

Integrating Gamified Strategies in Language Learning: The Effectiveness of Snakes and Ladders for Poetry Writing

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ABSTRACT

Purpose— This study investigates the effectiveness of integrating the Snake and Ladder game as a gamified learning medium to enhance students' engagement and creativity in poetry writing. The study discusses the limitations of the traditional teacher-centered approach, which often fails to involve students or foster creativity, by proposing a gamified strategy specifically designed for middle school learners.

Methodology- Using a qualitative case study, this study was conducted on 28 students of the eighth grade at class VIII-A, SMP Negeri 1 Banawa Tengah, Sulawesi Tengah, Indonesia. This study involved two learning sessions where students were involved in a modified Snakes and Ladders game, which combined the tasks related to the poetry, such as composing verses and identifying poetic devices—the data collected from class observation, students' poetry submissions, and teacher reflections. Thematic analysis measured students' engagement, creativity, and collaborative outcomes.

Findings- The findings show that 70% of students actively engaged and showed creative expression in their poetry, integrating the main elements of poetry effectively. There are 25% who show creativity, even in the face of a lack of engagement in the game, while 5% actively engage in the game but find it challenging to compose poetry. This study highlights the potential of gamified learning to grow teamwork, critical thinking, and a dynamic learning atmosphere, transforming poetry writing from a passive task and a monotone to an interactive and fun experience.

Contribution— This study contributes to the growing number of gamified learning in education and its impact on poetry writing. It offers valuable knowledge for educators, curriculum designers, and policy makers, showing the adaptability of gamified learning in the diverse context of education and providing a replicable model to be integrated creatively into poetry writing tasks in language learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The decline of creative writing skills among students, especially in poetry, is a growing issue influenced by multiple factors. Many students assume poetry writing is complex and unappealing, resulting in a lack of interest and active participation in developing their skills (Kangasharju et al., 2022). This assumption is worsened by students' struggle to express their ideas creatively, resulting in diminishing motivation to engage in poetic expression (Kristiantari et al., 2023). Furthermore, the limitation in the current education system, which prioritizes functional literacy over creative expression, has contributed to the marginalization of poetry in the school curriculum. This systemic focus marginalized the opportunity of students to explore and develop their creative writing skills through meaningful and engaging activities (Creely, 2019). As a result, students lack exposure to creative practice, which grows imagination, originality, and self-expression, becoming the cause of the decline of poetry writing skills.

The internal factors influencing poetry writing consist of student self-motivation, their creative skills, and previous exposure to poetry expression (Kristiantari et al., 2023). Many students struggle to develop ideas, experiment with poetic techniques, or find personal relevance in poetry, which results in their not participating in the writing process (Kangasharju et al., 2022). Without encouragement and structured opportunity to take creative risks, students often develop a rigid, formulaic approach to writing, which limits their artistic exploration. (Peremitina, 2023).

On the other hand, external factors such as teaching method, curriculum design, and assessment model also significantly impact students' creative engagement. Traditional poetry teaching often failed to engage students emotionally, making the subject seem dull and elitist (Creely, 2019). Teachers, which is limited by the exam-focused curriculum, might not be experts in creative writing, limiting their ability to develop artistic expression in the classroom (Greenham, 2019). Besides, the conventional analytic approach emphasizes structural dissection over emotional connection, failing to inspire innovative thinking or deep engagement with the poetry text (Aladini & Farahbod, 2020; Greenham, 2019). As a result, students are rarely allowed to directly experiment with poetic technique, which limits their creative writing skills and prevents them from fully exploring their expressive potential (Peremitina, 2023). Without such experiential learning, a significant gap will exist in pedagogical practice that supports (Kangasharju et al., 2022).

Moreover, the current educational system strongly emphasizes functional literacy, such as reading comprehension, grammar proficiency, and standardized tests, which accidentally degrades the prioritization of creative expression. While this skill is undoubtedly important, the non-existence of a balanced approach that can maintain both functional literacy and creativity has limited the opportunity for students to develop their poetic skills (Creely, 2019). Studies have shown that creativity is important in cognitive flexibility, emotional quotient, and deep engagement in language learning (Creely, 2019). However, that is still not emphasized in many school curricula.

Given these challenges, strategic pedagogy requires innovation to foster creativity and engagement in poetry writing. One promising approach is gamification, which utilizes game design elements to create a more interactive and deep learning experience (Klock et al., 2018; Palomino et al., 2023; Vrcelj et al., 2023). Gamification is defined as the implementation of elements and mechanisms of game design in the context of non-game, which has emerged as a powerful tool to involve and motivate individuals in various domains, including education (Klock et al., 2018; Palomino et al., 2023; Vrcelj et al., 2023). By integrating features such as points, badges, and leaderboards, gamification improves user experience and fosters active engagement, which is very effective in education.

The gamification skills to transform traditional learning into interactive and experiential have significant potential in overcoming the challenges in poetry writing learning. Studies have shown that gamification increases motivation, engagement, creativity, and critical thinking, which are all important in poetic expression. (Chen et al., 2020; Mee Mee et al., 2020; Mee et al., 2024). Besides, by integrating playful elements into learning, gamification reduces anxiety and fear of failure, allowing students to experiment with the poetic techniques freely (Sawarkar et al., 2024).

Even though there are benefits to gamification, most studies on it focus on general language skills such

as grammar, not creative writing or poetry. (Cahyani, 2016; Cattoni et al., 2024; Guo et al., 2024; Tayeh et al., 2024; Zhihao & Zhonggen, 2022). Furthermore, the effectiveness of gamification can vary significantly across different cultural and educational contexts. (Haruna, 2024; Waluyo & Balazon, 2024).

Therefore, this study investigates gamification, especially snakes and ladders, as a pedagogical strategy. As a pedagogical strategy to enhance the engagement and creativity of students in poetry writing. Snakes and Ladders, an ancient Indian board game, is well-known because of the root of instructional morality, where the user moves forward based on the labeled boxes using die rolls. As an educational tool, the mechanism is adaptable to writing poetry by integrating the tasks related to poetry tools into the gameplay.

By examining the implementation of snakes and ladders as a gamified learning strategy in poetry writing, this study aims to contribute to the development of a more interactive and student-centered poetry teaching approach. Overcoming this gap is important in advancing the understanding of gamified strategies that can effectively improve creativity and learning outcomes in poetry.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative case study approach to explore the effectiveness of integrating Snake and Ladders games as a gamified instructional tool for enhancing student engagement and creativity in poetry writing. The case study was chosen as it enables a deep assessment of student interactions, learning experiences, and creative processes in a real classroom environment (Yin, 2018). This study was conducted in SMP Negeri 1 Banawa Tengah, Donggala, Sulawesi Tengah, the school is well known for its openness to innovative teaching models. The participants consist of 28 students of the eighth grade, chosen by their diverse learning abilities and varying levels of proficiency in poetry writing. This class was chosen as a representative sample from middle school students, ensuring that the findings could be implemented broadly. This study was conducted in two consecutive sessions of 90 minutes, during which attendance varied from 35 to 19 students.

The intervention involved a modified version of the Snake and Ladders game, where poetry-related tasks were embedded at various points of the game board. As the students play, they engage in activities such as making short verses, identifying poetic devices, and collaborative storytelling, fostering a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Data collections were conducted by structured observation of the non-participant class, analysis of the submission of students' poetry, and teacher reflections. Three trained observers systematically noted the observations, including the class teacher and two external researchers, using a structured protocol that focused on the level of engagement, collaboration, poetic challenges, responses, and application of literary devices. Students' poetry submission was evaluated using a predefined rubric to assess the originality, coherency, and literary quality (Wilson & Dymoke, 2017), to ensure the structured and systematic assessment of their creative works.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), starting from the introduction and initial coding to identify the students' pattern of engagement and creativity. The codes were then categorized into broader themes: motivation, collaboration, and developing poetry writing skills. These were then defined in connection to the existing literature on gamification and poetry writing. To improve the credibility and trust, this study used triangulation by cross-referencing observational notes, student poetry, and teacher (Denzin, 2017). Furthermore, member checking allowed students to review and validate interpretations of their engagement, while inter-rater reliability was established by having two independent coders assess the data for consistency. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, with the consent of parents and the school obtained before data collection, ensuring student anonymity and voluntary participation. This systemic approach strengthened the ability of the study to give comprehensive and reliable insight into the role of gamification in enhancing the engagement and creativity of students in poetry writing.

FINDINGS

The findings in this study show the significant potential of using Snake and Ladders as a gamified learning medium to enhance the engagement and creativity of students in writing poetry. Data collected

through class observations, which were conducted with eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Banawa Tengah, focuses on the active engagement and creative works during the learning process. About 70% of students were actively engaged, showing high creativity in integrating the main concepts and expressing their minds aesthetically in poetry. Observation indicators consist of discussion participation, raising ideas, and poetry coherence composition. There were about 25% of other students, although they were more silent. However, they produced creative works that show the application's adaptability to any engagement style. However, about 5% of students, though showing enthusiasm during the game, exhibited limited creativity in their poetry. This highlights the importance of further elaborating on another learning approach to meet learning needs effectively.

This game significantly raises the learning atmosphere, changing poetry writing, which is always assumed to be a challenging or monotonous task, to become an enjoyable and dynamic activity. Students work in teams, fostering collaboration, teamwork, and sharing ideas. This cooperative interaction fosters critical thinking and collective problem solving when students develop the strategy to play the game while writing poetry using given keywords. The game design, which combines elements such as gift and punishment, keeps the students involved and motivated during the learning process.

This study provides important insight into the role of the game in maintaining the students' interest and motivation. Students claimed enthusiasm for this approach and were willing to do more game-based activities in the future. The Snake and Ladders game has proven to be an effective pedagogical tool for introducing game elements in poetry writing. Data shows that the strategy can enhance student engagement significantly and make learning more enjoyable, especially in topics that may be less appealing to students.

To evaluate the learning outcome, the comprehensive assessment was used to measure the aspects such as creativity, teamwork, poetry meaning construction, and game achievements. These criteria provided a deep understanding of the student's performance and enabled a deep evaluation of the game's effectiveness. Meanwhile, most students gain more benefit, variability in their responses highlights the need for further adaptability from the gamification approach to fulfill the needs and preferences of individual learning.

Table 1. Student performance in poetry writing through the Snakes and Ladders Game

Criteria	Weight (%)	Group 1 (%)	Group 2 (%)	Group 3 (%)	Group 4 (%)	Correlation with Total Score
Creativity in Poetry	30	28	25	22	20	Strong Positive
Team Collaboration	25	24	20	18	15	Strong Positive
Meaningful Content	25	22	20	18	15	Strong Positive
Game Achievement (Start)	10	10	8	6	5	Weak Positive
Completed Speed (Finish)	10	9	7	6	5	Weak Positive
Skor Total (%)	100	93	80	70	60	-

Table 1 presents a quantitative student's performance in writing poetry using the Snakes and Ladders game, which was assessed through five weighted criteria. The deep analysis reveals a strong correlation with creativity in poetry, team collaboration, and overall performance, which emphasizes their mutual dependency in the gamified learning environment. Group 11, which reached the highest score (93), showed exceptional creativity (28%) and collaboration (24%), which shows that both factors play important roles in student success. This finding supports the research that the collaborative environment fosters creative expression by encouraging the exchange of ideas and critical feedback (Mee Mee et al., 2020). In contrast, group 4 got the lowest score (60%), showing a significant weakness in creativity (20%) and collaboration (15%), which implies that the lack of teamwork might have contributed to their weak performance. While meaningful content (weighted at 25%) also influenced overall scores, its impact was moderate, showing that the content quality alone does not guarantee high performance without being supported by creativity and collaborative engagement. On the contrary, the achievement of the game (start) and the finishing speed showed a weak correlation with the overall success, which shows that despite these elements being able to improve motivation, they are not the main drivers of poetry writing proficiency.

The performance gap among the groups offers valuable insight to complete the gamified learning strategy. Considering the strong correlation between creativity and collaboration, combining more interactive team-based writing tasks can enhance the students' engagement and performance. Besides, while gamified elements such as the start and completion speed give extrinsic motivation, excessive competition might not necessarily improve poetic expression; thus, gamification should be arranged to push deeply the creative exploration. Furthermore, interventions targeted at weak performance, such as feedback from other guided friends, ordered structured writing, and collaborative storytelling activities, may help strengthen creativity and teamwork. These findings highlight gamification's potential as an effective pedagogical tool for fostering creativity in poetry writing. Future research should investigate how different structures, such as gamified, including digital adaptation and role play components, can make learning more optimal by creativity-driven learning in diverse educational contexts.

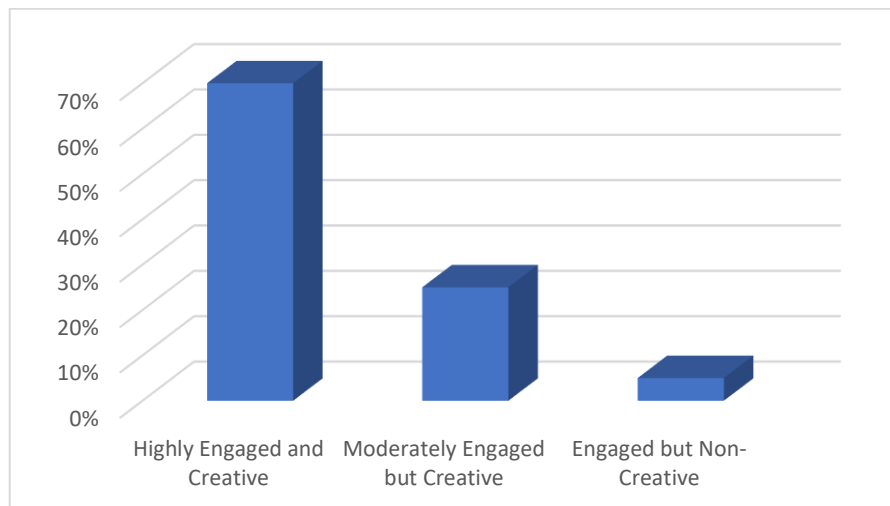


Figure 1. Distribution of Students' Engagement and Creativity

The bar chart in Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of engagement level and creativity of students during the research. Most students (70%) were categorized as the Highly Engaged and Creative, which showed active participation in the Snakes and Ladders game and the ability to create meaningful and imaginative poetry. These students were categorized by enthusiasm, frequent collaboration, and the willingness to experiment with the poetry structure and theme. The second category, Moderately Engaged but creative, consists of 25% of students who still produced high-quality poetry despite being less interactive in gameplay. This group is like independent work or needs external stimulation to produce creative content. 5% of students are categorized as Engaged but Non-Creative, which means they are actively engaged in the gameplay but struggle to apply creativity in their poetry writing. They may show the need for additional support to develop or express their ideas.

These findings provide insight into how student engagement and creativity interact in the gamified learning environment. The difference between the Highly Engaged and Moderately Engaged but creative suggests that the involvement in the gameplay does not directly produce creative works. The factors, such as private learning preferences, self-confidence in poetic expression, and previous research on creative writing, influence how students respond to the gamified learning. Besides, the small presentation of students who engaged but were not creative highlights the importance of designing interventions that maintain engagement and nurture creativity. Future research can explore how specific teaching strategies, such as guided brainstorming, peer feedback, or structured creative requests, can help students across the level to maximize their creative potential in arranging gamified learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings in this study highlight the potential of a gamified learning model, specifically Snakes and Ladders, in growing creativity and enhancing engagement among middle school students during the poetry writing session. The results show that gamification has transformed traditional learning practice into a dynamic, student-centered experience that combines cheerfulness with educational rigor. This part elaborates on the implications of their research, which is supported by theory and other relevant research and contextualized in a broader pedagogical frame.

The Role of Gamification in Enhancing Students' Creativity

The study reveals that the Snake and Ladders game significantly enhances the students' creativity in poetry writing, 70% of participants show active engagement and creative works. The creativity, as a cognitive skill, is fertile in the students' emotionally and intellectually stimulating environment. The flow theory by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) supports this research by stating that individuals can achieve optimal creativity when drawn into fun and challenging activities. Snakes and Ladders provides a balanced mix of challenges and rewards, encouraging students to use creativity when composing poetry.

Besides using keywords, the keyword experiences are internalized, creating a frame for the students to conceptualize poetic ideas. This aligns with the ZPD Vygotsky (1978) concept, which emphasizes the role of guided interaction in helping students achieve high-order cognitive skills. The game's design facilitated collaborative interaction and encouraged students to engage deeply with the poetic process.

The previous research strengthens this study. For example, Erlista (2018) noted that every creative strategy, such as visual instruction and multimedia tools, is significantly able to enhance students' skills in poetry writing. The Snakes and Ladders game, by the integration of gamification with linguistic prompts, offers a similar approach, validating its efficacy in improving creativity

The Engagement Through Gamification: a Catalyst for active learning

The finding also highlights the game's success in fostering student engagement. About 95% of students actively engaged in the game, with diverse levels of creativity. The engagement is the important factor in effective learning, as has been emphasized by Fredricks et al. (2004), who identified the engagement of behavior, emotion, and cognition as an important component of active learning. The snakes and ladders discuss the three dimensions, as follows; a) behavior engagement is student engage in physical interaction with the game, throwing the dice and moving their token, breaking the monotony of traditional learning activities, b) emotional engagement is the competitive characters of the game and the benefits of growing enthusiasm and a sense of achievement, and 3) cognitive engagement is the integration of keywords required students to think critically and creatively in poetry writing.

The game's emphasis on teamwork further strengthens engagement. The collaborative learning theory, proposed by Johnson & Johnson (1999), highlights how group activities enhance motivation and interpersonal skills. Students in this study work in teams to overcome obstacles, strengthening their skills to communicate, negotiate, and synthesize ideas. A study by Mahirah and Widyartono (2024) supports this study, showing that a gamified learning environment improves student engagement and makes learning tasks more interactive and fun. This finding is in line with the observation in this study, which underscores the potential of gamification and enhances engagement and motivation.

Differentiated Learning Outcomes and Individual Variability

Despite Snakes and Ladders' overall success, the study notes differences in student responses. While 70% of students were active and creative, 25% were less active but still able to produce creative products, and 5% were actively engaged without producing significantly creative products. These variations highlight the importance of differentiated instruction, as Tomlinson (2001) proposed, which suggests adapting educational approaches to address diverse learning and learning preferences.

The 5% of students who engaged actively in the game but failed to show their creativity might benefit from additional guidance. Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes the role of modeling and guided

practice in the acquisition of skills (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). Providing examples of well-written poetry or showing brainstorming techniques can help the students by bridging the gap between engagement and creativity.

Besides, outcome variability may reflect the differences in students' intrinsic abilities. In their self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that autonomy, competency, and relatedness are the main drivers of motivation. While the game inherently promotes autonomy and competency, further efforts to personalize experiences, such as enabling the students to pick their keywords, might have increased their intrinsic motivation.

Transforming Perceptions of Poetry Writing

One of the most significant contributions of Snakes and Ladders is its ability to change students' perception towards poetry writing. Traditionally perceived as complex tasks and abstract, poetry writing becomes more fun and engaging through gamification. This changing of perception is in line with constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of connecting knowledge and the experiences of students' interests (Piaget, 1964)

Integrating familiar games with academic content makes poetry writing easier to access. This approach echoes findings by Sanita dkk. (2020), who reported that the field trip and experiential learning significantly improved students' skills in writing a descriptive essay. Similarly, the snakes and ladders game provided a direct experiential framework for poetry writing, enabling students to overcome their concerns and embrace the creative process.

Gamification is a Pedagogical Tool that is Culturally Relevant

This study also underscores the importance of gamified tools in promoting culturally relevant pedagogy. The keywords used in Snakes and Ladders are adaptable to reflect the theme, value, and local tradition, thus providing more meaningful lesson experiences. Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that responsive teaching culturally improves students' engagement and academic success by validating their cultural identity in the curriculum.

In this study, game adaptation enabled the inclusion of instructions proper to the culture that can be understood by the students during the writing process. This approach not only grows creativity but also strengthens the students' sense of belonging and relevancy in process learning.

Implication and Limitation

These study findings have broad implications for educational practice. They suggest that gamification can be a functional pedagogical tool to improve engagement and creativity in every lesson and age group. Franco (2022) highlights gamification as a strategic tool that can increase engagement, motivation, and skills development in education, underscoring the potential to increase student engagement and interaction in the learning process across various contexts, including traditionally challenging subjects. It strengthens the implementation of gamification broadly in educational practices globally because the benefits exceed the geographical modalities and instructional. Furthermore, the collaboration of the Snakes and Ladders game is in line with contemporary educational priorities, such as the development of 21st-century skills. By fostering teamwork, communication, and critical thinking, the games prepare students for the real-world challenges beyond the classroom.

Although snakes and ladders have proven effective in this context, their success depends on thoughtful implementation. One of the limitations of this study is its dependency on qualitative observation, which might be a subjective bias. Future studies can combine quantitative measures, such as pretest and posttest, to give a more objective evaluation. Additionally, this study was conducted in one class setting, which limits the generalization. Broadening the study to cope with a more varied context and larger sample size will give stronger evidence of the game's effectiveness. A comparative study that examines the impact of the gamified tools on the students' creativity can also produce valuable insights.

CONCLUSION

The finding of this study highlights the potential transformative power of every gamification strategy, particularly in Snakes and Ladders, in increasing the creativity and engagement in poetry writing among secondary school students. By integrating elements such as keywords, challenges, and gifts, this study effectively overcomes the traditional teaching method's limitations, which often fail to motivate students or foster creative expression. This game provides a dynamic and interactive platform for the students to develop important skills in poetry writing, such as literary devices, thematic coherence, and expressive language. This game also facilitates collaborative learning, growing teamwork, and communication, which is very important for 21st-century education.

Although the results show significant improvement in engagement and students' creativity, the variability in individual responses underscores the need for different teaching approaches to ensure all students gain the same benefit. The qualitative insight in this study gives a strong foundation for future research to explore the broader application of gamification in language education. The educators and curriculum designers were encouraged to adapt and implement gamification tools, such as Snakes and Ladders, to make creative tasks easily accessible, fun, and effective for various student populations.

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