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TRANSLADDER: INTEGRATING GAME-BASED LEARNING INTO TRANSLATION CLASS

Ainul Adiba Saleh^{1*}, Haryati Ahmad², Sharifahtun Naim Shahidan³

¹Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Johor Branch, Segamat Campus, Malaysia

 ainuladiba@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6818-5363>

²Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Johor Branch, Segamat Campus, Malaysia

 harya365@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3514-4656>

³Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Johor Branch, Segamat Campus, Malaysia

 sharifahtun@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5413-765X>

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

In today's increasingly globalized world, translation studies play a significant role in training future translators to translate written documents. Their translation work would be one of the means to bridge the gaps in the knowledge, skills, and cultures among peoples of different nations and countries. However, most students of translation courses experience difficulties in understanding translation theories and procedures, and in applying them when translating materials for their coursework. The *Transladder: Translation Board Game* (henceforth referred to as *Transladder*) is an interactive educational tool developed to assist and motivate students in translation classrooms. Adapted from the *Political Fun Race* board game by Abdul Rahim et al. (2018), which was designed for students taking a political science course, *Transladder* aims to engage students in foundational translation theory and procedures through a game-based learning approach. Its primary objectives are to equip learners with the ability to explain general terms and concepts in translation studies, and to identify the translation procedures introduced by Vinay and Darbelnet, two prominent scholars in translation studies. A questionnaire was developed and distributed as an online survey through Microsoft Forms to students taking the BBM321: Introduction to Principles of Translation course for academic session I 2025/2026 (October 2025 - February 2026) at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Johor Branch, Segamat campus. This was to gain the students' perception of *Transladder* as an instructional tool for the course. The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents reported high levels of enjoyment, engagement, and perceived learning value from the game. Their recommendations of the game to peers

taking similar translation courses demonstrated a positive learning experience and engagement with the game.

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Introduction

Games have been used as instructional tools for a long time, with Dempsey et al. (1996) claiming they were used in China as early as 3000 B.C. They are used in many different educational fields spanning from business and healthcare to STEM and social sciences (Abdul Rahim et al., 2018; Buenadicha-Mateos, 2025; Damaševičius et al., 2023; Darmayanti et al., 2026). Some studies found that the use of games in the classrooms has resulted in increased student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Buenadicha-Mateos, 2025; Dempsey et al., 1996).

Some games like charades, Pictionary, twenty questions, and Taboo are very popular in language classrooms. They may be the precursors for newer and more structured language games that Dempsey's et. al. (1996) referred to as instructional games. These games include (but not limited to) the popular 'Two Truths and a Lie' that is focused on verb tenses and 'Grammuh: 2-in-1 Grammar Card Games' (Aziz, 2023). However, while translation games have grown into a significant genre (check out 'Chant of Sennaar' and '7 Days to End with You'), there is no translation game that focuses on Malay-English and English-Malay translation.

Transladder: Translation Board Game (henceforth referred to as *Transladder*) is a monopoly-snakes and ladders-inspired in-person game that was adapted from Abdul Rahim's et al. (2018) *Political Fun Race*. While their game was developed to help political science students to understand major concepts in their field, *Transladder* was developed to help translation students with general translation terms and concepts, as well as translation procedures introduced by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995). This study aimed to explore the students' perceptions towards *Transladder* as an instructional tool for translation courses and whether they would recommend the game to peers enrolled in similar translation courses.

Literature Review

Researchers have been studying how much students grasp the lesson after engaging in physical game-based learning (GBL). One of the previous local studies conducted by Abdul Rahim et al. (2018) has led to further research related to this topic with different subjects.

As stated by Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), learners exhibit greater engagement when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. Gameboards, featuring established rules and incentives (e.g., points, movement on a board), promote autonomy by enabling students to feel skilled through instant feedback (e.g., progressing on the board by successfully applying translation strategies and concepts). Khadraoui et al. (2024) emphasize SDT within gamification, mentioning that game features with organized rules, rewards (ladder), and punishments (snake) motivated students to compete for victory.

Likewise, Khadraoui et al. (2024) noted Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964), proposing that motivation hinges on the conviction that effort results in success and desirable rewards. Gameboards support this concept by providing measurable advancement (e.g., advancing pieces upon answering questions about translation theories and strategies), which makes learning seem attainable and gratifying. Sitzmann (2011), from Kim et. al (2017), has stated that game-based techniques are able to enhance self-efficacy by 20% and knowledge retention by 90%, indicating that gameboards might assist translation students in developing confidence in their language skills.

The Constructivism Theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that learning happens through collaboration, dialogue, and scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). For example, playing a board game helps students to succeed, with the help from peers and teachers. Teachers or peers may provide temporary support before they can play independently. During the learning game process, the observer or other players may scaffold by offering hints and clues to the player. From Vygotsky's lens, GBL encourages students to engage in the activity, build teamwork, and facilitate peer learning.

Gameboards, whether physical or in digital platforms where players progress through tasks or challenges, constitute a category of GBL that merges competition, collaboration, and defined advancement. In the study by Khadraoui et al. (2024), it is revealed that incorporating physical game elements (like game boards, dice, and counters) in the classroom is seen as interactive experience that can assist students in maintaining motivation and concentration. In contrast to comprehensive video games, gameboards are straightforward, affordable, and suitable for classroom environments. Nicholson (2015) describes gameboards as organized systems featuring rules, objectives, and feedback loops, which makes them perfect for translation courses where learners require distinct goals (e.g., precise translations) and prompt feedback (e.g., moving forward on the board).

Empirical data confirms the efficacy of gameboards in translation training. Research conducted by Klimova and Kacet (2017) indicated that language learning through games increased motivation by 40%. In translation, gameboards can make students focus on some particular skills like recognizing the appropriate translation theories and methods, by rewarding accurate selections. Moreover, gameboards address this issue by transforming learning into an enjoyable and low-pressure experience. Sitzmann (2011) found that learners using games demonstrated

11% greater conceptual understanding, indicating that gameboards might assist students in understanding intricate translation theories (such as equivalence or Skopos theory). Additionally, the competitive features of gameboards, such as leaderboards, engage students' social drives, promoting interaction among peers (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Gaps in the Literature

Although gamification has become increasingly popular in language learning, its application within translation pedagogy has received relatively little attention in GBL research. Notably, no educational games have yet been developed specifically to support Malay–English and English–Malay translation practice. This study fills that gap by introducing *Transladder*, illustrating how a purpose-built educational game can effectively facilitate bilingual translation skills. Overall, the research adds to the expanding evidence supporting the use of educational board games in higher education, highlighting their ability to boost motivation, engagement, and perceived learning gains when well-integrated with course objectives.

Methodology

Research Design

This study focused on the implementation of the *Transladder: Translation Board game* within the BBM321: Introduction to Principles of Translation classes at UiTM Johor Branch, Segamat campus for academic session I 2025/2026 (October 2025 - February 2026). This course introduces basic translation concepts and theories, and trains students to master the skills of translating general and specialized Malay-English and English-Malay texts. This Semester 3 course is a pre-requisite for the ELS254: Application of Translation Skills course in Semester 4.

As such, this study employed a single case study design as it only explored one bounded case (Coombs, 2022). As a research design, case study is extensively used in the fields of psychology, sociology, education, political science, medicine, and law (Merriam, 2009; Schoch, 2020; Yin, 2018; Zaidah, 2007). It is a useful approach to utilize when an in-depth understanding of an issue, event, or phenomenon in its natural real-life context is required (Crowe et. al, 2011, cited in Coombs, 2022). For this study, *Transladder* was the phenomenon explored as it introduced GBL in traditionally theory-heavy lectures of translation classes.

Transladder: The Translation Game Board

The game *Transladder: Translation Board Game* was developed based on the *Political Fun Race* game created by Abdul Rahim et al. (2018). The original game drew inspiration from a hybrid of Monopoly, and Snake and Ladders board game mechanics, with its primary focus on political science courses. The same gameplay has been adapted for *Transladder*, shifting the emphasis to the field of translation studies. The scarcity of existing board games designed specifically for translation education, especially focusing on Malay-English and English-Malay translation, served as the key motivation for developing *Transladder*.

The physical board game was also designed with the following learning objectives: to enable students to explain key general terms and concepts in translation studies, and to accurately identify and apply the translation procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995). These

procedures, a foundational model in translation theory, comprise seven techniques categorized into direct (literal) and oblique methods: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. By incorporating gameplay elements that require recognition and application of these procedures, Transladder facilitates active engagement with core theoretical content in translation studies.

Materials for the Game

To play the Transladder: Translation Board Game, there should be:

5 students (maximum number of players)

1 observer

1 game board

2 dices

Question cards

1 user's guide on game instructions

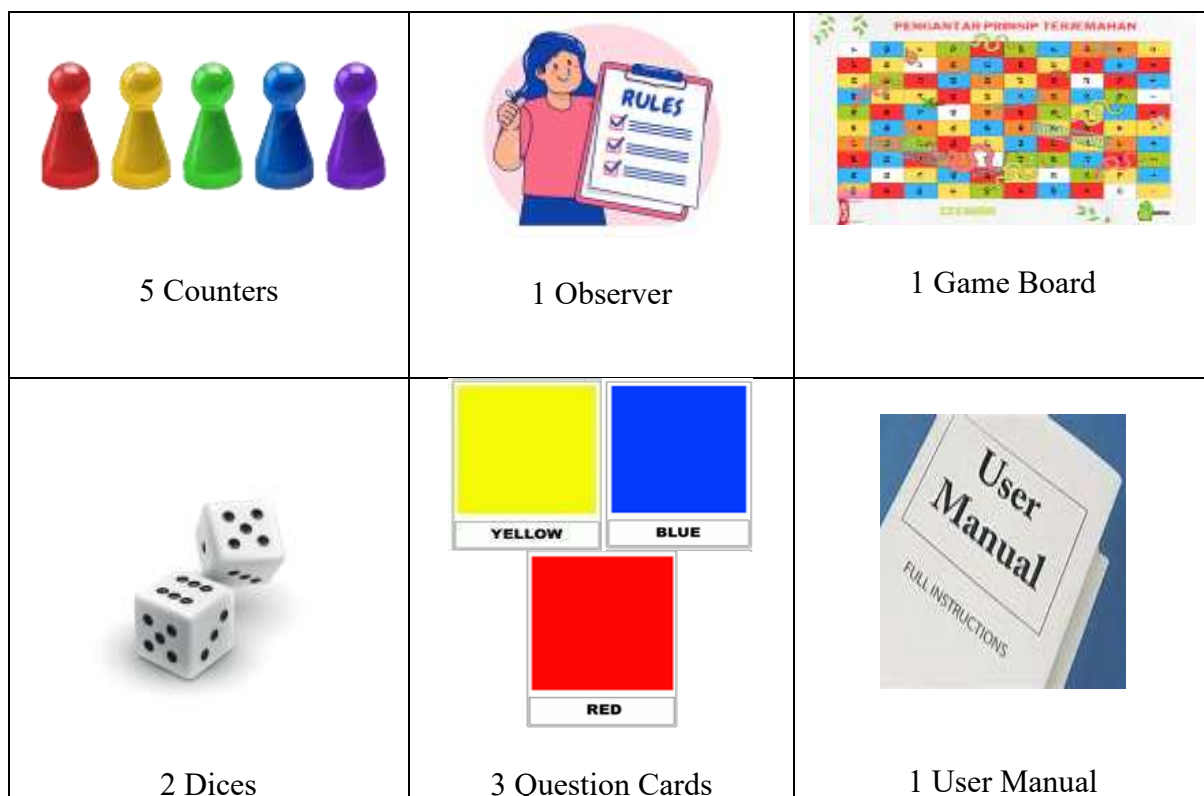


Figure 1: Materials of the ‘Transladder: Translation Board Game’

Game Applied

Performance:

Students will participate in *Transladder: Translation Board Game* and develop their knowledge through the correct and incorrect answers among themselves.

Conditions:

Students will be judged on their performance based on consecutive and successful correct answers.

Standards:

Students will be judged on their performance based on continually and successfully answering questions.

Repetitions:

The learning opportunities are created through question cards. Students will play the game to revise the previous lectures.



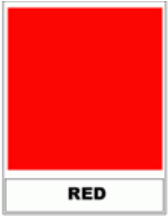
Colours of the Card	Level of Difficulty	Type of Questions
	Easy	Theories on Translation
	Medium	Direct Translation (Borrowing, Calque, Literal Translation)
	Difficult	Oblique Transposition (Modulation, Transposition, Equivalence, Adaptation)

Figure 2: Question Cards with Different Levels of Difficulty

Description of Game**Step 1**

1. Each player will put their counter on the space that says 'START'.
2. Each player will take turns to roll the dice to determine the turn: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th player. The player with the highest number on the dice will go first.
3. The first player will start playing by rolling the dice. The player will move their counter forward the number of spaces as shown on the dice.

Step 2

1. If the counter lands at any space with **LADDER (ORANGE SPACE)**, the player can move up to the top of the ladder.
2. If the counter lands at any space with **SNAKE (GREEN SPACE)**, the player must slide down to the bottom of the space given.
3. If the counter lands on coloured spaces (**RED, BLUE, or YELLOW**), the player needs to answer the questions based on the given question cards.
4. If the counter lands on the **WHITE** space, the player is allowed to skip their turn, and the player does not have to answer the question.

Step 3

1. The observer will read the question, and the player must answer the question within 60 seconds. The observer is also responsible for monitoring the time.

Step 4

1. If the answer given is **INCORRECT**, the player needs to move **TWO SPACES BACKWARD**. Meanwhile, if the answer is correct, the player will remain at their position until their next turn.

Step 5

1. If the counter lands on an existing player's space, the old counter needs to move **ONE SPACE BACKWARD**.
2. The winner is the player who gets to the **FINISH** line on the board first.

Application

In order to achieve the intended learning outcome as a game in seeking knowledge, below is the application of "Rules and Regulations" for the game to create an element of learning while educating the students.

Rules and Regulations

1. Students are allowed to refer to the notes from the class lecturer while playing the game.
2. The class lecturer may monitor students as the game progresses.
3. Respecting the other students:
 - a. All participants must respect the turn taken by other players when the other players obtain number six on the dice that enables them to roll the dice twice.
 - b. All participants must accept their loss if the answer is incorrect which will cause them to move two spaces backward.
 - c. All participants must accept their loss when another player lands in the counter space which has an existing player that will cause the latter to move one step backward.
 - d. The total number of participants will be six (6). Five (5) of the participants will be the players, while another participant (1) will be the observer. The observer is responsible for reading the instructions and question cards while acting as a timekeeper. All participants must listen carefully to the instructions.
 - e. The observer also determines the correct answer based on the answers provided on the question cards.

1. The first player to reach the last space first will be considered as a winner. If the number is too high, it will “bounce” off the last square and is required to move backwards. The player will only win if they get the exact number needed to land on the last square.
2. The player has to accept and continue playing while waiting for their turn to roll the dice.

Instrument

In order to glean the students' perception of this game application in the classroom, an online questionnaire was developed and hosted on Microsoft Forms, which was distributed after the learning experience. There are three sections in the questionnaire which are sections A, B and C. Section A consists of the questions related to the demography of the respondents such as gender and class. Section B consists of Likert-scale questions to collect the respondents' perceptions of *Transladder*. Section C consists of open-ended questions where the respondents can give their comments and recommendations regarding the game.

The internal consistency of the survey constructs was verified using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the reliability of the survey. The analysis yielded a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.890$. The value exceeds the 0.70 threshold recommended by Taber (2018), confirming that the instrument reliably measured the students' perception, and also as an indicator of good and acceptable internal consistency for educational research.

Procedure

The game was played in the classroom setting in Week 9, following the mid-semester break. Each class consisted of an average of 30 students, who were randomly assigned to six groups. Each group comprised five student players and one student assigned as the observer. Prior to commencement of the game, the lecturer provided detailed instructions and explanations of the *Transladder* game rules to ensure all participants understood the procedures. During the gameplay session, students played the board game in groups, requiring them to apply translation theories to progress.

The post-activity Microsoft Forms survey was administered and distributed via the class Telegram group following the session, immediately after the participants had completed the game. The students were required to click a direct link to the Microsoft Forms and submit the survey within the same week. Responses were collected digitally, ensuring anonymity and encouraging honest responses.

Data Analysis

In this study, descriptive analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel to analyse the quantitative data from sections A and B of the online questionnaire. Comments and recommendations given in section C were used to support the findings. Detailed presentations of the findings are provided in the results section.

Results

The total number of students of Diploma in English for Professional Communication taking the BBM321: Introduction to Principles of Translation course at UiTM Johor Branch, Segamat campus for October 2025 - February 2026 semester was 60. However, only 38 of them played

Transladder and completed the questionnaire. The others were absent when the game was conducted as they had to attend some university programmes. Eight (21.05%) of the respondents were males and 30 (78.9%) were females.

The results from sections B and C are presented below.

Table 1: The Respondents' Perception of The Game

NO	QUESTIONS	STRONGLY DISAGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	NEUTRAL (%)	AGREE (%)	STRONGLY AGREE (%)
1	<i>Transladder: Translation Board Game</i> is fun.	0	0	0	23.7	76.3
2	I enjoy playing the game.	0	0	0	31.6	68.4
3	The game is easy to understand, and the instructions are clear.	0	0	5.3	34.2	60.5
4	I am familiar with all the terminologies of translation used in the game.	0	0	10.8	46	43.2
5	This game is related to the course BBM321 (Introduction to Principles of Translation)	0	0	0	28.9	71.1
6	I am able to enhance the key concepts of translation through this game.	0	0	0	44.7	55.3
7	The game has the balance between fun and educational content.	0	0	0	27	73
8	I agree this game should be used during tutorial class as one of the methods for teaching and learning.	0	0	0	23.7	76.3
9	I would recommend this game to other students/institutions taking the translation subject.	0	0	0	26.3	73.7

Table 1 summarises the respondents' perceptions of the game. Questions 1 - 8 list eight statements to learn what the respondents think of *Transladder*, and question 9 seeks to find out if they would recommend the game to others taking similar translation courses. Some comments and recommendations that the respondents wrote in section C of the questionnaire are quoted to supplement the descriptive statistics tabulated in Table 1.

It was found that 76.3% of the respondents strongly agreed that *Transladder* is fun, while the remaining 23.7% of the respondents agreed with the statement. Four respondents (S5, S21, S25, S35) reported that the game is fun to play. For example, S5 commented that "*The board game method is a very good and fun way to learn this subject*" and S25 wrote that "*This game is really fun*".

68.4% respondents strongly agreed with the statement 'I enjoy playing the transladder game', while 31.6% respondents agreed with it. One respondent wrote that "*the game is enjoyable*".

For the statement 'The game is easy to understand, and the instructions are clear', 60.5% strongly agreed with the statement, while another 34.2% agreed with it. Only 5.3% of the respondents were neutral with the statement. S34 stated that "*the game is really helpful and easy to understand*".

Next, it is found that 43.2% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement 'I am familiar with all the terminologies of translation used in the game'. Meanwhile, 45.9% respondents agreed with the statement, and the remaining 10.8% respondents were neutral about it. None of the respondents wrote a comment in section C of the questionnaire that corresponded with the statement.

In addition, 71.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that 'This game is related to the course BBM321 (Introduction to Principles Translation)', while 28.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement. S25 stated that "*This game is really fun and it really helps the student to recall all the topics learned and please keep this game for future BBM students activities*".

From the statement 'I am able to enhance the key concepts of translation through this game', 55.3% responded with 'strongly agree', while the remaining 44.9% responded with 'agree'. This is supported by the comment from S18, "*Honestly, this game really enhanced my memory of the topics that I have learned and clearing my misconception towards the course,*" emphasizing that the player was able to enhance the key concepts of translation through this game.

Other than that, when being asked if 'The game has the balance between fun and educational content', 73% and 27% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed with the statement respectively. S29 mentioned that the game has the balance between fun and educational content, by saying "*Overall, the game was very effective because it's educational yet fun*".

For the statement of 'I agree this game should be used during tutorial class as one of the methods for teaching and learning', 76.3% and 23.7% of the respondents 'strongly agree' and 'agree' with the statement respectively. A comment from S9 reads, "*It is a good way to teach students about the subjects rather than the usual way. Using this way, students will become more engaged and have fun at the same time*".

Last but not least, 73.7% and 26.3% of the respondents responded with ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’, respectively, with the statement ‘I would recommend this game to other students/institutions taking the translation subject’. S25 mentioned in their comment that “*This game is really fun, and it really helps the student to recall all the topics learned and please keep this game for future BBM321 students’ activities*”.

Discussions

The overwhelmingly positive perceptions of *Transladder* can be interpreted through the lens of constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge actively through meaningful engagement, problem-solving, and social interaction rather than through passive information reception. Constructivist learning environments emphasise authentic tasks, learner autonomy, and contextualised challenges elements that are central to effective GBL design. Recent research indicates that educational games grounded in constructivist principles enhance learner engagement and conceptual understanding by situating learning within interactive and goal-oriented activities (Li & Zhang, 2025).

In the context of *Transladder*, constructivist principles are reflected in the game’s structured yet interactive mechanics, which require players to engage with translation terminology, make decisions, and solve problems collaboratively. Such a design aligns with studies showing that GBL environments characterised by clear objectives, transparent rules, and meaningful feedback promote deeper cognitive engagement and improved knowledge retention (Firdaus, 2021; Oliveira et al., 2023). By embedding translation concepts within the gameplay, *Transladder* also facilitates situated learning, enabling students to construct meaning through repeated exposure, practical application, and peer interaction which is shown to be effective in language and translation education (Yang et al., 2024; Zhou, 2021).

Constructivist GBL environments are also known to foster positive learner attitudes and motivation when students perceive games as both enjoyable and educationally meaningful. Active participation in gameplay encourages greater engagement and increases learners’ willingness to recommend such activities to others (Fedorcsak et al., 2025). The strong support for the continued use of *Transladder* in class therefore reflects findings from previous studies demonstrating that constructivist-aligned educational games can promote sustained engagement and participation in learning activities (Byusa et al., 2022; Chandrakant, 2023). These findings correspond with the results of the present study, which indicate that students perceived *Transladder* as an enjoyable, engaging, and effective tool for supporting translation learning during tutorial sessions.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. The study involved a specific cohort of students at UiTM Johor Branch, Segamat campus during a single academic semester, which may limit the generalisability of the results to translation students from other campuses or educational contexts. In addition, the study focused primarily on students’ perceptions and engagement when using *Transladder*, rather than examining the students’ long-term improvements in translation accuracy or competence. Therefore, future research should involve larger and more diverse samples and incorporate objective performance-based assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of GBL more comprehensively.

Conclusion

This study explored students' perceptions of *Transladder: The Translation Board Game* as a supplementary instructional tool in translation-related learning contexts. The findings reveal a consistently positive response, with students reporting high levels of enjoyment, engagement, and perceived learning value. These results indicate that the integration of a structured in-person educational board game can enhance learner engagement while supporting instructional goals in higher education.

The findings further suggest that *Transladder* supports the reinforcement of translation-related terminology and conceptual understanding through active and contextualised participation. Students perceived the game not merely as a recreational activity, but as a meaningful learning aid that complemented conventional teaching approaches. The interactive nature of the gameplay appears to promote cognitive engagement and conceptual clarity, highlighting the value of experiential and student-centred learning strategies in language education. In addition, the respondents' recommendation for the continued use of *Transladder* and the extension of its usage in similar translation courses reflects its potential to sustain learner motivation and encourage collaborative participation. Their willingness to recommend the game to their peers suggests that GBL tools can foster positive learning environments and active involvement in tutorial sessions.

Finally, despite the increasing use of gamification in language learning, translation pedagogy remains relatively underexplored within GBL research. In particular, there are currently no educational games specifically designed to support Malay–English and English–Malay translation practice. By introducing *Transladder*, this study addresses this gap and demonstrates how a translation-focused educational game can support bilingual translation learning. Future research should further examine the effectiveness of translation-based games across different contexts and learner proficiency levels. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research supporting educational board games in tertiary education and underscores their potential to enhance motivation, engagement, and perceived learning outcomes when aligned with course content.

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