

From Awareness to Action: A Game-Based Experiential Learning Approach to Responsible Tourism Education among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

Responsible tourism emphasizes minimizing environmental impacts, respecting local cultures, and enhancing community well-being. The growing tourism industry necessitates education that fosters responsible practices among future professionals. Game-based learning, noted for its ability to engage students through interaction, feedback, and challenge, has gained traction (Parekh, 2021; Hamari et al., 2014). However, research on board games as pedagogical tools in responsible tourism education remains limited, focusing more on digital games and gamification (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The board game "Travel with Care," designed to simulate real-world tourism scenarios, incorporates sustainability challenges and decision-making scenarios, facilitating experiential learning. This study aims to: 1) explore the effectiveness of board games in teaching responsible tourism concepts, 2) analyze behavioral and attitudinal changes post-participation, and 3) examine student engagement and learning experiences during these game-based activities.



Figure 1: The board game "Travel with Care"



Figure 2: City cards



Figure 3: Sea cards



Figure 4: Conservation Area Cards

This research utilized a qualitative methodology comprising interviews and observations, supported by an extensive literature review of relevant materials. Fifteen students from Phuket Rajabhat University's Faculty of Management Sciences were assessed before and after playing the bilingual board game, “Travel with Care,” designed to enhance English skills and engagement among Thai and foreign students. Developed by a first-year student and refined through iterative cycles with academic feedback, the game’s development and the students’ learning experiences were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The findings from interviews and observations identified four major themes regarding students' learning experiences with the "Travel with Care" board game. Theme 1 highlights Enhanced Understanding of Responsible Tourism, where most participants initially showed limited knowledge but improved significantly after playing, gaining insights into environmental impacts such as waste management and marine conservation. Theme 2 focuses on Active Engagement and Enjoyment in Learning, noting that while the game was initially seen as complex, students found it easy, interactive, and meaningful, leading to greater engagement through mechanics like scenario cards and scoring systems (e.g., Green Points). Theme 3 emphasizes the Development of Critical Thinking and Decision-Making Skills, as students had to critically assess their choices and understand the trade-offs between environmental responsibilities and other factors. Theme 4 discusses Increased Awareness and Attitudinal Change, with participants expressing heightened awareness of environmental issues and a sense of responsibility, recognizing that even small actions can significantly impact the environment. Additionally, Theme 5 presents Social Interaction and Collaborative Learning, showing that the game encouraged peer discussion and the sharing of ideas, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

We collected data from 15 students using pre and post-interviews. Before, five students thought the board game was just for children and not interesting, and ten had little knowledge of responsible tourism or marine environmental issues. Post-interview, six students liked the game because it helped them understand tourist impacts on nature, raised awareness about waste

reduction, and taught them about coral reefs and marine life. Three students said it improved analytical thinking and environmental decision-making. Collaborative play encouraged idea exchange and understanding environmental impacts. Students suggested adding scenario cards. The game is effective for learning, easy to play, engaging, and promotes experiential learning, immediate feedback, emotional engagement, and social interaction. These elements help students internalize responsible tourism behaviors, fostering environmental sustainability awareness beyond the classroom.



Figure 5: Board game testing in the classroom



Figure 6: Experiential Learning Process through the “Travel with Care” Board Game

In conclusion, the study shows that bridging theoretical knowledge with practical application in tourism education is enhanced through experiential learning using board games. This method encourages active participation, collaboration, and reflective thinking, helping students link their decisions to real-world environmental impacts. Interactive gameplay promotes a deeper understanding of responsible tourism practices, vital for future professionals, and underscores the importance of innovative teaching tools in fostering sustainability-oriented mindsets in younger generations.

This process illustrates transformative learning, wherein individuals reassess their assumptions and shift perspectives through experience and reflection (Mezirow, 1997). Initially, many participants underestimated tourism's impact and viewed the game as recreational. Engagement with game mechanics led to recognition of their actions' significance, indicating early perspective transformation. Additionally, findings align with the Theory of Planned Behavior, showing changes in knowledge, attitudes, and decision-making tendencies. The game's structure, promoting peer interaction and immediate feedback, fosters social awareness and confidence, potentially enhancing students' intentions to make environmentally responsible choices in real-life situations (Ajzen, 1991).

Future research should investigate the integration of digital or hybrid game-based learning by comparing traditional board games with digital simulations to identify the most effective formats for various learning environments. It is essential to refine the game's scoring system to reflect the real environmental impact of actions accurately, enhancing learning credibility and fostering responsible decision-making. Longitudinal studies are necessary to assess if the awareness gained through the "Travel with Care" board game leads to actual responsible tourism behavior over time. Ultimately, promoting responsible tourism in future generations relies on transformative learning experiences that shape values and inspire long-term commitment to sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: game-based learning, experiential learning, responsible tourism education, behavioral change, sustainability education

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