Board Games as Alternative Method of English Language Teaching in Taiwanese Studies

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Abstract
Traditional approaches to English language learning, which focused on grammar rules, vocabulary memorization, and rote learning, must be replaced with innovative methods of teaching. This study explored the integration of board games as an alternative English language teaching method. By making use of mixed method research design, the study investigated the use of board games in English teaching. The data comprised 85 academic papers, theses and dissertations retrieved from the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation in Taiwan. The selection criteria included publication year, department, research methods, study variables, types of board games utilized, focal points in English instruction, and target subjects. While the quantitative findings focused on statistics in terms of number of research methods, research subjects, research variables, and types of board games utilized, the qualitative analysis dealt with learning trends, learners' motivation, learning outcomes, and board game content design. The findings revealed that board games not only fostered face-to-face interaction, but also contributed to an enjoyable learning environment. Board games emerged as versatile tools applicable across various subjects. It was also found that the integration of board games enhanced both learning effectiveness and enjoyment; it facilitated aligning board games with specific teaching goals. The study emphasizes the need for tailoring board games to specific teaching objectives, providing practical recommendations for educators and institutions. The integration of board games into English teaching would also boost students' motivation, strengthen their language acquisition efforts, and contribute valuable insights to the evolving landscape of English language teaching.

Keywords: Board Games, English Teaching, Board Games-Assisted English Teaching, Theses, Dissertations.

Introduction

With the present era rapidly moving towards a global village, the emphasis on English learning has intensified worldwide. All governments and citizens across the world have recognized English as the lingua franca of international communication, making proficiency in the language nearly indispensable. Moreover, as globalization connects cultures and economies, English proficiency is much required for cross-border collaboration, trade, and cultural exchange. In response to these global trends, educational systems and

institutions across the world have prioritized English language learning from early childhood. The recognition of English as an international language has underscored its importance for students' future academic and professional endeavors. In 2018, the Executive Yuan (2018) proposed the *2030 Bilingual National Policy Development Blueprint*, with the goals of "enhancing national competitiveness" and "cultivating the English proficiency of citizens" (p. 3). The aim was to elevate the English skills of the populace in order to increase international competitiveness.

Traditional approaches to English language learning, which focused on grammar rules, vocabulary memorization, and rote learning, often struggled to engage students effectively. As a result, educators and researchers sought innovative methods to enhance language acquisition and fluency. One such method that gained traction was the integration of board games into English language instruction. A lot of attention has been given to the board games as a teaching method, for its potential to enhance students' interest, motivation, and learning outcomes (Chao & Fan, 2020); and providing an enjoyable learning environment (Zulkefli & Mohd Juned, 2023). In tandem with these developments, educators and researchers have also recognized the challenges of developing effective educational board games. Issues such as question selection, design expertise, and game mechanics require careful consideration to create engaging and educational experiences for learners. Given the global demand for English proficiency and the evolving landscape of language education, innovative approaches such as incorporating board games into language instruction offer promising possibilities for enhancing students' language skills and reducing communication apprehension.

In Taiwanese theses and dissertations, research gaps exist regarding the use of board games in English teaching. Firstly, the studies have ignored cultural adaptability in their researches, and did not explore how board games could be adapted culturally among Taiwanese students and how adjustments could be made based on local cultural characteristics. Despite the widespread acknowledgment of board games in English teaching, their application within Taiwanese culture is presented in a very limited fashion. Secondly, most studies focused on short-term impacts (Łodzikowski & Jekiel, 2019), there was a lack of evaluation of long-term teaching effects. No studies were carried out on tracking long-term teaching effects and concentrating on how board games could sustain students' English proficiency and learning motivation. Thirdly, not much attention has been paid on technical and methodological challenges in using board games for English teaching. There is a dearth of research on the impact of teacher training programs on enhancing teachers' effectiveness and confidence.

There is a dire need to address these research gaps to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of using board games in English teaching in Taiwan, and offering targeted recommendations for educational practices. This research, therefore, aimed to compile and analyze thesis studies from the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation in Taiwan to focus on the use of board games in English instruction. The objective was to statistically analyze and compare the results of these studies in order to identify the principles and key success factors for integrating board games into English teaching. Specifically, the study framed the following research objectives:

1. To assess the current status of research regarding the integration of board games into English instruction.
2. To examine the research findings associated with the integration of board games into English instruction.
3. To investigate the historical development and emerging trends in research related to the incorporation of board games into English teaching.

In light of the abovementioned research objectives, the authors formulated the following research questions to investigate the current state of research on the integration of board games into English instruction:

1. What is the distribution of research periods in studies involving the integration of board games into English instruction?
2. Where do researchers studying the integration of board games into English instruction typically come from in terms of academic departments?
3. What are the main focuses and prevalence of research methods employed in the integration of board games into English instruction?
4. What are the primary focuses and prevalence of research variables investigated in the integration of board games into English instruction?
5. What are the main focuses and prevalence of the types of board games utilized in the integration of board games into English instruction?
6. What are the primary focuses and prevalence of English teaching topics explored in the integration of board games into English instruction?
7. What are the main focuses and prevalence of research subjects examined in the integration of board games into English instruction?

Literature Review

The history of Board games such as "Senet" date back to nearly 5000 years, which highlights the enduring appeal of traditional gaming. In the modern era, technology has revolutionized education, reshaping teaching methods into learner-centered activities and enhancing language learning through various tools. Gamification, applying game mechanics to education, creates engaging learning environments and fosters positive attitudes. The prestigious German Game of the Year award, established in 1979, evaluates originality, entertainment value, educational aspects, and component quality. Games provide a competitive platform for immersive learning experiences (Castillo-Cuesta, 2020). Furthermore, the findings of Sousa et al. (2023) support the role of simulation games in education, emphasizing their interdisciplinary nature and potential in promoting various skills, particularly soft skills. Conversely, Yang, Li, & Zhou (2024) found positive effects of game-based language learning in K-12 education, highlighting the adoption of theoretical frameworks and instructional strategies. Both studies underscore the importance of further research in leveraging gaming technologies for educational purposes while addressing associated limitations.

Board games are intellectually stimulating and hands-on games suitable for teaching across various age groups and subject areas (Treher, 2011). There is a substantial body of research both domestically and internationally on the use of board games in education. Schaefer & Reid (1986) found that board games assist children and adolescents in developing socialization and self-identity. Bartfay & Bartfay (1994) successfully used board games to teach sixth-grade students preventive health knowledge related to heart disease and cancer. Caldwell (1998) integrated board games into math curricula, aiding students in enhancing mathematical computation skills and problem-solving strategies. Kiyosaki & Parta (2000) designed accounting-themed cash flow teaching games for elementary school children, helping them learn financial and accounting concepts. Ogershok & Cottrell (2004) applied board games in pediatric medical education. Siegler & Ramani (2008) demonstrated that board games, in just one hour of play, effectively improved numerical recognition, ordering, arithmetic, and numerical comparison skills among socioeconomically disadvantaged preschoolers. Cavanagh's (2008) research confirmed that the use of board games was beneficial for strengthening children's mathematical abilities, particularly for those who performed poorly in mathematics. Furthermore, card games have been shown to facilitate math problem-solving skills in students without their awareness (Crews, 2011).

Chao & Fan (2020) have demonstrated the potential of board games to increase students' interest, motivation, and learning outcomes. These games provided immersive and interactive experiences that fostered language acquisition in a relaxed and enjoyable environment. In a related study, Zulkefli & Mohd Juned (2023) have discussed challenges in developing educational board games, including question selection, lack of design experience, and color choices. They aimed to create games fostering English learning, teamwork, and enjoyable environments, emphasizing long-term language proficiency benefits for global communication and career opportunities.

Researchers have found that board games can effectively achieve specific teaching objectives, with the help of word-building board games such as "Scrabble," which effectively enhance vocabulary acquisition by challenging students to form words from a set of letters (Sari, Ismiyati, & Munawwaroh, 2023). Through repeated exposure and engagement with vocabulary words, students can improve their word recognition and retention. Hidayatullah & Haerazi (2021) indicated that using full English and board games in speaking classes benefited students in imitating the target language's expression. They could enhance their speaking skills through pair exercises and group discussions. Board games sparked students' motivation and interest, leading them to actively engage in speaking practice. Teachers also employed various communication strategies, including speaking games, to enhance students' grammar proficiency. Therefore, the use of board games in speaking classes facilitated the creation of a collaborative learning environment, enhancing students' oral proficiency and phonological awareness.

Additionally, Wong & Yunus (2021) conducted a literature review investigating students' perceptions of board games and the efficacy of board games in enhancing speaking skills. The findings indicated that students enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere of board games, which encouraged them to speak English without fear of making mistakes. Board games also enhanced students' social interactions and improved their pronunciation, fluency, and grammar. The research suggested that board games were effective tools for improving speaking skills, and educators should incorporate them into teaching to cultivate student interest and enhance speaking proficiency. By assuming different roles and engaging in dialogue within the game's framework, students can develop their oral communication skills and active listening abilities. Through the examination of board game integration in English teaching contexts, educators can gain valuable insights into effective instructional strategies and pedagogical approaches that promote language learning outcomes.

Methodology

- *Research Design*

This study adopted a mixed method research design to investigate the use of board games in English teaching in the masters' theses and doctoral dissertations (collectively academic papers) retrieved for this study from the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation in Taiwan. The approach was both historical and academic. While the quantitative part analyzed the quantity and publication years of these term papers, the number of categories based on publication years, academic departments, research methodologies, variables under investigation, and types of board games utilized, focal points in English instruction, and the target subject, the qualitative analysis dealt with abstracts, conclusions, and recommendations of these papers to identify trends. This phase also focused on learners' motivation, learning outcomes, and board game content design.

- *Data Collection and Research Procedure*

The major data resource of this study were the academic papers which used board games in English teaching. These papers were identified through keyword searches in the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation in Taiwan. The keywords used included "board game" and "English," in combination with other game-related terms, to ensure there was no omission of any papers that might have discussed board games indirectly. In total, 85 papers were found related to board games in English teaching. Out of these, 41 papers had full-text electronic files available for direct download, while the remaining 45 papers either lacked full-text electronic files or were not publicly accessible. The authors obtained hard copies of these 45 papers through interlibrary cooperation. The papers in this study, which pertain to the utilization of board games in English teaching, were published between 2014 and 2021.

Prior to embarking on the research journey, the both reliability and validity of these academic papers were determined. Reliability was examined by scrutinizing the consistency in categorizing research methods, variables, types of board games, key aspects of English teaching, and study subjects in the papers. The consistency was also identified in the categorization of abstracts, conclusions, and recommendations in related papers, following two rounds of coding. To mitigate potential researcher bias, a peer review process was also implemented, involving graduate students majoring in education. This step enabled to resolve any discrepancies in categorization with input from board game experts and experienced English teachers.

Concurrently, validity of these academic papers was also tested to evaluate the alignment of quantitative category classification with qualitative analyses of learner motivation, learning outcomes, and trends in board game content design in the context of integrating board games into English teaching. This involved a qualitative analysis of relevant sections in the papers of study subjects to determine if the findings matched the research objectives and effectively addressed the research questions. Here also a peer review process was adopted participated by graduate students, to prevent researcher bias, and address any discrepancies in validity testing through expert consultation and revision.

- *Data Analysis*

This study involved an analysis of content related to the use of board games in English learning from the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation in Taiwan. The authors applied quantitative analysis to areas such as research methods, research subjects, research variables, and types of board games. They utilized qualitative analysis to examine research topics such as learners' motivation, learning outcomes, and board game content. They compiled, analyzed, and summarized the findings from each thesis. Then, they combined the results of both quantitative and qualitative analyses to offer teachers and curriculum designers valuable insights for developing English courses that integrate board games.

A content analysis and a systematic review method was also used in this study (Arslan, 2023) to thoroughly investigate and describe the trends observed in the research content of the analyzed papers. The researchers quantified and categorized the academic papers based on various criteria, such as publication years, graduate student departments, research methods, and variables, types of board games, English teaching emphasis, and research subject classifications. This analysis aimed to explore the prevalence of "board game" applications in "English teaching." Potential biases or limitations in the chosen database were taken care of as variations in the availability of theses and dissertations were found. For instance, certain institutions may not have contributed their theses and dissertations to the database, leading to potential gaps in the research coverage.

Results And Findings

- *Initial Phase*

After collecting academic papers related to board game applications in English teaching from the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation in Taiwan, an initial examination was carried out.

This was the initial phase of the study. it was found that the adoption of board games in English teaching research in Taiwan commenced in 2014, with the peak years occurring from 2016 to 2019. Notably, in 2017, there were 20 relevant dissertations, accounting for the highest proportion of 23.5% among the current corpus of related research. In the research on the integration of board games into English teaching for papers, Curriculum and Instruction-related departments had the most publications, with 14 papers (16.5%), followed by English or Foreign Language Departments, with 12 papers (14.1%). This showed the highest interest in these areas. Departments related to education, teaching, curriculum, learning, instructional materials or evaluation had a total of 54 papers (63.6%), indicating that research on board games in education was not as common. Besides these, 19 papers (22.3%) came from various other disciplines, such as digital content, technology, management, information, engineering, arts, culture, public affairs, human resources, communication, and leisure. This demonstrated that researchers from non-education or non-English/ Foreign Language departments also showed interest in the integration of board games into English teaching.

The study also addressed factors like validity and reliability, learners' motivations, their impact on learning effectiveness, causal relationships, correlations, and future research trends in the sampled doctoral and master's theses. It was found that in most of the academic papers, reliability was used to measure consistency in content categorization, with higher reliability indicating greater consistency, while lower reliability indicated less consistency (Huang & Chien, 2003). Likewise, validity inferred whether the items being analyzed met research requirements, with higher validity enhancing inferential accuracy.

A data triangulation approach was utilized in this study. All the research items such as variables were categorized. The graduate students majoring in education assisted in this categorization process. A few discrepancies were seen which were resolved with inputs from an experienced English language teacher holding a master's degree and 16 years of teaching experience. In categorizing research items, some were clear and uncontroversial (e.g., thesis publication year, academic department, research methods, and study subjects) and did not need secondary checks. Others were less clear, such as research variables related to English language teaching focus and board game types. There were 28 discrepancies for research variables out of 157 (82.17% agreement), 18 for board game types out of 85 (78.82% agreement), and 12 for English teaching focus out of 113 (89.38% agreement). A close discussion with the English teacher and graduate students led to necessary modifications for the final categorization.

- *Exploring Trends and The Distinctive Features*

The next step was to explore trends and the distinctive features of the sampled papers. A total of five factors were identified, in addition to publication years and academic affiliations of the graduate students, such as (i) research methods, (ii) research variables under study, (iii) types or categories of board games employed, (iv) the emphasis on English instruction, and (v) the target subject of these papers. The findings are summarized in Tables 1 to 5.

Regarding the first factor of research methods, Borgstede & Scholz (2021) recommend the modification of positive research methods through empirical techniques. Empirical research involved the application of scientific methods such as observation, surveys, statistics, and induction to describe phenomena. In this study, following Lin and Lin's (2010) classification of research methods, the sampled academic papers were classified into two types: empirical research type, which included survey and experimental methods; and non-empirical type, such as case studies and action research. Any academic paper beyond empirical and non-empirical research was identified as 'other' type. This research method classification is exhibited in Table 1.

Table 1: *Research Methods Classification for Board Games in English Teaching Papers.*

Type of research	Codes	Research method	Number of papers	Subtotal	Ratio
Empirical research	A1-1	Investigation method	6	63	74%
	A1-2	Experimental method	57		
Non-empirical research	A2-1	Case study	3	21	24.8%
	A2-2	Action research method	18		
Other types	A3	Alternate research methods	1	1	1.2%

The findings show that out of 63 (74%) empirical research papers concerning the use of board games in English teaching, 57 employed experimental methods and 6 used investigation methods. Out of the total papers, 21 (24.8%) used non-empirical research methods, which included 3 case studies and 18 action research studies. One thesis was found having used classroom self-study as a unique research approach. These data suggest that there was a preference among domestic masters and doctoral students for experimental methods. This approach typically involved dividing subjects into experimental and control groups and conducting pre- and post-tests when investigating the application of board games in

English teaching. A good number (18) of studies that used action research also suggest that studies that used board games in English teaching recognized a flexible design and adaptable process, allowing for adjustments during the research and encouraging responsiveness and on-site experimentation and innovation.

For research variable classification, the study followed Shih's (2013) recommendations, according to which variables were classified into three main domains: cognitive domain, affective domain, and psychomotor domain. Table 2 presents these domains, their explanations and detailed breakdown.

Table 2: *Research Variables.*

Research variables	Codes	Explanation of variables	Number of papers	Ratio
Cognitive domain	B1	Thinking, comprehension, memory, analysis, and recognition abilities with regard to knowledge.	84	53.5%
Affective domain	B2	Attitudes, interests, emotions, motivations, receptivity, and attention with regard to learning.	64	40.8%
Psychomotor domain	B3	Regarding the application, creation, perception, and outcomes of knowledge.	9	5.7%

The data reveals that with regard to the application of board games in English language teaching, a total of 154 research articles were identified with various research variables. Among these, cognitive variables, which pertained to the cognitive aspects of knowledge, such as thinking, understanding, memory, analysis, and recognition, were mentioned in 84 of these research papers, constituting 53.5% of the total. Affective variables, which encompassed attitudes, interests, emotions, motivation, acceptability, and attention in the context of learning, were present in 64 of the research papers, accounting for 40.8% of the total. Psychomotor variables, which focused on the application, creativity, perception, and effectiveness of knowledge, aimed at achieving innovation and practical application. However, only 9 research papers addressed these psychomotor variables, representing a mere 5.7% of the total.

The third factor of board game classification belonged to the tabletop game retailers categories such as role-playing games, thematic games, strategy games, party games, faction games, and children's games. In this study, a specific emphasis was placed on the integration of board games with English education. As a result, traditional board game classification models were not employed. Instead, Jan and Chang's (2018) game-based learning classification was adapted, to categorize board games into the following four types: Motivation-based board games, skill-based board games, proficiency learning board games, and core competencies-based board games. Table 3 provides a detailed description of this classification.

Table 3: *Board Game Categorization.*

Board game category	Codes	Explanation	Number of papers	Ratio
Motivation-based board games	C1	The primary goal of motivation-driven board games was to stimulate learners' motivation, enhance their interest, and foster a positive attitude, with the instructional aspect of the game not being the central focus.	8	9.4%
Skill-based board games	C2	The distinguishing characteristic of advanced board games lay in their capacity to afford learners the opportunity to exercise, commit to memory, and achieve proficiency in previously acquired vocabulary, sentence patterns, grammar, and other linguistic elements.	49	57.6%
Proficiency learning board games	C3	Proficiency learning board games facilitated complex concept acquisition, making them the core of the learning process.	23	27.1%
Core competencies-based board games	C4	Improved advanced skills like teamwork and problem-solving in students through board games.	0	0%
Other board games	C5	A board game that did not fit into any of the mentioned four categories.	5	5.9%

The categories in this table included motivation-based board games, which aimed to boost learner motivation and interest, albeit with minimal relevance to English instruction, and only 9.4% of the research corpus (8 papers) explored their use in English teaching. Skill-based board games focused on reinforcing

English skills learned in courses, representing the largest share with 57.6% (49 papers). Proficiency learning board games predominantly utilized board games for English instruction, allowing students to master complex concepts, accounting for 27.1% (23 papers). However, the investigation of core competencies-based board games, designed to foster advanced skills, collaborative abilities, and problem-solving skills, was limited to domestic papers. Additionally, five papers (5.9%) explored other board game models or combined various board games in their curricula.

The next step in this study was to organize the key aspects of English teaching used in board game applications. The sampled academic articles were classified into several key points like English alphabet recognition or memory, vocabulary recognition and retention, spelling or application, speaking proficiency, listening training, English sentence or short text construction, English reading ability, English grammar and sentence structures, and school English curriculum materials. Table 4 highlights these key points underlying the English instruction using board games.

Table 4: *The Key Points of English Instruction Using Board Games.*

The key points of English instruction	Codes	Explanation	Number of papers	Ratio
English alphabet recognition or memory	D1	Using board games to facilitate and encourage students' memorization or recognition of English alphabets.	3	2.7%
Vocabulary recognition and retention, spelling or application	D2	Using board games to aid or encourage students in memorizing, identifying English vocabulary, practicing spelling, or applying English words in various contexts.	43	38%
Speaking proficiency	D3	Using board games to facilitate and encourage students to speak English.	17	15%
Listening training	D4	Using board games to aid students in practicing English vocabulary and sentence comprehension through auditory skills.	7	6.2%
English sentence or short text construction	D5	In educational board games, students practice English sentence construction, composing English short texts, and English-to-Chinese sentence and text translation.	8	7.1%
English reading ability	D6	Students engage in board games to practice reading English sentences or short passages.	3	2.7%
English grammar and sentence structures	D7	Students learn English grammar rules in board game activities.	7	6.2%
School English curriculum materials	D8	Using standard school English curriculum materials as the teaching goal.	25	22.1%
		Total	113	-

The table reveals that the use of board games in English instruction used multiple key teaching objectives. A total of 113 papers were analyzed to identify the key points used in English instructions. It was found that vocabulary, which encompassed memorization, recognition, spelling, and application, was the primary focus in 43 papers, representing 38% of the total. This highlighted the prevalent use of board games to enhance vocabulary acquisition. School Curriculum Integration was the second most common theme, with 25 papers (22.1%) that examined the effectiveness of incorporating board games into standard school English language curricula, indicating a strong interest in this area. Oral Communication was also a significant theme, with 17 papers (15%) that explored how board games facilitated the development of oral communication skills, including speaking and pronunciation. Additionally, 8 papers focused on writing, translation, and sentence structure, while 7 papers each addressed listening comprehension and grammar pattern acquisition. In contrast, English alphabet recognition and reading skills received the least attention, with only 3 papers each, likely due to the complexities involved in effectively integrating board games into these areas.

Finally, this phase of research was concluded with the analysis of the subjects (participants) of research within the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation in Taiwan, specifically focusing on the application of board games in English instruction. The subjects were categorized on the basis of their age, spanning preschoolers, primary school students (divided into lower and upper grades), junior high school students, high school vocational students, university students, teachers, general public members, and others. Table 5 depicts these details.

Table 5: *The Study Subject for Board Games in English Teaching Papers.*

Study subject	Codes	Explanation	Number of papers	Ratio
Young children to early primary students	E1	Preschool-aged, kindergarten, and grades 1-2 elementary students.	6	7%
Elementary school upper grade students	E2	Elementary students in grades 3-6.	59	69.4%
Junior high school students	E3	Refers to students typically aged between 12 and 15 who are enrolled in grades 7 through 9.	14	16.5%
High school vocational students	E4	High school and vocational college students in their first to third year.	1	1.2%
College student	E5	College students, junior college, and vocational school students in their second year, and students in their fourth to fifth year of five-year programs.	0	0%
Instructor	E6	Investigating teachers as the subject of study.	5	5.9%
Members of society	E7	The individuals who are not students or educators.	0	0%
Others	E8	Research subjects that cannot be categorized into the above-mentioned types.	0	0%

The data reveals that majority were upper-grade elementary students (third to sixth grade), totaling 59 papers (69.4%). Junior high school students accounted for the second-largest group with 14 papers (16.5%), while 6 (7%) papers focused on young children to early primary students (kindergarten to second grade). Additionally, 5 (5.9%) papers examined instructors, primarily exploring their attitudes and experiences with board games in education, and only 01 (1.2%) thesis focused on high school vocational students.

- *Effectiveness of Board Games in English Teaching Papers*

In the next phase of research, researchers were driven by a desire to explore the effectiveness of incorporating board games into English instruction, with a particular emphasis on improving learning outcomes, motivation, and attitudes (Luo, 2016). However, it was found that there existed a lack of motivation to integrate board games into English teaching in Taiwan. Although there were numerous workshops on board game applications in education, there was still a dearth of studies focusing on board games in English language teaching. The fewer studies which demonstrated the potential of board games in English instruction confined their attention only to the impact of board game integration on various aspects of English language learning. Some studies examined vocabulary acquisition and spelling, highlighting board games as effective tools for building vocabulary and spelling skills. Others delved into how board games improved oral proficiency, listening, grammar, and reading abilities.

For instance, Huang (2021) explored the influence of board games on English vocabulary learning strategies, while Li (2017) focused on the effect of simple and engaging card games on pronunciation, spelling, and attitudes among third-grade students. Kuo (2015) investigated the relationship between using board games in English teaching activities and improved letter recognition, along with enhanced student interest. Cho (2017) examined the impact of board games on phonemic awareness and spelling abilities in sixth-grade students, and Huang (2018) assessed their role in enhancing learning interest, classroom participation, and willingness, particularly among low-achieving students. Wu (2016) sought to determine whether board games could boost intrinsic motivation and confidence in learning English. Chen (2019) delved into the frequency of board game integration among primary school English teachers and its relationship to their teaching effectiveness. All these studies have explored English teachers' perspectives, investigating their attitudes toward and usage of board games in teaching. These studies also aimed to gauge the current status of board game usage among English teachers and its impact on their teaching practices.

Figure 1 illustrates the components of research motivation for board games in English instruction, and positive and negative findings. To begin with, the innermost segment of the Figure represents research motivation. Research motivations in a master's or doctoral thesis could often be categorized into 10 major areas. A single thesis could encompass multiple research motivations, such as investigating the impact of board games on students' learning attitudes and assessing whether board games enhanced vocabulary acquisition in English. Moving on, the middle section of Figure 1 pertains to positive findings. Many papers affirmed that board games significantly contributed to motivation, attitude, interest, and effectiveness in English language learning. The majority of learners exhibited a positive disposition toward incorporating board games into English language courses.

Such an approach also mitigated anxiety related to English language learning and fostered students' teamwork abilities. During the gaming process, most students actively sought peer assistance, collaboratively achieving tasks and game objectives. Researchers compared the learning outcomes between "Board Games in English Instruction" and "Teacher-Led Speaking and Writing Instruction" and found no significant differences, indicating that board games in English instruction were as effective as teacher-led methods. Importantly, incorporating board games did not detract students from the primary focus of English language learning (Chiang, 2020). Lastly, the outermost section of Figure 1 concerns negative paper's findings. The inclusion of board games in English instruction did not universally yield positive results. It was not guaranteed to enhance students' learning outcomes and interests in the classroom. For example, Chen (2018) discovered that integrating board games into English listening courses did not significantly improve English listening skills or motivation compared to conventional listening activities. Additionally, research revealed that board games did not significantly alleviate anxiety related to English language learning. If students were concerned about negative evaluations from teachers or peers or experienced test-related anxiety, board games did not have a substantial ameliorating effect (Chao & Fan, 2020).
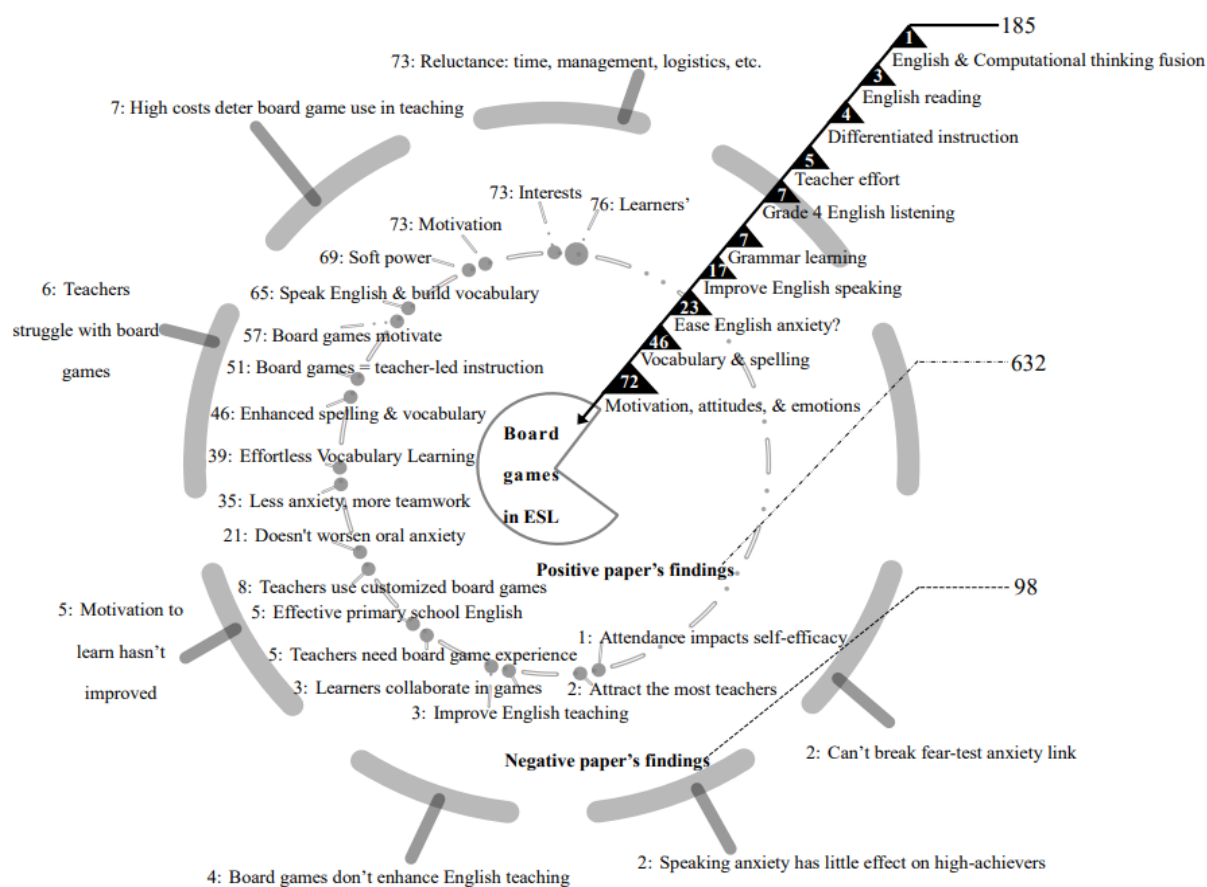

Figure 1: *Overview of Papers by Research Motivation, Positive and Negative Findings.*

Discussion

The current study analyzed masters' and doctoral theses (collectively academic papers) to investigate the use of board games in English language teaching. The focus was on publication years, academic departments, research methodologies, variables studied, types of board games, aspects of English language teaching, and study populations. The researchers also explored the relationships between these categories, particularly the impact of board games on learners' motivation. There were seven research questions for evaluation, which the study attempted to find answers for.

With regard to Research Question One (What is the distribution of research periods in studies involving the integration of board games into English instruction?), it was found that the papers on the integration of board games into English language teaching have had a gradual increase in the number since 2014. In 2017, it reached its peak with 20 papers, accounting for 23.5% of the total 85 papers sampled. This surge in research output can be attributed to a significant development in the field. Notably, during the first half of 2014, Taiwan hosted 760 workshops and seminars dedicated to the application of board games in educational

settings, marking the emergence of board game integration as a prominent topic (Luo, 2016). In 2014, there were five related studies published, and this number steadily grew each year until 2017. This trend suggests that the integration of board games into English language teaching gained popularity between 2014 and 2017. However, from 2017 onwards, the number of publications gradually decreased, reaching only two papers in 2021. This decline may indicate that the research on this topic had matured, and the related concepts and outcomes had become well-established. As a result, there was a reduction in the number of researchers focusing on this subject, and the overall popularity of this topic waned.

With regard to Research Question 2 (Where do researchers studying the integration of board games into English instruction typically come from in terms of academic departments?), the authors found a total of 54 academic papers within departments and disciplines related to education, teaching, curriculum development, learning, instructional materials, and evaluation. This suggests a significant interest and commitment within educational departments to explore the potential of board games as effective tools for English language instruction. Researchers from these fields are actively seeking valuable teaching tools and investigating whether the incorporation of engaging board games can effectively enhance motivation and learning outcomes in English language education. Furthermore, 12 papers were found within English or foreign language departments, indicating that graduate students in these departments are also intrigued by the role board games can play in the context of English language learning. Apart from education-related departments and English or foreign language departments, there were an additional 19 papers originating from a diverse range of disciplines, including digital content, technology, management, information sciences, computer engineering, arts, communication, culture, and leisure and tourism. These papers span across 13 distinct disciplines outside the realms of education and language studies. This diversity underscores the widespread interest in exploring the integration of board games into English language instruction, indicating that the topic of board game-based teaching is currently a highly popular and trending research area.

With regard to Research Question 3 (What are the main focuses and prevalence of research methods employed in the integration of board games into English instruction?), the authors found that the papers focused on the use of board games in English language teaching; there were a total of 63 empirical research studies, with 6 surveys and 57 experiments. Additionally, 21 non-empirical research studies were conducted, including 3 case studies and 18 action research studies. One thesis used classroom self-research as a different research method. Graduate students in Taiwan conducting research on board game integration in English language teaching predominantly utilized empirical experimental methods. Among these, 39 papers involved experimental and control groups, while 18 employed single-group pre-post testing experimental designs. This allowed for a rigorous comparison of the effectiveness of board game-based instruction. Non-empirical research methods were less common, comprising 21 papers. Of these, 18 used action research, which offers flexibility and adaptability, making it suitable for exploring new board game designs or teaching activities. This approach allowed English language teachers to adjust and refine their teaching methods during the research process. Additionally, three papers employed case studies to explore English language teachers' experiences and teaching cases when using board games. These papers aimed to identify effective teaching models for specific board games.

With regard to Research Question 4 (What are the primary focuses and prevalence of research variables investigated in the integration of board games into English instruction?), it was found that a total of 84 papers focused on the use of board games in English language education; cognitive factors were mentioned as research variables in 84 instances. Cognitive factors encompass the cognitive processes of thinking, comprehension, memory, analysis, and recognition. Additionally, affective factors were addressed in 64 papers, which encompass attitudes, interests, emotions, motivation, acceptance, and attention as they pertain to the learning process. Furthermore, 09 papers mentioned variables related to psychomotor in application, creation, perception, and behavior. Psychomotor variables are associated with assessing the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition, with the ultimate goal of achieving innovative application in learning. The primary objective of employing board games in English language education is to investigate whether these games can enhance learners' understanding, memory, and recognition of English vocabulary, sentence structures, pronunciation, and grammar during gameplay, ultimately leading to improved English language learning outcomes. Secondary objectives include exploring whether board games can positively impact learners' attitudes, interests, emotions, and motivation, with the hope of improving learners' overall attitudes and motivation towards learning. Relatively few studies have delved into the influence of board game utilization in English language education on enhancing innovative and practical English language skills. This is due to the perception that board games typically follow a more standardized and fixed gameplay format, making it challenging for students to develop innovative applications of the English language.

With regard to Research Question 5 (What are the main focuses and prevalence of the types of board games utilized in the integration of board games into English instruction?), in this study, the authors expanded board games into four categories: Motivation-based, skill-based, proficiency learning, and core competencies-based, drawing on Jan and Chang's (2018) game-based learning classification. To begin with, motivation-based board games were employed to ignite students' enthusiasm and emotions, with only 8 papers exploring their use in English teaching. Moving on to skill-based board games, a total of 49 papers dedicated to their use indicated their role in practicing and reinforcing English language skills, particularly

vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammar learned in the curriculum. Furthermore, proficiency learning board games, the focus of 23 papers, were designed to help students' master complex English concepts through intricate game design. In contrast, core competencies-based board games, which emphasize higher-order skills, collaboration, and problem-solving, lacked research in the context of English teaching. In addition, 05 papers explored mixed approaches, combining various board game types in the curriculum to maintain student engagement and vary learning focuses. Such approaches required careful curriculum planning and explanations during transitions for effective teaching.

With regard to Research Question 6 (What are the primary focuses and prevalence of English teaching topics explored in the integration of board games into English instruction?), it was found that 43 papers focused on using board games for English language teaching, primarily targeting vocabulary acquisition. Board games were commonly used to help students overcome the challenge of memorizing English words. This approach was likened to how children first learn individual words before grasping grammar. Learning vocabulary was considered crucial for listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. Many students found memorizing English words daunting and resisted it. Therefore, researchers conducted numerous studies to use board games to aid students in memorizing and understanding English words. Vocabulary acquisition remained a central theme in integrating board games into English language teaching. Additionally, 25 papers explored the use of board games to supplement traditional school English courses, especially in elementary and middle schools. The third most common teaching theme was oral proficiency, with 17 papers focusing on using board games to help students practice speaking and pronunciation. However, fewer studies, only 03 each, addressed English letter recognition and reading comprehension using board games. Designing effective board games for these areas was deemed more challenging.

With regard to Research Question 7 (What are the main focuses and prevalence of research subjects examined in the integration of board games into English instruction?), the authors found that research subjects in the collected papers were mainly elementary school students in grades three to six, totaling 59 papers. These students were more willing to play board games with their peers in the classroom, had a good understanding of complex board game rules, and faced less academic pressure. Middle school students were the second-largest group, with 14 papers, sharing similar characteristics with elementary school students but experiencing higher academic pressure. Preschool and early elementary students (kindergarten to second grade) were the subjects of six papers, and their board game rules needed to be simple, with a focus on fun and straightforward English content. High school and vocational school students had minimal representation due to lower interest in board games and higher academic pressure. Additionally, five papers focused on teachers, investigating their attitudes and experiences in using board games as teaching aids to provide insights and guidance for incorporating board games into the classroom.

Conclusion, Recommendations and Limitations

This study made a comprehensive analysis of previous studies focusing on the use of board games in English language teaching. These studies delved into various aspects, such as research variables, types of board games, teaching priorities, and performed statistical analyses to explore learner motivation, learning outcomes, content trends, causality, and correlations. Through detailed description, comparison, analysis, and inference, this study revealed common findings and recommendations, while also normalizing quantitative data to systematically compare different research methods, publication years, affiliations, game types, and teaching approaches.

The conclusion about the potential of board games as effective English language teaching technique was drawn by synthesizing descriptive statistics, qualitative analysis, and normalized quantitative data. In conclusion, the study made evident that integration of board games enhances both learning effectiveness and enjoyment, contributing valuable insights to the evolving landscape of English language teaching. Educators can leverage these findings for a more engaging and effective learning experience, aligning board games with specific teaching goals. The integration of these research findings served as a valuable resource for educators interested in integrating board games into their English teaching and for researchers exploring the integration of board games into English instruction.

The current research was limited to the focus on integration of board games into English language teaching and did not anticipate future technological advancements in English education. It examined students and their experiences with board games in English teaching, but there were limitations. The authors could not directly apply their study's results to younger children or adult learners, and did not extend their investigation to using board games for teaching subjects other than English. Additionally, they did not compare board games with digital or situational simulation games in English language learning. This limited the utility of this study as a reference for English courses rather than for evaluating different teaching modes in course design. The authors also examined 85 papers on using board games in English teaching, concluding that board games can enhance learning, promote interaction, and bring joy to the classroom. The study advocates for wider adoption of board games in education, providing practical suggestions for teachers.

Board games are an effective means to enhance students' interest and motivation in learning English. Many Taiwanese master's and doctoral students have conducted research on integrating board games into English instruction, gaining insights into its procedures, outcomes, advantages, and challenges. However, research lacked comparisons among different board game types and the involvement of students in game design. Future studies should explore these aspects, particularly in the context of older students, such as high school and vocational school students.

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