

# The Integration of Online Games for Preposition Learning: A Literature Review

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## Abstract

Acquiring knowledge of prepositions of place (namely, in, on, and at) is a crucial aspect of the process of acquiring proficiency in the English language. It is essential to understand how ESL primary learners construct meaning. This literature review examines three key areas pertaining to the acquisition of prepositions of place, namely the significance and difficulties encountered by learners, as well as the potential benefits of utilising online games to facilitate learning. The present study asserts that primary English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Malaysia encounter difficulties in accurately applying their understanding of prepositions of place, both in academic settings and in everyday communication. This phenomenon occurs as a result of inadequate methodology. According to several prior studies, it has been demonstrated that online games can facilitate the learning process of individuals by providing three significant criteria: an attractive design, interactive features, and a real-time strategic approach. Given the proliferation of readily available online games on the internet, it is imperative for educators to exercise discernment in the curation and recommendation of materials that align with the aptitude and requirements of their students.

**Keywords:** ESL Primary Classroom, Prepositions of Place, Online Games

## Introduction

The proficiency of English as a Second Language (ESL) primary learners in Malaysia will demonstrated through the utilisation of accurate and suitable grammatical conventions in both oral and written communication (Rhee, 2004; Litkowski and Hargraves, 2007; Spicer-Escalante and DeJonge-Kannan, 2014;). The present modifications to the English curriculum involve the integration of grammar knowledge into the acquisition of the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in addition to Language Arts and Language Awareness. This is in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The acquisition of knowledge pertaining to prepositions of place, namely "in," "on," and "at," serves to enhance the linguistic competence of learners by fostering an understanding of the fundamental conventions of language usage (Jafarinejad & Shahrokhi,

2016). The teaching and learning process places equal emphasis on the acquisition of prepositions of place alongside other grammatical components. The acquisition of prepositions of place is often linked to rote learning and formulaic memorization, which can prove to be a tedious undertaking for learners, ultimately detracting from their overall enjoyment of the learning process (Zuraidah & Hayati, 2017). The aforementioned assertion is corroborated by various prior research endeavours, which have documented the challenges encountered by Malaysian elementary-level English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in identifying prepositions of location in spoken discourse, despite having been introduced to these components during their formative years in kindergarten (Chapman & Rich, 2018; Kessler, 2018). Many individuals have a tendency to conflate the application of prepositions denoting location with their native language, which can be attributed to a dearth of precise guidelines.

However, the significance of acquiring proficiency in prepositions of place would remain unaltered. The acquisition of knowledge can aid learners in reducing ambiguity when interpreting or conveying a message, as posited by (Lindstromberg, 2010; Lam, 2009; Özışık, 2014). According to Figueroa-Flores (2015), the integration of online games can be a useful tool for learners to encounter prepositions of place frequently during the process of learning English. The ongoing process facilitates the acquisition of fundamental grammar and functional skills at the A1 level for students from Year 1 to Year 4, as indicated in Attachment 1. Mifsud et al. (2013) posit that online games offer a valuable and engaging pedagogical tool for fostering favourable dispositions and self-assurance in the acquisition of prepositions of place. Typically, online games are constructed with prevalent characteristics such as an attractive design, interactive elements, and a real-time strategic approach that is appealing to users. Errors related to prepositions of place are considered a natural aspect of the learning process within a classroom environment. According to Lorincz and Gordon (2012), online games employ a real-time strategy that allows learners to attempt questions repeatedly in a less stressful manner, which is a natural and inevitable approach.

In contemporary times, educators and students are proficient in utilising information and communication technology (ICT) as a tool for instructional and learning purposes. This is supported by various scholarly works such as those of (Lam, 2009; Tyler and Evans, 2003; Blake, 2011; Iaremenco, 2017; Jafarnejad and Shahrokhi, 2016). According to Syafiqah et al (2020), there exists a significant correlation between emergent technologies and gamification as a tool for learning, which presents numerous possibilities for enhancing educational practises. The researchers aim to examine three key aspects pertaining to the acquisition of prepositions of place by learners, namely their significance, the difficulties associated with the learning process, and the potential benefits of utilising online games as a learning tool. It is crucial for educators and students to carefully select appropriate online games that align with the learners' educational aptitude and curriculum requirements (Deterding et al., 2011) to ensure the successful integration of online materials into the learning process.

## **Findings**

Firstly, preposition learning is crucial for primary learners in Malaysia as it helps them avoid misinterpretation in their communication. Prepositions provide vital context and clarify the spatial and temporal relationships between objects and locations. Without a proper understanding of prepositions, learners may misinterpret the intended meaning of a sentence, leading to misunderstandings and miscommunications. For example, a sentence like "The cat is on the table" can be misinterpreted as "The cat is under the table" if the learner

does not grasp the meaning of the preposition "on." By acquiring propositional knowledge, learners can accurately comprehend and convey messages, enhancing their overall communication skills.

Prepositions are an essential part of the language that governs the relationship between nouns, pronouns, and other words within a sentence. For primary learners in Malaysia, mastering prepositions is of utmost importance as it plays a crucial role in their language development. This essay will discuss the significance of prepositional learning for primary learners in Malaysia, focusing on the aspects of avoiding misinterpretation, avoiding confusion, and meeting the curriculum's needs.

*(i) Avoiding Misinterpretation*

Firstly, prepositional learning is crucial for primary learners in Malaysia, as it helps them avoid misinterpretation in their communication. Prepositions provide vital context and clarify the spatial and temporal relationships between objects and locations. Without a proper understanding of prepositions, learners may misinterpret the intended meaning of a sentence, leading to misunderstandings and miscommunications. For example, a sentence like "The cat is on the table" can be misinterpreted as "The cat is under the table" if the learner does not grasp the meaning of the preposition "on." By acquiring propositional knowledge, learners can accurately comprehend and convey messages, enhancing their overall communication skills.

The grammatical element of prepositions of place plays a crucial role in determining the semantic and subsequent grammatical functions of the noun phrase to which they are attached (Rhee, 2004). Lindstromberg (2010); Litkowski and Hargraves (2007) have characterised them as high-frequency words in the English language that possess minimal semantic value but possess the ability to significantly alter the intended meaning in both written and spoken communication. The majority of instances involving prepositions of place exhibit a primary semantic function pertaining to the notions of location and motion. The contention exists that several prepositions of place possess multiple usages, thereby conveying distinct messages and meanings (Lindstromberg, 2010). According to Lorincz and Gordon's (2012) proposal, the polysemous nature of prepositions of place underscores the importance of ESL learners acquiring a solid understanding of fundamental prepositions of place that are frequently utilised. The prepositions of place encompass lexical items such as 'in', 'on', and 'at'.

*(ii) Avoiding Confusion*

Secondly, the learning of prepositions assists primary learners in Malaysia in avoiding confusion within their written and spoken language. Prepositions often have subtle differences in meaning, and using the wrong preposition can alter the intended message. For instance, using "in" instead of "on" when describing the location of an object can completely change the context. By focusing on prepositional learning, primary learners can develop a clear understanding of the appropriate prepositions to use in different contexts, reducing confusion and ensuring their language expression is accurate and coherent.

Tyler and Evans (2003) assert that for the majority of ESL learners, it is imperative to possess a firm foundational understanding and retention of fundamental spatial prepositions of place such as in, on, and at. Despite their brevity and frequent underestimation by learners, these words present a greater level of difficulty in achieving mastery than one might anticipate. According to Spicer-Escalante and DeJonge-Kannan (2014), prepositions of place and other

similar grammatical constructs are frequently misused by individuals who are learning English as a second language. The Oxford Learner's Dictionary (n.d.) states that the prepositions 'in' and 'at' have fifteen distinct meanings and usages in relation to place, while 'on' has sixteen. The abundance of definitions and applications of prepositions of place, namely in, on, and at, may potentially cause confusion for ESL learners, including young Malaysian students, in comprehending their fundamental usage and connotations.

### *(iii) Curriculum Needs*

Furthermore, prepositional learning is essential to meet the curriculum's needs in Malaysia. The national curriculum emphasises the development of language skills among primary learners, including the understanding and use of prepositions. Mastery of prepositions aligns with the curriculum's objectives of fostering language proficiency, enhancing critical thinking, and improving communication abilities. By incorporating prepositional learning into the curriculum, educators can ensure that primary learners develop a solid foundation in language skills, preparing them for future academic success and effective communication in various contexts. In conjunction with the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in the Malaysian Primary English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum, students will be assessed based on their proficiency in specific English language skills and their corresponding abilities.

Focusing specifically on the domains of speaking and writing, it is crucial for Malaysian learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) to demonstrate proficiency in accurate and refined grammatical structures as well as in the utilisation of high-frequency lexical items and vocabulary. This proficiency is essential for achieving success in the prescribed curriculum, as noted by (Zuraidah and Hayati, 2017). Prepositions of place are considered a fundamental aspect of grammar as they contain high-frequency words, as noted by Lindstromberg (2010). This underscores the importance of emphasising prepositions of place in language learning courses, particularly in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms.

In summary, the importance of prepositional learning for primary learners in Malaysia cannot be overstated. Acquiring knowledge of prepositions enables learners to avoid misinterpretation, prevent confusion, and meet the requirements of the curriculum. By emphasising prepositional learning in the language education of primary learners, educators can empower them with the necessary language skills to effectively communicate and comprehend the intricacies of the English language.

### **The Utilisation of Online Games in Enhancing Students' Preposition Learning**

The use of games in the realm of education, particularly in the acquisition of a secondary language, is a well-established practise. Conversely, online games embody a comparable notion, albeit with the additional stipulation that they can be fully or partially accessed via the internet or other computer-mediated networks. According to Blake (2011), online games have been regarded as a contemporary phenomenon and an instructional instrument that can foster the involvement of ESL learners in their educational pursuits. Moreover, numerous studies have been conducted, affirming that games have a multitude of positive effects on an individual's learning (Griffiths, 2002). The forthcoming discourse will expound upon the attributes and capabilities that online games can offer in facilitating the acquisition of prepositions of place, specifically "in," "on," and "at," within an educational context.

*(i) Appealing layout and use of an adaptive approach*

One of the salient attributes of online gaming is the incorporation of visually captivating interfaces and the implementation of adaptable methodologies across the software or website utilised. According to Iaremenco's (2017) argument, such layouts have the potential to foster a pleasant and stress-free environment with respect to setbacks, including those encountered during the learning process. Additionally, Schlosser et al (2012) conducted a study that indicated that incorporating animation into instruction facilitates the acquisition and comprehension of prepositions of place for ESL learners, thereby alleviating the instructional demands placed on educators. Mifsud et al (2013) discovered a similar concept in their research, wherein 79.1% of students in Maltese schools believed that games could offer learning opportunities, irrespective of the content, general or linguistic. Regarding the aforementioned topics and previous discussions, it is evident that numerous challenges are encountered by ESL learners when acquiring knowledge of prepositions of place, and experiencing difficulty in this area is highly probable. Lo et al (2004) posit that to address this matter, students must possess a considerable degree of autonomy in their academic pursuits. Online games have the potential to facilitate interactive participation among students and foster adaptive approaches to accommodate individual differences. Online games offer various levels of difficulty that cater to the diverse needs of ESL learners. Additionally, multiplayer options provide opportunities for healthy competition, while varying levels of achievement allow for individualised progress. The use of online games as an intervention for teaching prepositions of place to students can lead to a more relaxed and stress-free learning environment, which may foster their interest and affection for grammar acquisition, as suggested by (Iaremenco, 2017; Lo et al., 2004).

*(ii) Interactive*

An additional salient characteristic of digital games is their capacity to engage in interactivity with their users. According to Iaremenco (2017), interactions may manifest in various forms, such as verbal, physical, emotional, or intellectual. According to Iaremenco (2017), the use of interactive materials in the form of online games has the potential to enhance student engagement and increase the amount of time spent on learning the subject matter. Mantovani (2003) supports the notion that the use of game-related materials that are both engaging and enjoyable can lead to extended periods of interactive learning among ESL learners. However, it is expected that students actively participate in the learning process to facilitate effective language acquisition, as noted by (Lo et al., 2004). Online games can serve as a means for students to practise and reinforce their understanding of prepositions of place. These games may involve tasks such as selecting the appropriate preposition, constructing sentences utilising the target prepositions, or distinguishing between common basic usages of prepositions of place, such as in, on, and at, with respect to various contexts, including location and phrasal verbs. Furthermore, the activities may encompass a variety of tasks such as completing sentences with missing words, determining the veracity of statements, inputting the appropriate prepositions of place, manipulating visual elements to depict the desired prepositions of place, and a multitude of other exercises. Jafarinejad and Shahrokhii (2016) contend that ESL learners are inclined to participate in enjoyable and interactive methods of acquiring the target language through such endeavours.

*(iii) A real-time strategy approach*

Finally, it is worth noting that online games represent a real-time strategy that may enhance the motivation and confidence of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in their pursuit of mastering the subject matter. Laremenko (2017) asserts that the acquisition of a second language by students is greatly influenced by their confidence and motivation levels. Incorporating immediate feedback and interactive, enjoyable interventions such as online games can be an effective means of fostering motivation and confidence among students. By doing so, anxiety and fear of failure can be mitigated during the learning process. Lo et al. (2004) reported that the implementation of web-based English hypermedia and other online-based interactive interventions can enhance students' confidence levels by providing immediate feedback, regardless of whether they provide consecutive correct answers or not. Jafarinejad and Shahrokhi (2016) posit that the utilisation of online materials, such as games, can facilitate the acquisition of the second language, thereby bolstering one's confidence in engaging with or comprehending prepositions of place.

Overall, the features and potential of online games present a hopeful outlook for education, benefiting both teachers and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Facilitating the acquisition of prepositions of place poses a challenge due to the multifaceted semantic properties inherent in English prepositions of place. However, there is a need to deepen the conviction and endeavour to comprehensively comprehend, implement, and utilise interactive interventions, such as online games, in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, particularly among educators.

**Conclusion**

In summary, it can be asserted that the utilisation of online games as a means to augment the acquisition of prepositions of place, specifically "in," "on," and "at," among primary English as a Second Language (ESL) learners holds considerable importance. ESL learners, including those from Malaysia, encounter various challenges in acquiring prepositions of place. However, the use of online games has the potential to facilitate their acquisition of this specific grammatical feature. Despite this, online games possess numerous beneficial characteristics that can entice and motivate ESL learners to become engaged participants in their education. However, research suggests that English as a Second Language (ESL) learners are most effective in their learning process when they are highly motivated, confident, and fully engaged (Blake, 2011; laremenko, 2017; Jafarinejad and Shahrokhi, 2016).

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