

# Developing Grammar-Based Board Game ‘Grammar Gambit’ Using Addie Model

Muhammad Nasiruddin Aziz\*, Nurhafeza Mohd Akhir, Nasiha Nasrudin

Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, UiTM Shah Alam, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan

\*Corresponding Author

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## ABSTRACT

Though the world has moved past the pandemic, the much-needed recovery in some areas remains a challenge. One of which is the learning loss among students, evident in the recent academic performance. In the Malaysian context, this situation is particularly true for English language learners, as seen in the recent Malaysian Certificate of Education results. This is further exacerbated by students’ declining attention span and wavering motivation. In line with the United Nations Children’s Fund’s (UNICEF) emphasis on the need for interactive language learning methods to keep students engaged, this study therefore presents the development of a board game ‘Grammar Gambit’. The game is developed using the ADDIE model, consisting of five (5) different phases- analyse, design, develop, implement, and evaluate- guided by the review of relevant literature. The gamification of the grammar learning through the approach of a grammar-based board game means to tackle six (6) common grammar errors reported by scholars: (i) tenses, (ii) singular/plural nouns, (iii) articles, (iv) prepositions, (v) adjective/noun, and (vi) subject-verb agreement. Based on its development through the model, the board game is believed to be a promising way to keep students engaged and motivated. This development also sets out future endeavours for the full implementation of ‘Grammar Gambit’ to facilitate grammar learning. In the next stage, the board game is planned to be implemented with key persons and evaluated for its effectiveness through a summative approach.

**Keywords** – Grammar learning, ADDIE Model, board game, gamification, Malaysian learners

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past years, the average attention span of many people is argued to have alarmingly decreased due to constant digital stimulation (i.e., overflowing amount of presented information) made possible by technological advancements [1]. Due to this, many find themselves unable to stay focused. This, as reported by [1], has impacted society, especially the young people and their learning. This is because, as their attention span reduces, so does their ability to retain information. To make matters worse, this issue was further exacerbated when the world faced one of the most trying times, following the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Though most countries have managed to recover from this devastating chapter, its impact remains almost irreversible.

The long-standing issue of decreasing attention span among students was further heightened as educators reported a noticeable drop in student motivation [2], [3], [4]. As such, many students are finding themselves struggling to remain attentive, let alone being responsive in the classroom– this is the learning loss that the majority of students across the globe are currently experiencing. This lack of commitment as reported by [2] indicates the dwindling importance of education among the young people. As a result of this significant drop, student performance has been shown to indicate a similar decline.

To cope with this, a number of remedial solutions have been put forth by scholars: one of which is to veer away from the traditional methods of teaching [1], [2]. This includes the use of games [1], [4]. Generally, games have been argued to be a great way to tap into learners’ productivity and creativity [5]. Due to the fun and appealing

nature, games can then keep learners engaged and motivated to learn and this hence helps address the issues of declining attention span and motivation.

In the Malaysian context, one of the areas which is reported to deteriorate is English proficiency, evident in the results of the 2022 *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) or the Malaysian Certificate of Education [6]. Apart from secondary school students, a similar trend has been observed among university students. In [7], the Pro-Chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) pointed out that upon graduation, many lose employment opportunities due to their underwhelming communication skills, particularly on their mastery of the English language. These situations have since then left Malaysian educators worried and anxious. One much-discussed area in language proficiency is English grammar. Through a review of related literature on Malaysian students' mastery of English grammar, the present study has identified six (6) common errors namely (i) tenses, (ii) singular/plural, (iii) articles, (iv) prepositions, (v) adjective/noun, and (vi) subject-verb agreement. Further explanation on the review is presented in section on Phase 1: Analysis.

Therefore, to tackle the worrying decline in students' attention and motivation while also addressing the deteriorating proficiency of English language in Malaysia, the present study proposes the gamification of English grammar learning through the following objective:

- To develop a grammar-based board game to tackle the common grammatical errors by Malaysian students

As such, the gamification of the grammar-based board game 'Grammar Gambit' is in line with the United Nations Children's Fund or UNICEF's suggestion to include interactive teaching methods to keep students engaged in school [1], [4], [8].

### **Gamification and Its Application in Education**

Traditional teaching methods, as asserted by [9] are typically associated with (i) the role of teachers (as the primary source conditioning the learning environment and curriculum) and (ii) rote learning and memorisation through repetition. Gamification, on the other hand, is an innovative teaching method which centres around the idea of having a more dynamic and engaging learning environment. This includes learning through student collaboration (thus, less reliance on educators) and engaging context (indicating a spark contrast with the traditional practice of memorising). These unique features of gamification, according to [10] and [11], are achieved through applying game elements— competition, interactive narratives, rewards, and challenges to name a few, into non-game contexts to encourage engagement and motivation.

One approach to gamification is the use of board games, which has received much attention due to its engaging nature which makes learning more enjoyable and effective [12]. Not only that, board games are also the type that majority of students play [13], thus suggesting familiarity for seamless adoption for many learners. This explains why board games have seen considerable application in the context of learning, as educators continue to use them as a strategy to keep students motivated and engaged [12]. This includes the development of a Knowledge Management (KM) game prototype using board game design [13]. Developed using the ADDIE model, the prototype was tested through different methods including the researchers' own observation and questionnaire. The findings revealed the game to have a motivational effect on students' learning. Undertaking the same approach and use of the model, [14] for one, developed a game on cell division in Biology called BioXpedia Board Game (BXBG). Based on a questionnaire involving pre-service university teachers, the game was believed to be able to render high understanding among students, apart from being very user-friendly. [15], on contrary, used such model and game design to develop 'QR Code Silamon', in her scholarly attempt of instilling Pancasila values among students. Her approach was to put a twist to the traditional, tedious learning process. Based on students' responses through a questionnaire, the game was believed to have facilitated students' understanding.

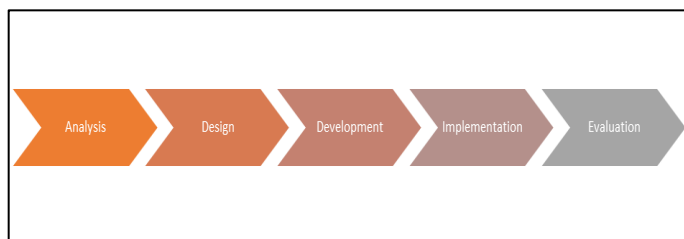
Upon reviewing the findings of these studies, the key takeaways are rather clear: (i) the motivational effects of board games, as an approach to gamifying learning and facilitating students' understanding and (ii) feasibility of the ADDIE model to guide game development (i.e., gamification process). Taking into account these

discoveries, the study therefore believes that the development of a board game to facilitate English grammar learning is a research avenue worth exploring. This idea is supported by scholars' assertion that gamification is a promising approach in the context of language learning [1], [4], [16].

### 'Grammar Gambit' As an Innovative Teaching Approach

To address the problems identified, the present study has employed the ADDIE model by [17] as it has been indicated to be the most preferred model upon developing any educational or training instruction, with a focus on enhancing learners' psychological and behavioural outcomes [18]. This concurs with the findings of the literature review by the present study (presented in the previous section). As depicted in Figure 1 below, the ADDIE model consists of five different components- (i) Analysis, (ii) Design, (iii) Development, (iv) Implementation, and (v) Evaluation [19].

Fig. 1 ADDIE model and its components



The application of the model is to address the objective of the present study to develop a grammar-based game 'Grammar Gambit' to tackle the common grammatical errors by Malaysian students. The intended users of the board game are Malaysian students. The uniqueness of this board game lies in its fun and engaging nature which traditional teaching methods often lack. The following sections describe how the components of the ADDIE model are used to guide the development of the board game 'Grammar Gambit'.

#### Phase 1: Analysis

As elaborated in the previous section, the development of the board game 'Grammar Gambit' begins with the analysis phase. According to [20], this phase sets out the goal of the intended product as it identifies relevant problems so they can be met. Prompted by (i) the decline in students' academic performance for English language in the 2022 SPM and (ii) the underwhelming mastery of English language among Malaysian university students, the present study therefore has conducted a review of related literature. This was to find out the areas of English grammar in which students commonly struggle. The review included the studies by [21], [22], and [23].

Over 15 years ago, [21] in their research work, investigated the common errors committed by secondary school students in their academic essays. They found singular and plural forms, verb tenses, word choice, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and word order to be areas in which the many students struggled. Reference [21] subsequently suggested that these findings are considered upon preparing effective teaching materials (this is exactly what the present study has done, through the development of 'Grammar Gambit'). Few years later, [22] conducted a similar investigation with a different group of participants- university students. Interestingly, he found that errors related to articles, subject-verb agreement, and tenses were frequently present in the students' essays. This suggests that the areas in which students generally struggle remain similar, despite being in different groups. In the study, [22] also observed other areas in which students commonly struggled, namely (i) the use of articles, (ii) the use of adjectives and nouns, and (iii) the use of singular and plural nouns. Recently, two of the errors found by [21] and [22]- namely (i) the use of singular and plural nouns and (ii) observance of subject-verb agreement, were also reported by [23] through the analysis of diploma students' academic compositions.

Drawing from these findings, the present study then compares the areas of students' grammatical errors, in order to identify the problems. This is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table I Past Studies On Malaysian Students' Common Grammatical Errors

No	Scholar(s)	Findings
1.	Darus and Subramaniam (2009)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Incorrect use of singular/plural nouns</li> <li>2. Incorrect verb tense</li> <li>3. Incorrect use of prepositions</li> <li>4. Incorrect subject-verb agreement</li> <li>5. Incorrect word choices</li> <li>6. Incorrect sentence constructions</li> </ol>
2.	Tse and Yau (2014)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Incorrect use of singular/plural nouns</li> <li>2. Incorrect use of articles</li> <li>3. Incorrect use of prepositions</li> <li>4. Incorrect use of adjectives/nouns</li> <li>5. Incorrect subject-verb agreement</li> <li>6. Incorrect verb tense</li> </ol>
3.	Nasrudin et al. (2023)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Incorrect use of singular/plural nouns</li> <li>2. Incorrect subject-verb agreement</li> </ol>

In total, there are 8 areas in which students' errors are common. However, incorrect word choices and incorrect sentence construction (reported by [21]) are excluded as the respective errors are errors related to semantic and syntax, not grammatical items. Therefore, the review then sets out the six (6) common grammatical errors committed by Malaysian students- (i) tenses, (ii) singular/plural nouns, (iii) articles, (iv) prepositions, (v) adjective/noun, and (vi) subject-verb agreement.

## Phase 2: Design

- 1) *Learning Objectives*: Based on the analysis of the literature, the study then undertakes the design stage by first defining the learning objectives, one of the design activities as indicated by [19]. This is to ensure that the problems can be effectively met by the board game upon its implementation with the intended users (i.e., Malaysian students). According to the researchers, defining objectives helps to identify what to be included in an instruction apart from allowing users' learning to be measured and most importantly accomplished. Ultimately, this activity underlines the whole purpose of why an instruction (or board game, in the context of the present study) is developed.

Thus, 'Grammar Gambit' outlines the following learning objectives, in an attempt to address the findings on the common grammatical errors committed by Malaysian users:

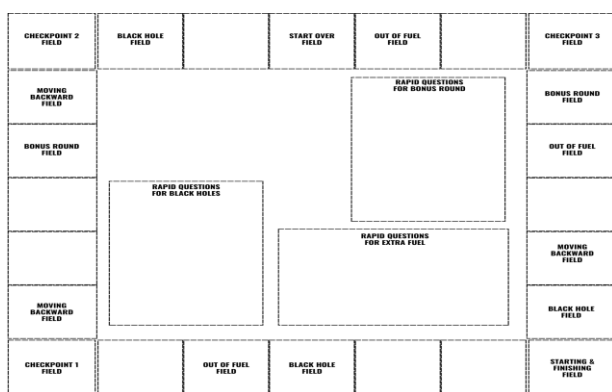
1. To use singular and plural nouns appropriately
2. To use articles appropriately
3. To use prepositions appropriately

4. To observe subject-verb agreement appropriately
5. To employ verb tense appropriately
6. To use the adjectives and nouns appropriately

One type of the learning objectives, as suggested by [19] is behavioural objectives which requires intended users to demonstrate their mastery of the related knowledge and skills. In the context of the board game, the learners are expected to apply their grammar knowledge on the grammar items extracted from the literature.

- 2) *Game Design*: Following the learning objectives, the present study then formulates the elements of the game design, which is another important activity in the phase. As depicted in the game design plan in Figure 2, the board game contains one start field, one finish field, three checkpoint fields, and five event fields.

Fig. 2 Game design plan



There are five (5) different event fields in the board game, each representing dissimilar game elements. The inclusion of these fields is due to their importance in stimulating the gaming effect, as argued by [13]. Table 2 below presents and explains the fields according to their types and effects in the board game.

Table II Self-Illustrated Table on the Event Fields

Field	Type of Element	Explanation
Black hole	Punishment	Players are to answer a question correctly to roll the dice in the next round
Out of fuel	Punishment	Players are not allowed to roll the dice in the round. They have to answer a question correctly in the following turn.
Moving backward	Punishment	Players are to move backward accordingly.
Start over	Punishment	Players are to return to the start field
Bonus round	Reward	Players are to answer a question correctly in order to get another chance of rolling the dice in the same turn, allowing them to move twice within the turn.

Three (3) of these fields require learners to answer a question which is specifically colour coded to represent either one of the grammar items (further explanation is presented in the development phase). The questions are based on a 1,000-word cloze passage titled “*Melor’s Space Voyage on Kembara*”. The passage has been generated via GPT 4o version of the ChatGPT using the following prompt:

*“Write an essay of about 1,000 words long about the space exploration of a Malaysian female astronaut, named Melor, and her spaceship named Kembara”*

The use is due to the AI chatbot’s strength as a teaching learning support which, according to [24], includes its use upon developing course materials. The final version of the passage was generated following a series of carefully written prompts to ensure the effectiveness of passage. This is to overcome ChatGPT’s drawback- the need for users to critically and effectively plan their interaction with the AI chatbot, in order to obtain their desired output [24].

To produce the cloze passage, the present study then deletes a number of words in the generated passage (according to the grammar items identified earlier) in a random manner. In total, there are 30 deleted words or blanks (as shown in Figure 7 on the cloze passage). Each sentence containing the missing word or blank is then extracted to become an individual question. The blanks are based on Malaysian students’ common grammatical errors, addressed by the learning objectives of the board game.

The following example is a question from the generated passage, which tests learners’ ability to correctly observe subject-verb agreement.

QUESTION 2		
When MYSA announced a program to select the first Malaysian female astronaut, Melor knew this _____ her chance.		
A.	was	
B.	were	
C.	is	

As shown in the example, there is one missing word or blank in the stem (i.e., the question) and learners are presented with three (3) options, one of which is the key which completes the sentence.

Other game elements and preparation of ‘Grammar Gambit’ are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table III Self-Illustrated Table Of The Game Elements And Preparation

Type	Remark
Game elements	1 game board 1 game instruction 1 start field 1 finish field 4 punishment fields- black hole, out of fuel, moving backward, and start over field 1 reward field- bonus round field
Game preparation	1 game master (i.e., class instructor) 4 - 16 players (students) 1 dice 4 -16 player piece in different colours

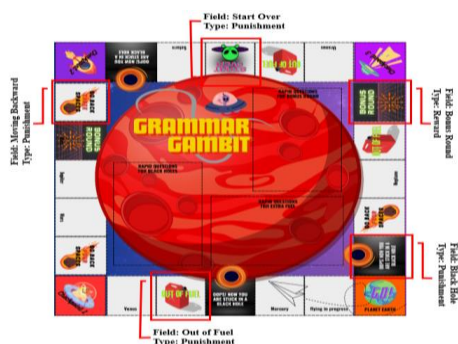
	1 call bell
	1 yes buzzer
	1 no buzzer

### Phase 3: Development

Based on the elements of the game design, the present study then undertakes the third phase of the ADDIE model- development. This phase is generally done using Canva, an online design and visual communication platform. According to [25], one of the responsibilities of today's educators is to ensure that learning materials are communicated in the most effective way. This can be done through appealing designs in order to spark student motivation, hence participation. The use of state-of-the-art platforms, as argued by the scholars, accordingly address the current technological growth. Therefore, the use of Canva in the third phase of the present study is in line with [25]'s recommendations.

The first design element developed using Canva is the game board. As stated in the previous section, the cloze passage, from which the questions are formulated, is based on an AI-generated fictional story of Melor, the first Malaysian female astronaut, who went to space with her spaceship Kembara. The theme is carried forward upon developing the game board and its related components. This is shown in Figure 3 below.

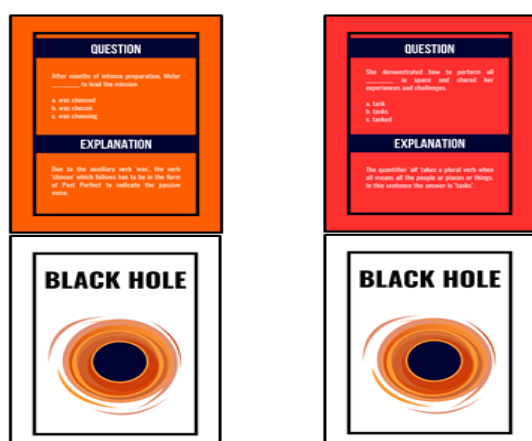
Fig. 3 Game board



As seen in Figure 3, the five fields are indicated using different labels and designs. Of the fields, three- (i) Out of Fuel, (ii) Bonus Round, and (iii) Black Hole field, require students to complete the deleted words or blanks in the cloze passage.

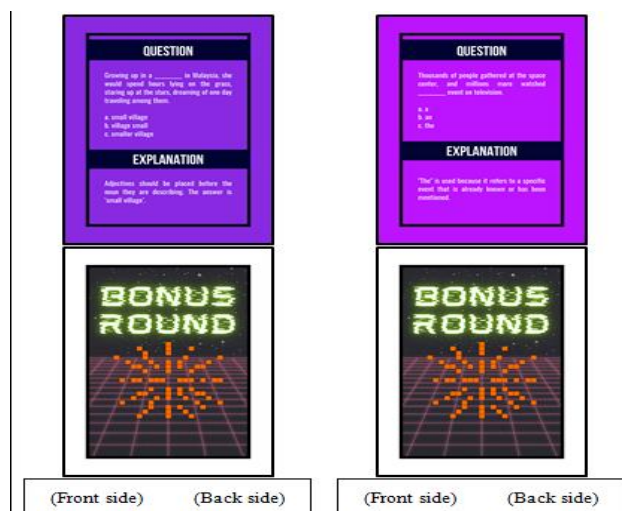
Each of the fields is colour coded to represent different grammar items (hence different learning objective that students ought to fulfil). This feature incorporates the aspect of appealing game mechanics- clear goals, as suggested by [13]. The aspect involves presenting clearly formulated objectives for learners to achieve.

Fig. 4 Black Hole field



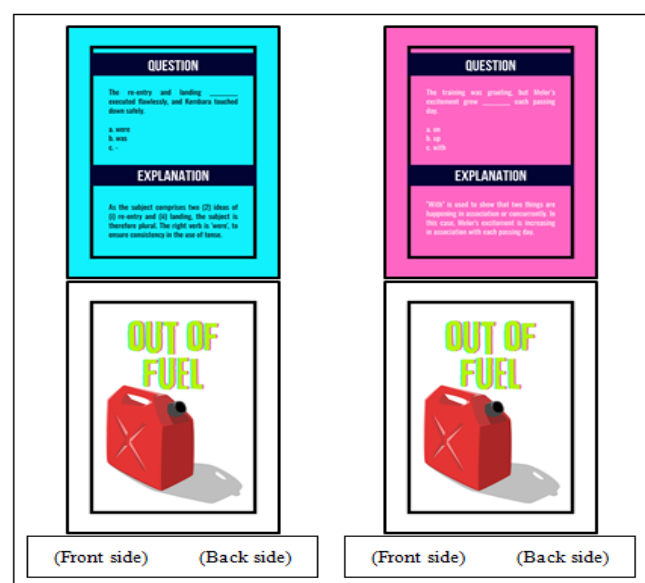
As seen in the figure above, the Black Hole field is indicated in two (2) different colours. The question card in orange tests on the use of tense (i.e., the fifth learning objective of ‘Grammar Gambit’). Whereas the cards in red are to test students’ grammar knowledge of singular and plural nouns (the first learning objective).

Fig. 5 Bonus Round field



The Bonus Round field on the other hand involves cards in violet (to test on the use of articles, as indicated in the second learning objective) and indigo (to test students’ use of adjectives and nouns, as indicated in the sixth learning objective). This is reflected in Figure 5 above.

Fig. 6 Out of Fuel field



Whereas the last field, Out of Fuel, is indicated in blue to test students’ observance of subject-verb-agreement (indicated in the fourth learning objective). Cards of this field type are also indicated in pink, to test students’ use of prepositions (the third learning objective). Figure 6 shows the Out of Fuel cards.

In the gameplay of ‘Grammar Gambit’, the question cards are placed face down on the game board. The cards test the six grammar items (represented in different colours): each item is tested using five different question cards. Altogether, there are 30 question cards and they are shuffled before the game starts. This allows the students to be tested on different grammar items every time the question cards are drawn. Apart from the different colour codes, its immediate reinforcement is another interesting feature of the game. To illustrate, in cases where students or players mistakenly answer a question, the game master (i.e., the class instructor) is to instantly provide feedback (by pressing the buzzer) and explanation (provided in the question card). This does not only create a fun and engaging learning environment but also allows students to collaboratively discuss and learn

together, as they play the game. The feature of immediate reinforcement reflects the aspects of (i) community collaboration and (ii) feedback from the game mechanics from [13].

The other game elements, namely the cloze passage and instruction, are respectively shown in Figure 7 and 8 below.

Fig. 7 Cloze passage



Fig. 8 Game instructions

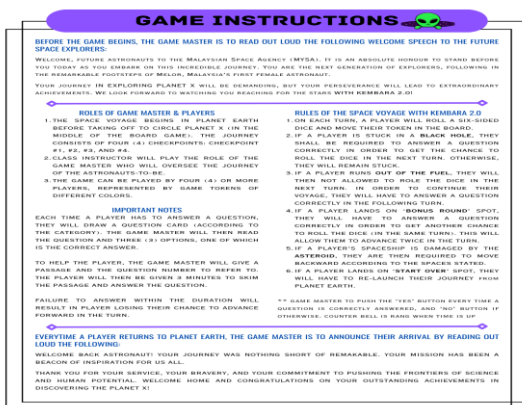


Figure 9 is the complete presentation of 'Grammar Gambit' elements, developed using Canva.

Fig. 9 Grammar Gambit



## Phase 4: Implementation

Following the development of the game elements, the present study then undertakes the fourth phase in the ADDIE model, known as implementation. According to [19], this phase requires the involvement of key individuals to ensure a smooth rollout of an instruction (of the board game, in the case of the present study).

To implement ‘Grammar Gambit’, four English lecturers from a local university were recruited in a preliminary playtest. This process was to spot any flaw in the design and mechanics of the board game. This is shown in Figure 10 below.

Fig. 10 Preliminary playtest with lecturers



The feedback from playtest is elaborated in the fifth and final phase of the game development.

### Phase 5: Evaluation

According to [19], the phase of evaluation comprises two types of evaluation namely formative and summative. While formative evaluation involves testing a draft or prototype of an instruction, summative evaluation is implemented to evaluate the final draft.

In the case of the present study, formative evaluation is conducted in two phases: (i) testimonials from English lecturers in the preliminary playtest and (ii) presentation of the prototype at a national innovation and invention competition.

In the preliminary playtest, the lecturers involved shared their testimonials on the game mechanics and elements. Their feedback on the game preparation includes:

- the role of class instructor as the game master;
- the need for a clear game instruction; and
- the incorporation of other elements such as the use of buzzers and countdown to make the game more engaging

The feedback is then compared against the game mechanics suggested by [13], before eventually being incorporated in the game elements and preparation. These features will be further tested in the Phase 1 of ‘Grammar Gambit’ full implementation.

Apart from the evaluation by lecturers, the ‘Grammar Gambit’ prototype was presented at the 5th Language Invention, Innovation, and Design Exposition (LIID) 2024 in Johor Bahru, Malaysia in order to get experts’ feedback and suggestions. The prototype received the Silver Award and promising feedback from the jury members. The comments from the jury members were to conduct further evaluation with the intended users (i.e., the students) to improve the overall quality and performance of the board game.

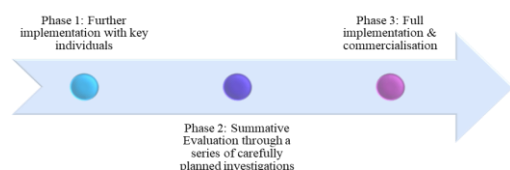
### Way Forward To Implement ‘Grammar Gambit’

To arrive at an actual implementation of the board game ‘Grammar Gambit’, the present study outlines three (3) different phases. After the development of the board game through the ADDIE model, the study plans to conduct further implementations with key individuals (through Phase 1). This includes conducting further playtesting with both lecturers and students. While lecturers’ feedback is expected to improve the learning aspect of the

game, comments from students (as the intended users of the board game) are to ensure that the game elements and mechanics are not just logical but also effectively engaging and appealing. After a few rounds of the implementation, the study will conduct a summative evaluation of the final version of ‘Grammar Gambit’ (Phase 2). This will be done via a series of carefully planned investigations with a variety of research methods. Simply put, Phase 1 and 2 in ‘Grammar Gambit’ implementation are the evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the board game.

Findings from these investigations will then be incorporated before the study finally undertakes Phase 3- full implementation of the board game in the classroom and commercialisation of the game as an innovative teaching approach to teach English grammar.

Fig. 11 Phases of ‘Grammar Gambit’ implementation



## CONCLUSIONS

It is needed to highlight that in recent years, the field of education has seen a paradigm shift, with digital technology playing an increasingly central role in shaping how learning is delivered and experienced [26]. It must be acknowledged that change is inevitable. Language educators sometimes not only face the challenge of new technologies in learning but also to embrace the fact that students are now resourceful and adaptive [27]. Instead of perceiving AI as a threat, it is better to incorporate AI in educational settings, emphasising its capacity to improve the quality of teaching and learning process [28]. This is why the development of ‘Grammar Gambit’ involves both ChatGPT and Canva in its creation. The researchers refine and tailor the content using ideas from both platforms to meet learners' needs and enhance the design.

Learning English grammar in the form of a board game may take away this dullness, but instead offers a non-threatening and useful activity for language learning [29]. ‘Grammar Gambit’ presents an alternative approach to teaching grammar with reduced preparation and time requirements, moving away from the traditional chalk-and-board method that might diminish learners' positive engagement and, ultimately, their motivation to learn the intricacies of grammar. The game addresses six common grammatical errors among Malaysian users: (i) singular and plural nouns, (ii) articles, (iii) prepositions, (iv) subject-verb agreement, (v) verb tense, and (iv) adjectives. Since grammar learning is often seen as dull and demotivating [29], addressing these six errors through a game is encouraged, as it allows the learning process to unfold in a deliberately fun environment.

‘Grammar Gambit’ is a well-designed language game that requires minimal supervision from educators and can be played in an enjoyable setting while providing meaningful context for English grammar learning, motivating learners to engage in the process. Since grammar is best taught in context, the game includes the main story of Melor embarking on a space exploration. It incorporates gamification elements like rewards, penalties, and end goals, encouraging teamwork and communication skills when played in groups. The game also has the potential to be commercialised as a teaching tool for language learners of all ages, not just those studying English courses. It is suitable for anyone looking to improve their grammar skills.

The adoption of innovative methods like ‘Grammar Gambit’ offers a promising path for modern education, adding diversity and creativity to teaching approaches rather than solely relying on digital stimulation and technological advancements. By incorporating these tools, it is hoped that engaging and effective learning experiences can be crafted not only to tackle common language learning challenges but also inspire and motivate students to actively engage in their educational journey.

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