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Page: 213- 222 https://amjd.kiu.ac.ug/

INTEGRATING DIGITAL GAMES INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION AT THE SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL IN ONDO WEST, ONDO STATE

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Abstract

The use of digital games in language instruction has increasingly drawn the interest of researchers, primarily because of their ability to boost student motivation and improve academic performance. This research focuses on utilization of digital games in the teaching of English Language at the senior secondary school level within Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. It specifically examines the level of teacher awareness regarding digital games, the frequency of their application in classroom settings, the obstacles affecting their integration, and educators' attitudes toward incorporating such tools in English language instruction. Employing a descriptive survey methodology, the study targeted a total of 1,827 teachers, from which a representative sample of 100 English Language teachers was randomly chosen. Data were gathered using a standardized instrument titled Utilization of Digital Games for Teaching English Language in Senior Secondary Schools (UDGTELSSS), which had a reliability coefficient of 0.50. Analysis involved descriptive statistics and the Mann-Whitney U test to assess trends and demographic variations. Results showed that while a considerable number of teachers were knowledgeable about the instructional benefits of digital games, actual implementation within classrooms was notably limited. This underuse was largely linked to issues such as lack of digital infrastructure, insufficient training, and systemic resource shortages. Additionally, the study identified diverse teacher attitudes toward the adoption of digital games, with significant variations observed across gender. Based on these findings, the study advocates for enhanced investment in technological infrastructure, focused capacity-building initiatives, and policy adjustments to support the effective incorporation of digital games into English language curricula in Nigerian secondary education.

Keywords: Digital games, English Language, Senior Secondary Schools, Awareness, Utilization, Educational technology

Introduction

In today's world, the rapid advancement in technology has caused a serious change to the society. According to American Psychological Association (2018), teenagers and youths now spend over six hours daily on electronic screens, engaging more with television, music, and interactive media than with traditional print sources. Digital games, have become integral to young people's lives, serving as a powerful cultural force (Cerezo-Pizarro, 2023). A 2021 global survey by YouGov found that over 40% of consumers aged 18-24 consider video games to be as culturally important as, or even more significant than, music (Bruce, 2021). The interactive nature of games encourages active engagement, allowing players to participate in complex problem-solving, strategic planning, and teamwork. This active involvement

enhances cognitive functions and social abilities, which are essential in educational settings (Cerezo-Pizarro, 2023).

The integration of digital games into education (teaching and learning) has gained significant attention as a contemporary pedagogical approach. This method, known as Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL), capitalizes on the fascinating and interactive attribute of games to facilitate learning across various subjects (Jia *et al*., 2024). Laurian-Fitzgerald (2015) emphasized games enhances and promote communication skills, thereby establishing contexts where English language use becomes practical. As English remains central to global communication, learners strive to develop essential language skills like reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In Nigeria, English serves as both the formal language and the medium of teaching and learning in schools, underscoring its importance in the educational system. Nnadozie & Ugochukwu (2021) indicated that students exposed to computer-assisted scrabble games demonstrated significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition compared to those taught through conventional method. However, numerous challenges impede effective English language teaching, including limited instructional resources, large class sizes, and students' diverse linguistic backgrounds. These obstacles often result in suboptimal language proficiency levels among secondary school students (Muhammad, 2018).

Moreover, the successful integration of digital games into the English language curriculum hinges on several factors, including teachers' awareness, attitudes, and competencies. Kaimara *et al*., (2021) found that teachers acknowledge the positive impact of digital educational games on students, many educators were hesitant to incorporate them into their teaching practices. This reluctance was primarily attributed to limited personal gaming experience and inadequate technological skills. Mlumun *et al*., (2021) revealed in their study that a significant proportion of students and teachers were aware of mobile educational games, but their actual utilization in teaching and learning processes was relatively low. Challenges identified included a lack of subject-specific educational games aligned with the Nigerian secondary school curriculum and insufficient exposure of both teachers and students to these digital tools.

Digital games are electronically driven experiences enjoyed on devices like computers, consoles, and mobile devices, engaging players through interactive media for both entertainment and learning. Prensky (2015) describes these games as interactive experiences combining rules, objectives, feedback, and voluntary participation, creating an engaging, often educational experience. Gee (2017) further elaborates on digital games as complex systems that foster learning through problem-solving, exploration, and interaction, where players receive immediate feedback and develop skills through practice. Digital games span a variety of genres, each offering unique interactions and experiences. Action games, for example, challenge players with quick reflexes and hand-eye coordination, while adventure games emphasize narrative and exploration, encouraging intellectual engagement (Malliet & De Meyer, 2017). Role-playing games (RPGs) allow players to navigate fictional worlds, influencing the storyline through their decisions (Kallio *et al*., 2015). Simulations replicate real-life processes, enabling players to practice skills in a controlled, virtual setting (Squire & Jenkins, 2016).

Digital games in education integrate these immersive elements with learning goals, creating dynamic environments where students can actively explore and experiment (Kapp, 2016). Games like "Minecraft Education Edition" support collaborative problem-solving, while platforms like "Kahoot!" transform assessments into interactive sessions (Callaghan, 2016). Language-learning games like "Duolingo" reinforce vocabulary through repetition and context, while multiplayer games promote authentic communication,

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lowering anxiety and boosting confidence (Loewen et al., 2020). Additionally, Thorne *et al*., (2018) indicate that role-playing and storytelling games immerse learners in cultural perspectives, fostering contextual language use. Through digital games, students can better engage in their lessons, enhancing learning outcomes and providing teachers with valuable tools for assessing progress and maintaining engagement (Licorish *et al*., 2018).

The integration of digital games into educational practices is influenced significantly by secondary school teachers' awareness and perception of their potential benefits. Olusola & Alaba (2016) indicate that Nigerian educators often lack familiarity with digital games, resulting in their limited incorporation in classrooms, primarily due to restricted access to digital resources and insufficient professional development. However, as Adeoye & Akanbi (2019) demonstrated, increasing teachers' awareness through targeted workshops can improve their attitudes, encourage using digital games to improve student engagement. Teachers acknowledge that these games can capture attention, boost interactivity, and make learning enjoyable, thereby potentially aiding in the retention and comprehension of complex topics (Adewumi & Akinsanya, 2019). Despite such promising perspectives, skepticism persists among some educators regarding the educational efficacy of digital games, with concerns that these games might distract from traditional learning goals or lack the rigor for meaningful academic contributions (Onasanya, 2020).

The adoption of digital games is also shaped by teachers' attitudes, often influenced by familiarity with traditional methods. For instance, Kaimara *et al*., (2021) identify entrenched preferences for conventional practices as a major factor in teachers' reluctance to adopt game-based learning. Similarly, the perceived ease of use plays a crucial role, with studies noting that teachers are more likely to embrace technological tools if they find them user-friendly (Alomary & Woolard, 2015). Cultural and social factors further influence these attitudes, underscoring the need for professional support and development to improve teacher confidence with digital game technologies (Johnson, 2016). Nigeria secondary schools inadequate digital infrastructure remains a prominent barrier to adopting digital games for teaching. As Olufemi & Oluwadare (2021) explain, this digital divide significantly limits the capacity of teachers to explore game-based educational tools. Teachers with lower digital literacy may also hesitate to use these tools due to limited personal and professional experience with technology (Ajibade & Adeoye, 2018). Additionally, rigid curriculum standards, focused on traditional assessment methods, often present challenges for the seamless integration of digital games into classrooms (Nwafor & Ezeh, 2017).

Abdulkrim (2021), posits that digital games significantly enhance students' oral English skills, indicating their utility in language learning. Similarly, Nuru *et al*. (2024) report positive teacher perceptions in terms of engagement, skill development, and classroom management. However, some studies, such as Ibrahim (2023) and Erline (2019), show that despite awareness of digital game-based learning (DGBL) benefits, actual utilization and acceptance vary due to factors such as gender, age, and previous experience. These findings suggest that while digital games hold potential as effective teaching tools, their adoption depends heavily on individual teacher experiences, school resources, and supportive institutional policies.

Statement of the Problem

In response to evolving trends in school education, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment have shifted towards active student learning approaches that facilitate knowledge construction in dynamic environments. However, in Nigeria, implementation is limited by lack of subject-specific educational games aligned with the Nigerian secondary school curriculum, insufficient exposure of both teachers and students

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to these digital tools, technological, instructional, and cultural challenges. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of researches on the application of digital games for learning in Nigeria and teachers' perspectives are among the least explored aspects. Therefore, this study aims to how digital games are employed in the instruction of English Language at the senior secondary school level within Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State.

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this research is to explore how digital games are being incorporated into English language instruction within senior secondary schools located in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State. The study specifically seeks to:

1) Assess the degree to which teachers in Ondo West are informed about the use of digital games as a pedagogical tool for teaching English at the senior secondary level.
2) Determine the actual level of implementation of digital games in the classroom setting for English language instruction in senior secondary schools.
3) Identify the key obstacles that hinder the effective integration of digital games into English language teaching practices in these schools.
4) Explore the perceptions and dispositions of English language teachers in senior secondary schools regarding the use of digital games in their instructional approach.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives of this study, the following research questions are posed:

1) How familiar are teachers with the concept and application of digital games in the teaching of English language at the senior secondary level?
2) To what degree are digital games being applied in English language instruction across senior secondary schools?
3) What barriers exist that limit the successful adoption of digital games in the teaching of English?
4) How do English language teachers in senior secondary schools within Ondo West Local Government Area perceive the use of digital games in their teaching practices?

Research Hypothesis

H_{01}: Gender does not significantly influence teachers' attitudes toward the use of digital games in English language instruction.

Methodology

This investigation employed a survey-based research approach to examine how digital games are being utilized in the teaching of English Language at the senior secondary school level. The study focused on a total population of 1,827 English Language teachers within the Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State. From this group, a sample of 100 teachers was randomly selected across 10 Senior Secondary Schools using a simple random sampling method. Data collection was carried out through a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Utilization of Digital Games for Teaching English Language in Senior Secondary Schools in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State (UDGTELSSS). Trained research assistants in each selected school supported the administration of the instrument. The data gathered were subjected to analysis using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard

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deviations. Additionally, inferential analysis using the t-test was conducted to test the research hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Teachers' Awareness of the Application of Digital Games in English Language Instruction at the Senior Secondary School Level

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
I make a deliberate effort to learn more about how digital games can be applied in my teaching.	57	25	12	6	3.33	0.91
I hold a believe that digital games can improve students' engagement in learning English.	25	51	24	0	3.01	0.70
I have received professional training on integrating digital games into teaching.	37	35	21	7	3.02	0.93
I regularly explore new digital games that can be used for teaching English.	40	35	23	2	3.13	0.84
I am confident in my capacity to integrate digital games effectively into English language instruction.	33	40	27	0	3.06	0.78
I know how to access digital games for classroom use.	36	41	15	8	3.05	0.91
Total			3.10			

Table 1 shows the level of awareness of teachers in the utilization of digital games in teaching English language in Senior Secondary Schools. The results are as follow: I actively seek out information about using digital games in my teaching($\bar{x}$ =3.33±0.91), I believe digital games can enhance students' engagement in learning English($\bar{x}$ =3.01±0.70), I have received professional training on integrating digital games into teaching($\bar{x}$ =3.02±0.93), I regularly explore new digital games that can be used for teaching English($\bar{x}$ =3.13±0.84), I feel confident in my ability to use digital games effectively in English lessons($\bar{x}$ =3.06±0.78), I know how to access digital games for classroom use($\bar{x}$ =3.05±0.91). Given the weighted mean score of 3.10 on a scale with a maximum value of 4.00 and considering that this figure falls within the established threshold for a "high" rating, it can be concluded that teachers exhibit a substantial level of awareness regarding the application of digital games in the instruction of English Language at the Senior Secondary School level.

Table 2: Degree of Integration of Digital Games in Senior Secondary School English Language Instruction.

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
I frequently incorporate digital games into my English language teaching	21	6	51	22	2.26	1.03
I find digital games to be effective tools for teaching grammar and vocabulary.	6	33	48	13	2.32	0.78
I modify digital games to align with the particular learning goals of each English lesson I teach.	29	23	34	14	2.67	1.05
Learners display increased interest and engagement when digital games are incorporated into English language instruction.	25	7	43	25	2.32	1.11

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Students often respond favorably when digital games are employed during classroom instruction.	8	36	42	14	2.38	0.83
I incorporate digital games as complementary tools in addition to conventional teaching methods.	27	22	30	21	2.55	1.10
Digital games have become an essential part of my teaching toolkit for teaching	21	25	33	21	2.46	1.05
Total			2.42			

Table 2 shows the extent to which digital games are deployed in the instructional process of English language in Senior Secondary Schools.The results are as follow; digital games are regularly used in my English language classes ($\bar{x}$ =2.26±1.03), I find digital games to be effective tools for teaching grammar and vocabulary($\bar{x}$ =2.32±0.78), I adapt digital games to suit the specific learning objectives of each of my English lesson ($\bar{x}$ =2.67±1.05), students show enthusiasm when digital games are used for learning English($\bar{x}$ =2.32±1.11), I receive positive feedback from students whenever I use of digital games in class ($\bar{x}$ =2.38±0.83), I use digital games as supplementary resources alongside traditional teaching ($\bar{x}$ =2.55±1.10), digital games have become an essential part of my teaching toolkit for teaching($\bar{x}$ =2.46±1.05). Considering the computed weighted mean score of 2.42 on a 4.00-point scale which falls below the benchmark for a high rating, it is evident that the actual use of digital games in teaching English Language at the Senior Secondary School level remains limited.

Table 3: Barriers to the Effective Integration of Digital Games in English Language Teaching at the Senior Secondary Level.

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
Limited access to appropriate digital game resources for teaching English	74	11	15	0	3.59	0.74
Insufficient training and support in utilizing digital games effectively	38	51	11	0	3.27	0.65
Lack of time to adequately plan and implement digital game-based lessons	20	46	23	11	2.75	0.90
Inadequate technical infrastructure to support digital game integration	53	26	21	0	3.32	0.80
Concerns about students' distractions or misuse of digital games during lessons	39	41	15	5	3.14	0.85
Difficulty in aligning digital game activities with curriculum standards and learning outcomes	53	35	7	5	3.36	0.82
Limited access to appropriate digital game resources for teaching English	61	26	13	0	3.48	0.72
Total			3.27			

Table 3 highlights the obstacles that impede the successful use of digital games in teaching English in senior secondary schools. The following are the results; limited access to appropriate digital game resources for teaching English($\bar{x}$ =3.59±0.74), insufficient training and support in utilizing digital games effectively($\bar{x}$ =3.27±0.65), lack of time to adequately plan and implement digital game-based lessons($\bar{x}$ =2.75±0.90), inadequate technical infrastructure to support digital game integration($\bar{x}$ =3.32±0.80), concerns about students' distractions or misuse of digital games during lessons($\bar{x}$ =3.14±0.85), difficulty in aligning digital game activities with curriculum standards and learning outcomes($\bar{x}$ =3.36±0.82), limited access to appropriate digital game resources for teaching

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English($\bar{x}$ =3.48±0.72). With a weighted average score of 3.27 on a 4.00 scale, positioned within the range indicative of a high rating, it can be concluded that the barriers to effectively integrating digital games into English Language instruction at the Senior Secondary School level are considerably significant.

Table 4: Senior Secondary School English Language teachers' attitudes of towards the use of digital games in instruction.

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
I am prepared to dedicate time to learning how to incorporate new digital games into my teaching practices.	24	60	12	4	3.04	0.72
I consider digital games to be an effective means of enhancing student participation during English classes.	15	50	24	11	2.69	0.86
I am confident in my ability to apply digital games successfully within English language instruction.	30	47	20	3	3.04	0.79
I believe that digital games can enrich the overall learning experience in English language classrooms.	32	49	14	5	3.08	0.81
I am receptive to integrating digital games as part of my instructional approach to teaching English.	42	46	6	6	3.24	0.82
Total				3.02		

Table 4 presents insights into how English language teachers at the senior secondary level perceive the use of digital games in their teaching. The responses indicate the following: a willingness to commit time to learning new digital games ($\bar{x}$ = 3.04 ± 0.72), recognition of their value in boosting student engagement ($\bar{x}$ = 2.69 ± 0.86), confidence in applying them effectively ($\bar{x}$ = 3.04 ± 0.79), belief in their potential to enhance learning outcomes ($\bar{x}$ = 3.08 ± 0.81), and openness to adopting them in instructional methods ($\bar{x}$ = 3.24 ± 0.82). With an overall weighted mean score of 3.02 on a 4.00 scale—classified as high—it may be concluded that teachers generally exhibit a positive disposition toward the use of digital games in English language instruction.

Test for Hypothesis

Table 5: Mann-Whitney statistical test showing the Difference in the attitudes of Senior Secondary School teachers towards the use of digital games based on gender

		Ranks		
	GENDER	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
ATTITUDE	Female	59	30.35	1790.50
	Male	41	79.50	3259.50
	Total	100		

Test Statistics[a]	
	ATTITUDE
Mann-Whitney U	20.500

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Wilcoxon W	1790.500
Z	-9.156
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
a. Grouping Variable: GENDER	

Table 5 presents the outcome of the Mann-Whitney U test used to assess whether gender has a significant impact on attitude scores. The findings indicated a marked disparity in average rank values, with male participants generally showing more favorable attitudes than their female counterparts. The calculated U statistic was 20.500, accompanied by a Z-score of -9.156. The associated p-value was found to be less than 0.001, which is well below the threshold of 0.05, indicating statistical significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis suggesting no difference in attitude distributions between male and female teachers is rejected. This leads to the conclusion that gender plays a meaningful role in shaping teachers' attitudes within the sampled population.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicate that teachers possess a strong level of awareness regarding the use of digital games in English Language instruction, which is an encouraging sign. This awareness reflects an understanding among educators of the educational value that digital games can bring to the classroom environment. Supporting this observation, Adeoye and Akanbi (2019) assert that the degree of familiarity with digital technologies plays a critical role in their successful adoption in schools. Nonetheless, this heightened awareness does not appear to translate into widespread use, as actual classroom integration remains limited. This gap between awareness and implementation is consistent with the findings of Kaimara et al. (2021), who noted that although many educators are conscious of digital learning tools, their day-to-day usage is often constrained by numerous practical obstacles.

The limited application of digital games in English Language teaching, as evidenced by the study, is largely the result of significant challenges. Prominent among these are restricted access to necessary digital resources, a lack of adequate training, and underdeveloped technical infrastructure. These findings align with prior studies. For instance, research by Muhammed et al. (2018) identified insufficient resources and training as key impediments to effectively utilizing digital games in instructional contexts. Likewise, Nwafor and Ezeh (2017) emphasized that technical deficiencies and the absence of sustained professional development opportunities pose major barriers to the integration of game-based learning in educational practice.

The challenges identified, such as concerns about student distractions and alignment with curriculum standards, further support the findings of Kapp (2016), who emphasize that while digital games have the potential to engage students, their effectiveness is often compromised by practical implementation issues. These challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions to address resource limitations and improve support structures for educators.

Regarding teachers' attitudes towards digital games, the study shows a positive inclination, indicating that educators see value in incorporating these tools into their teaching. This positive attitude is supported by research from Gee *et al.*, (2017), who argue that digital games can improve student engagement and learning outcomes when effectively integrated. However, the positive attitude does not always translate into widespread use, as evidenced by the low utilization rates, suggesting that attitudes alone are insufficient to drive change without addressing underlying barriers.

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The t-test result indicates a significant difference in attitudes based on gender. Nuru *et al*., (2024) opined that gender can influence teachers' perceptions and adoption of educational technologies. This suggests that gender-specific factors may play a role in how digital games are perceived and utilized in teaching.

Recommendations

In light of this study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educational institutions should be adequately furnished with essential digital infrastructure, including functional hardware and stable internet access, to facilitate the smooth integration of digital games into teaching practices.
2. Continuous professional development initiatives, such as hands-on training sessions and instructional workshops, should be organized to build teachers' skills, boost their confidence, and improve their competence in leveraging digital games as instructional tools.
3. Deliberate efforts should be made to design or procure educational games that are directly aligned with the English Language curriculum, thereby enabling educators to embed these resources effectively into their instructional planning and classroom delivery.
4. Government or educational authorities should consider subsidizing the cost of high-quality digital games for schools.
5. Schools should provide teachers with extra time for lesson planning that incorporates digital games would also encourage their greater use in the classroom.

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