionnaire data, observation notes were also taken to capture participants' experiences with the games. Following Merriam (1998), the observations focused on identifying events, examining them from various angles, and noting behaviors that met the study's

objectives, as guided by DeWalt and DeWalt (1998). Observations were analyzed and categorized as O1, O2, and O3 to emphasize their significance in teaching English to adult learners.

FINDINGS

Approximately 94.1% of participants were motivated to achieve high TOEFL scores to qualify for scholarships for further education, eagerly seeking tips and strategies to improve their scores. They intended to retake the TOEFL test soon, reflecting a clear learning intention (O1). In contrast, 5.9% participated primarily to refresh their knowledge without an immediate plan to continue their studies.

Before joining the course, 35.4% of participants had not used specific strategies for the Structure and Written Expressions section and often ran out of time due to a lack of strategy knowledge (O1). One participant noted that a significant gap between tests led her to rely on instinct rather than previously learned skills. Conversely, 64.9% emphasized the importance of mastering grammar and identifying sentence components to answer questions correctly, indicating a focus on grammar and parts of speech (O1). The course design, incorporating active, constructive, intentional, authentic, and cooperative elements, aligned with Howland, Jonassen, and Marra's (2012) principles of meaningful learning.

Regarding vocabulary mastery and its contextual use, 94.1% of participants felt that the non-digital language games aided their understanding, while 5.9% felt they needed more examples to fully grasp the context. Additionally, 88.2% agreed the games helped them understand sentence structures. A notable 94.1% reported that the games increased their enthusiasm for learning Structure and Written Expressions, though 5.9% were less enthusiastic due to uncertainty about continuing their studies.

Questions 4 and 5, which explored whether the games helped identify areas for improvement and integrate past and current knowledge, yielded similar responses. 88.2% found the games helpful for analyzing areas needing more work and for clarifying past learning experiences, whereas 11.7% felt their limited TOEFL experience made it difficult to evaluate their progress.

All participants saw the connection between the games and TOEFL Structure and Written Expressions. 94.1% felt the games helped them reflect on both their initial and new knowledge, providing a clear view of the real test, while 5.9% disagreed. Finally, all participants agreed that the non-digital language games contributed to their professional development and personal satisfaction.

DISCUSSIONS

The trainers provided clear explanations about the learning outcomes of each game and examples of their application, leading 94.1% of participants to feel that the games improved their

understanding of vocabulary and its contextual use, while 88.2% felt the games helped with sentence structures. According to Adipat et al. (2021), well-structured and appropriately implemented game-based learning is crucial for achieving desired outcomes. The non-digital language games used in the TOEFL Structure and Written Expressions class are structured, include follow-up activities, and are designed with specific purposes, rules, feedback systems, and voluntary participation (McGonigal, 2011, as cited in Hidayat, 2018). These games align with the goal of enhancing TOEFL scores. However, some participants felt that the examples provided were insufficient for understanding vocabulary in context, suggesting a need for more examples in future sessions.

The fact that 94.1% of participants reported increased enthusiasm for learning Structure and Written Expressions through the games supports the idea that learning involves both cognitive and affective outcomes (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956; Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993, as cited in Friehs, 2016). Most participants were extrinsically motivated, driven by rewards such as scholarships, which ties into the intentional aspect of meaningful learning by clarifying their goals. Additionally, 88.2% of participants felt the games effectively bridged gaps between their previous and current knowledge, aiding in understanding unclear concepts and identifying areas needing improvement. This supports Novak's (2002) idea that meaningful learning involves connecting new concepts with existing knowledge (Hung, 2019) and aligns with Wong's (2015) view that learners integrate new experiences with prior knowledge. Participants also recognized that the games covered essential TOEFL materials and appreciated their relevance to their learning goals. This suggests that the games not only met the intentional attribute of meaningful learning but also fulfilled the authentic attribute by reflecting real-world contexts (Wong, 2015).

Participants shared their views on the non-digital language games used in class, finding them both enjoyable and helpful for learning Structure and Written Expressions (O2). They appreciated the first game, which involved recalling words from a selected alphabet to refresh their vocabulary, although some suggested making it more challenging by focusing on specific themes like work or education. The second game, a vocabulary quartet, was new to many but exciting as it helped them categorize and memorize English vocabulary, improving their understanding of word classes such as nouns, prepositions, and verbs. This improved their ability to identify missing words in TOEFL questions (O3). The final game, classifying adjectives and adverbs, was praised for helping participants recall English lessons and better understand the use of adjectives and adverbs in context. It also helped them identify common TOEFL pitfalls, such as confusing adverbs with adjectives, and improved their speed in answering questions (O3). All participants enjoyed the games and valued the collaborative aspect, which allowed them to share

insights and clarify misunderstandings. This cooperation, along with the active participation, underscored the cooperative and active attributes of meaningful learning (O2).

The study highlights that non-digital language games effectively promote meaningful learning by incorporating active, constructive, intentional, authentic, and cooperative elements. Participants recognized that the games covered essential TOEFL Structure and Written Expressions material and helped them answer questions more efficiently (O3). The games are well-suited for adult learners who value relevant, problem-solving activities, as they include follow-up explanations and address common TOEFL issues. Participants noted that the games helped them become more aware of common mistakes in TOEFL questions (O1) and improved their ability to answer questions accurately and quickly. As stated by participants, the games provided a unified approach to analyzing sentence structures, aiding in the identification of correct and incorrect sentences. Overall, the games support adult learners in achieving their goals by offering practical strategies and fostering a deeper understanding of the materials.

CONCLUSION

During the non-digital language games, participants reported that the games helped integrate their prior knowledge with the new material learned in the Structure and Written Expressions class, demonstrating the constructive aspect of meaningful learning. Their active participation in group games indicated that they enjoyed the experience and valued the opportunity to share and exchange knowledge, highlighting the active and cooperative elements of meaningful learning. The games were designed to mirror real TOEFL questions, which improved participants' understanding and provided effective strategies for answering questions correctly, thus reflecting the intentional and authentic attributes of meaningful learning.

Participants offered two suggestions: First, the alphabet game could be made more challenging by asking for specific words related to certain themes. Second, additional examples should be provided to deepen their understanding of sentence structures. These recommendations should be considered for future game implementations.

The study has some limitations, including a small sample of seventeen participants from the National Institute of Public Administration. To address this, English trainers from other language training centers or government agencies could apply the same non-digital language games to gather data and compare results. Additionally, applying these games in more diverse settings, such as with participants from different ministries or provinces, could help determine if variations in English proficiency, academic background, and learning experiences affect the outcomes, providing valuable insights for future research on non-digital language games.

REFERENCES

Adipat, S., Laksana, K., Busayanon, K., Asawasowan, A., & Adipat, B. (2021). Engaging students in the Learning Process with Game-based Learning: The Fundamental Concepts. *International Journal of Technology in Education* (IJTE), 4(3), 542-552. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijte.169

Alshebou, S., & Taqi, H.A. (2019). English Language Learning in Adulthood: Perceptions of Female Adult Learners. *British Journal of Education*, 7(6), 9-25. https://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/English-Language-Learning-in-Adulthood-Perceptions-of-female-adult-learners.pdf

Badan Kepegawaian Negara. (2022). *Booklet Panduan Pengembangan Kompetensi Jalur Pendidikan*. Retrieved from https://www.bkn.go.id/unggahan/2022/08/BOOKLET-PANDUAN-TUBEL-2022.pdf

DeWalt, Kathleen M. & DeWalt, Billie R. (1998). Participant observation. In H. Russell Bernard (Ed.), *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (pp. 259-300). Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Educational Testing Service. (2024). TOEFL: *Opening Doors to a Wide and Diverse World*. Retrieved from https://www.ets.org/toefl.html

Friehs, B. (2016). Games in Adult Foreign Language Teaching. *International Conference on Language, Innovation, Culture, and Education*, 51-61. https://icsai.org/procarch/3iclice/index.html

Harmer, J. (2001). *How to Teach English*. Harlow: Pearson Longman.

Howland, J., Jonassen, D., & Marra , R. (2012). *Meaningful learning with technology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson

Hidayat, R. (2018). Game-Based Learning: Academic Games Sebagai Metode Penunjang Pembelajaran Kewirausahaan. *Buletin Psikologi*, *26*(2), 71-85. https:// DOI: 10.22146/buletinpsikologi.30988

Hung, B.P. (2019). Meaningful Learning and Its Implications for Language Education in Vietnam. *Journal of Language and Education*, *5*(1), 98-102. https://doi.org/10.17323/2411-7390-2019-5-1-98-102

Hutabarat, Z., & Zaidi, M.Y. (2021). Improving Reading Skill through Game Technique for the First Grade Elementary School Students. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Literature*, *2*(2), 130-139.

Indira Gandhi National Open University. (2018). *Non-Digital Teaching Learning Resources*. Retrieved from https://egyankosh.ac.in/handle/123456789/46308

Kementerian Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara dan Reformasi Birokrasi. (2021). https://www.bkn.go.id/unggahan/2022/06/SE-Nomor-28-Tahun-2021.pdf

Knowles, M. S. (1990). *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species, 4th ed*. Houston: Gulf.

Lembaga Administrasi Negara. (2020). http://sister.lan.go.id/documents/625872/5721857/PERATURAN+LEMBAGA+ADMINISTRASI+NEGARA+REPUBLIK+INDONESIA+NOMOR+11+TAHUN+2020+TENTANG+ORGANISASI+DAN+TATA+KERJA++BALAI+PELATIHAN+BAHASA/4830d839-775f-4fad-8575-622d8bb7d6bb

Mali, Y.C.G. (2017). Adult Learners's Experiences in Learning English: A Case Study of Two University Students in Indonesia. *IJOLTL*, *2*(2), 131-146. https:// DOI:10.30957/ijoltl.v2i2.280

Sastrikirana, Pramudita. *Non-Digital..*

Merriam, S. B. (1998). Case study research in education. A qualitative approach. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Michael, J. A. (2004). Mental models and meaningful learning. *J Vet Med Educ. Spring*, 31(1):1-5. https:// doi: 10.3138/jvme.31.1.1. PMID: 15962239.

Purwati, D., Mardhiah, A., Nurhasanah, E., & Ramli, R. (2022). The Six Characteristics of Andragogy and Future Research Directions in EFL: A Literature Review. *Elsya: Journal of English Language Studies*, *4*(1), 86-95. https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v4i1.7473

Syafii, M.L., Kusnawan, W., & Syukroni, A. (2020). Enhancing Listening Skills Using Games. *International Journal on Studies in Education*, *2*(2), 78-107. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonse.21

Udosen, A. E., & Ekpo, U. S. (2016). Instructional Games: Implications for Curriculum and Instruction. *Equatorial Journal of Education and Curriculum Studies*. *1*(1):24-42. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2834253

Widiantoro, Y. & Dukut, E. (2018). Information System for Game TOEFL Like App. *International Conference on Informatics and Computational Sciences (ICICoS), 1-6.* https:// DOI: 10.1109/ICICOS.2018.8621685

Wong, K.P. (2015). Facilitating a Meaningful Learning Experience for Students by Multimedia Teaching Approach. *Asia Pacific Journal of Contemporary Education and Communication Technology*, 1(1), 72-80. https://apiar.org.au/journal-paper/facilitating-a-meaningful-learning-experience-for-students-by-multimedia-teaching-approach/