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(IJEPC)**www.ijepe.com**WATCH OUT FOR LANGUAGE FLAWS (WOLF): ENHANCING
GRAMMAR LEARNING THROUGH DIGITAL BOARD GAME
IN YEAR 4 ESL CLASSROOMS**Nur Ain Nazirah Ash'ari^{1*}, Nurain Syakirah Abdullah², Melor Md Yunus³¹ Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Email: p145918@siswa.ukm.edu.my

² Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Email: p145476@siswa.ukm.edu.my

³ Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Email: melor@ukm.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

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DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.956030**This work is licensed under** [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

Grammar is essential for effective communication and plays an important role in Malaysia's curriculum to develop students' language skills from an early age. However, many students find grammar learning tedious and irrelevant to real-life situations, often struggling to engage with traditional methods like rote memorization. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Watch Out for Language Flaws (WOLF) board game in improving grammar lessons in ESL classrooms and to explore students' perceptions of the game based on their learning experience. The study involved twelve Year 4 students from primary schools in Dungun, Terengganu, and Johor Bahru, Johor. The development of the WOLF board game using the ADDIE model emphasises a structured approach that ensures the innovation is both engaging and effective in enhancing grammar skills. The research used a quasi-experimental design to assess students' grammar performance by comparing their results from pre-tests and post-tests. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' grammar proficiency after engaging with the WOLF board game. The data also indicated positive feedback, with many participants highlighting its fun and engaging features. The study concludes that integrating innovative tools like the WOLF game into grammar instruction not only improves grammar proficiency but also creates a more engaging and enjoyable learning experience. The innovation is hoped to encourage teachers to move beyond traditional grammar lessons and incorporate more engaging and interactive learning methods. Despite the efficiency, the study recognizes the limitations related to the geographical and demographic factors. Hence, it is recommended for future research to employ broader perspectives from different backgrounds

of students to yield greater data. The findings will be able to help to further refine the innovation to accommodate various types of learners.

Keywords:

ESL Classrooms, Gamification, Quasi-Experimental Design, Grammar, ADDIE Model

Introduction

English language, which is a language that is integrated in the Malaysian education system, is considered a prominent second language (L2) for primary school pupils. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) that has been introduced in 2015 indicated a substantial change by emphasising on the role of grammar in supporting the practical language skills including speaking, writing, reading and listening. Understanding the function of grammar in learning the language is a fundamental aspect in ensuring effective and clear communication. However, Manokaran et al. (2023) asserts the difficulties in learning grammar among the pupils in their studies due to its structures and rules that often contradicts with their first language (L1) and hence, resulting in their passiveness and introverted behaviour in learning English as they are hesitant in the potential of making mistakes.

Grammar lessons in the past teaching and learning process put more emphasis on the concepts of memorization, drilling, and constant practices on writing in order to ensure their comprehension and understanding. Despite its strength in imparting a restrained and controlled practice, it may not be as effective in engaging students or helping them retain grammatical concepts. Hence, it is of paramount importance to consider other teaching aspects that can ignite the learning enthusiasm of students including integrating technology in education. Interactive learning, which can be incorporated by using technology, has been proven to be efficacious in maximising pupils' abilities in their language competence (Sarangapani & Harwati Hashim, 2022). Several studies showed an improved performance particularly in grammar learning through utilising technology (Khairi Fakhri Fazil & Nur Ehsan Mohd Said, 2020; Sarangapani & Harwati Hashim, 2022; Segaran & Harwati Hashim, 2022). Therefore, the influence of technology in teaching practices is significant and should be taken into consideration to be used in the classroom.

In relation to the technological integration in education, an innovation entitled Watch Out for Language Flaws (WOLF) Digital Board Game has been carefully designed and developed independently as the component in this study which is intended to act as a teaching aid for educators as well as a supplementary tool for the pupils to enhance their grammar proficiency. The gamification concept integrated into the innovation conveyed a notion to build a non-threatening experience in language learning which can help to reduce their anxiety and passivity in the classroom. WOLF Digital Board Game is ideally adapted from a combination of Monopoly and Werewolf games which focuses on fun learning in the aspects of grammar. Players are divided into several characters. The Scholar is a character that has to defeat the Trickster by answering the questions with correct grammar. The Trickster acts as the one who tricks the Scholars into making grammar mistakes. Various elements of grammar such as simple tense, adjectives, and nouns are compartmentalised into the digital question cards which players are required to complete in order to advance to the next level.

By incorporating these elements, the study aims to answer two research questions:

- 1) How effective is the WOLF Digital Board Game in improving English grammar skills among Year 4 primary school students?
- 2) What are the students' perceptions of using the WOLF Digital Board Game in the classroom?

Literature Review

Teaching and Learning Grammar in Malaysia

Teaching and learning English grammar in Malaysia are crucial in the education system in Malaysia because English is both a first and a second language (L2) in the country. As a result of understanding the importance of English especially in the aspect of international communications and competitiveness of the economy, Malaysia's Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2017 has adopted the use of CEFR, with the main purpose of raising the standard of English usage among students and bringing the Malaysian standards on par with the international standards. The implementation of CEFR, thus entailed a change from the traditional transmission of grammatical knowledge to meaningful communication; a skills-based approach (Kaur & Jian, 2022). In the course of the implementation of the strategies tied to the CEFR, grammar teaching transitioned from being predominantly integrative, where grammar rules were taught and practised through direct exercises and drills, to an implicit one that was based on tasks. Grammar is now part of language acquisition where learners learn through meaningful purposes and contexts (Sulaiman & Singh, 2021). This change is based on the orientation of the communication approach from the traditional approach that emphasizes correctness in grammar use. The learners are urged to show their performance via the 'can do' statements in the context of listening, reading, writing and speaking (Kaur & Jian, 2022). The rationale of this approach is to afford the students the chance to use grammar in real-life contexts and such contexts may include group discussions, project-based learning and role-play.

The Use of Games in Learning Grammar

Games have been identified to boost the teaching of grammar in many countries including Malaysia where studies have noted the usefulness in learning the subject. According to Hashim et al. (2019), Malaysian secondary school students' understanding of grammar and their attitude towards explicitly learning grammar was enhanced by using digital grammar games. Similarly, (Zakaria et al., 2022) introduced card games as grammar teaching aids in a Malaysian university which increased students' learning and attributed to improved knowledge in retention of grammatical rules among low achievers. These results are similar to international research, but the focus is on the applicability of games in Malaysian classrooms. Besides these studies, (Fazil & Said, 2020) focused on the implementation of the 'TurTense mobile games application to increase learning performance among students in rural Malaysian schools and revealed that the participants' grammatical accuracy was increased in addition to revealing the positive effects on collaborative peer learning. This is in agreement with Din & Othman (2023) as games develop the spirit of teamwork among students in learning grammar effectively. In both studies, there is an emphasis on how gaming is useful in filling gaps in conventional teaching, especially in well-trained schools.

The Use of Board Games and its Advantages in Learning Grammar

According to Barbara (2017), board games are defined as games that have rules, a playing surface, and tokens that allow players to engage with one another while looking down at the playing surface. Board games create guidelines and frameworks for learning that also encourage the learners to be actively involved in the learning process as well as engage in teamwork. When applying the principles of grammar instruction, they use aspects of game design including rules, tasks, and rewards to encourage students to work with grammatical ideas (MENNI, 2020). Board games give the learners an opportunity, through simulation, to apply the rules of grammar in an environment that is not stressful. For instance, Rusli et al. (2022) used board games to teach verb tenses to students since it motivated the students to make the correct tense in a given sentence. Likewise, Ong et al. (2020) mentioned that primary school students in Malaysia benefited from the creation of a board game through an increased understanding of subject-verb agreement and prepositions. In addition, board games have the advantage of repetitiveness to reinforce previously taught grammatical concepts. In cognitive learning theories, the learners become familiar with the stimulus and through repeated exposure to linguistic input, various structures are stored in long-term memory (Ellis et al., 2019). Similar to playing board games, they are required to complete numerous exercises that are staged in a patterned manner to explain grammar rules interactively, for instance constructing a sentence or identifying an error. For instance, Ahmad et al. (2023) exposed tertiary learners to a grammar board game that resulted in the enhancement of the learners' knowledge about the different irregular verb forms. The study suggested that this was made possible by the repetitive but diverse task elements that are incorporated into the game, which kept students interested.

Methodology

In this study, the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) instructional design model was utilised as the primary guiding tool for designing a Watch Out for Language Flaws (WOLF) Digital Board Game for the improvement of students' English grammar skills. The study focused on 12 students from a primary school in Dungun, Terengganu, and Johor Bahru, who were selected through convenience sampling as they included students from the researchers' schools. To evaluate the impact of the WOLF Digital Board Game, the score difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was calculated through the mean difference to determine the extent of grammar knowledge the students gained during the lesson. In addition, a structured self-completed questionnaire comprising 10 items, developed by Metom et al. (2019), was used to solicit information on the students' perceptions after interacting with the game.

Analysis Phase

In the first phase of the ADDIE model, the planning or analysis phase comprises the identification of the skills that Year 4 students may find problematic in terms of grammar comprehension. Questionnaires and interviews with both teachers and students were conducted to describe the challenges experienced when teaching grammar. These insights from this analysis informed the subsequent Design phase of the study where the WOLF Digital Board Game intervention was developed. The main goal was to design an interesting and not-too-difficult game which ensures proper and fun grammar practice.

Design Phase

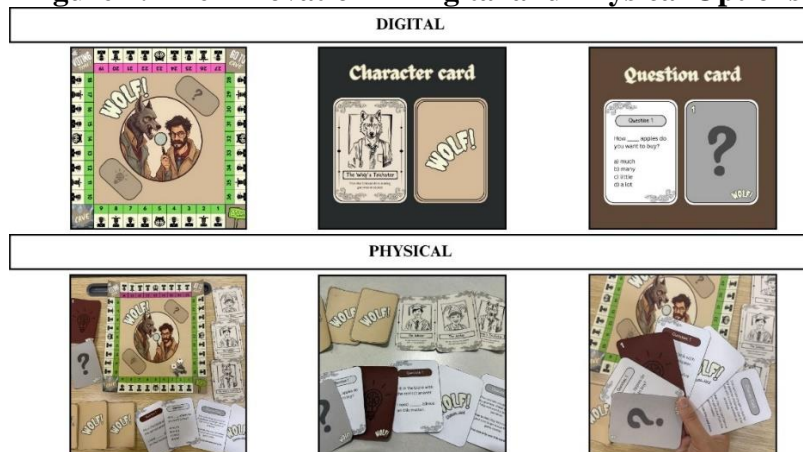
During the design phase, theories drawn from education were incorporated into creating the WOLF game. Some of the theories covered included Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1977), Behaviourism by Skinner (1953), Constructivism by Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1978), as well as principles from Game-Based Learning Theory. The learning theories that underpinned this approach focused on social interaction, participation, and cooperative learning as ways of promoting students' understanding of grammatical structures. The game structure was outlined, defining distinct roles for players: Scholars, who collaborated to answer questions correctly; the Wolf's Trickster, who attempted to mislead them; and The Jester, who interrupted the game. This structure fostered teamwork and critical thinking while also considering the fun aspect. Formative assessments were also developed before and after the game in the form of quizzes comprising the same questions as the game, to determine the increase in grammar mastery.

Development Phase

The development phase focused on the creation of the WOLF Digital Board Game. This included creating question cards corresponding to various elements of grammar, such as adjectives and simple past tense. There were 30 questions in the game: 20 basic questions and 10 higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) questions for students to answer. These contents were formulated according to the DSKP (Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran) and CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) standards suitable for Year 4 pupils. Such alignment ensured that the game ideas corresponded to curriculum objectives and benefited the students.

To enhance the aesthetic of the game, surveys were conducted with a senior lecturer in TESL and two senior English teachers from a primary school. These assessments provided important information on the accuracy of content and the teaching utility of materials. Based on the feedback received, necessary modifications were made to the game components before finalising them. Another component of the design process involved developing an additional content format in the form of a board game, which was designed using the appropriate software. The initial concepts were drawn with the help of Canva AI as a basis for further work on the visualisation of objects. These designs were further developed through hand drawing to produce new, unified artwork suited to the target age group.

Figure 1: The Innovation in Digital and Physical Options



Implementation Phase

The implementation phase targeted the adoption of the WOLF Digital Board Game in classroom contexts, particularly in ESL classrooms. Four to six pupils were grouped, and the gameplay began with the use of dice for movement around the board. Whenever they landed on a question space, they were presented with a question based on selected grammar topics. Players participated in group discussions, and each player presented strategies according to their roles. The discussions enabled them to verbalise their thoughts, helping them apply and reconstruct the grammar rules learned. Only one player answered on behalf of the team, and they took turns answering each question until they completed a round. Once a group committed to an answer, a voting session was conducted, during which a perceived Trickster could be eliminated from the group. Finally, the Scholars won if they successfully voted out all Tricksters. This voting process required critical thinking skills as players judged evidence against potential deception while simultaneously promoting communication skills.

Figure 2: The Implementation in ESL Classroom



Evaluation Phase

The final phase involved attempts to demonstrate the efficacy of the WOLF Digital Board Game for enhancing students' grammar proficiency. The data were collected from pre-test and post-test in the form of questions as those contained in the game. The mean scores between the pre-test and the post-test were used to measure the extent to which the board game could help students. For data collection involving gameplay sessions, a structured questionnaire with 10 items adapted from those used by Metom et al. (2019) was used to collect quantitative measures of students' perceptions of using the board game in class. This cyclic approach of ADDIE guaranteed constant updates due to student and expert feedback, which in turn improved the teaching of grammar to learners in primary school.

Results & Discussion

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the WOLF Digital Board Game by comparing the mean scores of pre and post-tests over four weeks of implementation. The results indicate significant improvements in grammar skills among the participants. For clarity and better comparison, the findings are presented separately for students in the researcher's primary school in Johor Bahru (Table 1) and another researcher's primary school in Dungun, Terengganu (Table 2). Table 1 and 2 present the scores and improved mean scores of the post-tests, while Table 3 illustrates participants' perceptions of the WOLF Digital Board Game following their gameplay experience. The marks displayed in Table 1 and 2 are based on a total score of 30.

Table 1: Pre & Post Test Result (Primary students in Johor Bahru, Johor)

Participant	Week 1 (<i>Adjective</i>)		Week 2 (<i>Past Tense</i>)		Week 3 (<i>Demonstrative Pronoun</i>)		Week 4 (<i>Uncountable/ Countable Noun</i>)	
	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>
1	14	19	9	18	15	23	13	24
2	18	25	14	23	16	27	15	21
3	20	28	20	29	21	30	19	29
4	13	21	16	22	24	30	19	25
5	17	25	12	21	23	29	17	26
6	9	17	6	15	15	23	11	19
Overall Mean Scores	15.2	22.5	12.8	21.3	19.0	27.0	15.7	24.0

Table 1.1: Improvement In Students' Scores (A Primary School In Johor Bahru, Johor)
Result

Week	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>
1	15.2	22.5
2	12.8	21.3
3	19.0	27.0
4	15.7	24.0

In a primary school in Johor Bahru, the implementation of the WOLF Digital Board Game demonstrated a significant improvement in students' grammar skills, as evidenced by the pre and post-test results. Initially, the average pre-test scores across four weeks were as follows: Week 1 (15.2), Week 2 (12.8), Week 3 (19.0), and Week 4 (15.7). After participating in the WOLF Digital Board Game activities, the post-test scores showed marked increases: Week 1 (22.5), Week 2 (21.3), Week 3 (27.0), and Week 4 (24.0). This indicates a positive progress in the students' comprehension of adjectives, past tense, demonstrative pronouns, and countable and uncountable nouns when playing the game.

Table 2: Pre & Post Test Result (A Primary School In Dungun, Terengganu)

Participant	Week 1 (<i>Adjective</i>)		Week 2 (<i>Past Tense</i>)		Week 3 (<i>Demonstrative Pronoun</i>)		Week 4 (<i>Uncountable/ Countable Noun</i>)	
	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>
1	9	25	10	18	4	17	7	16
2	6	23	5	20	9	16	10	20
3	10	23	11	25	14	20	10	20
4	12	17	10	18	8	15	6	26
5	9	25	12	21	9	19	8	23
6	9.7	22.2	8.8	20.2	8.3	17.5	8.2	21.5
Overall Mean Scores	15.2	22.5	12.8	21.3	19.0	27.0	15.7	24.0

Table 2.1: Improvement In Students' Scores (A Primary School In Dungun, Terengganu)

Week	Result	
	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>
1	9.7	22.2
2	8.8	20.2
3	8.3	17.5
4	8.2	21.5

Similarly, in a primary school in Dungun, Terengganu, the WOLF Digital Board Game also proved effective in enhancing the primary students' grammar skills. The pre-test mean scores were significantly lower than those in the researcher's primary school in Johor Bahru, with averages of Week 1 (9.7), Week 2 (8.8), Week 3 (8.3), and Week 4 (8.2). However, post-test results revealed substantial improvements: Week 1 (22.2), Week 2 (20.2), Week 3 (17.5), and Week 4 (21.5). Hence, given the fact that the performance of students in Dungun was relatively low at the beginning, it can be concluded that they achieved great improvement in their results in grammar after practising with the WOLF Digital Board Game, which proves its effectiveness in the context of different schools.

To answer the second research question regarding students' perceptions of the board game, a 10-item questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral,

Agree, Strongly Agree) was distributed to participants after playing the WOLF board game. The results are presented in Table 3 below. The participants' responses are combined from both schools in Johor Bahru and Dungun, Terengganu to provide a more comprehensive result.

Table 3: Participants' Perception of WOLF Digital Board Game

No.	Items	Strongly Disagree (n%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)
1.	I enjoyed playing the board game.	-	-	-	2 (16.7%)	10 (83.3%)
2.	The features of the board game are attractive and fun.	-	-	-	5 (41.7%)	7 (58.3%)
3.	I learn new things when I play board game.	-	-	-	6 (50%)	6 (50%)
4.	Question items are clear and can be easily understood.	-	-	1 (8.3%)	8 (66.7%)	3 (25%)
5.	Question items are challenging and are able to improve my language skills.	-	-	-	9 (75%)	3 (25%)
6.	The board game encourages me to sharpen my language skills.	-	-	-	8 (66.7%)	4 (33.3%)
7.	Using the board game is a fun and engaging way of learning English.	-	-	-	3 (25%)	9 (75%)

8.	The board game is a practical and meaningful way of learning English.	-	-	-	6 (50%)	6 (50%)
9.	I would recommend this board to my friends and family members.	-	-	-	4 (33.3%)	8 (66.7%)
10.	I will play the board game with my friends and family members in class or at home.	-	-	-	7 (58.3%)	5 (41.7%)

Table 3 presents the findings from a survey on participants' perceptions of the WOLF Digital Board Game for language learning. The results show that participants view the game positively as an aid in enhancing their English language skills. The majority reported enjoying the game, with all participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing (100%). Additionally, all participants found the game's features to be attractive and enjoyable (100%) and felt they learned new things while playing (100%). Most participants agreed that the question items were clear and easy to understand (91.7%) and believed the game's challenges effectively improved their language skills (100%). The game was also regarded as a fun, engaging, and practical tool for learning English, with all participants willing to recommend it or play it with friends and family (100%). Notably, there was no disagreement from any of the participants.

The WOLF Digital Board Game's effectiveness is rooted in several key factors: engagement, motivation, immediate feedback, social interaction, real-world application, and enjoyment. Firstly, the board game engages students actively in the learning process by transforming them from passive recipients of information into active participants. They must think critically and apply their grammar knowledge in real time. Such interactive experiences can significantly enhance student engagement (Kerrouzi, 2024). Moreover, the motivational aspect of game-based learning is critical; the competitive yet collaborative environment fostered by the WOLF Digital Board Game encourages students to strive for improvement. When students are motivated, they are more likely to invest effort in their learning (Filgona et al., 2020). The game also provides immediate feedback that allows players to receive instant responses to their answers during gameplay. This reinforcement helps correct misunderstandings promptly, which is crucial in language learning contexts (Kalleney et al., 2020). Additionally, the social interaction facilitated by the game enhances its effectiveness. Language acquisition is inherently social, and games provide opportunities for students to communicate and collaborate with peers, which can lead to improved grammatical proficiency (Kos, 2024). The WOLF

Digital Board Game also simulates real-world scenarios where grammar is applied in context. This practical application helps students understand how grammatical rules function outside the classroom and enhances retention and understanding (Turopova, 2024). Furthermore, participants reported high levels of enjoyment while playing the game; 100% indicated that they found it engaging and that its features were attractive (Table 3). Enjoyment is a powerful motivator for learning; when students find activities fun, they are more likely to engage deeply with the content (Oya et al., 2024). As such, participants' perceptions of the WOLF board game are overwhelmingly positive. This high level of agreement suggests that students recognize the game's educational value and appreciate its design. The willingness of participants to recommend the game further underscores its positive reception; when students express enthusiasm about sharing an educational tool with others, it indicates a strong endorsement of its effectiveness.

Conclusion & Recommendation

The findings concluded that the WOLF board game has significantly helped in improving students' proficiency levels by incorporating gamification concepts. It is a practical and validated innovation which is able to engage primary school students in acquiring necessary skills in learning English. The combination of fun and interactive learning through various challenges and activities in the board game contrasts from the traditional method of teaching grammar by drilling and memorising. The approach allows for teachers to modify their teaching instruction that can enable individualised support and students' collaboration besides enhancing their classroom management as the innovation requires students to be more focused and motivated. Students are also given the opportunity to learn effectively and enjoyably. This positively influenced learning environment encourages learners to contribute their utmost effort in learning and become more confident and proficient language learners.

Based on the findings, it is recommended for educators to ponder on utilising WOLF board games in the classroom, or other similar tools that incorporate the concept of gamification to enhance students' engagement. However, some limitations in this study which includes geographical, demographic and approach may impact the data obtained as the participant that has been selected only involved students from Terengganu and Johor. Hence, future research might potentially conduct a broader demographic that can include their socio-cultural and education background. Moreover, utilising a different research design or approach to investigate the same topic is highly encouraged to be studied as to offer a different understanding. This will directly provide extensive information that could yield greater useful data.

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