

## Digital Board Games as a Tool to Boost Speaking in Foreign Language E-classes During COVID-19: Students' Perspectives

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### Abstract

*This article elaborates the ongoing discussion about whether digital board games can enhance speaking in language courses. The research targets 51 adult L2 Greek students in Istanbul/Turkey addressing if digital board games in on-line classes can enhance speaking in foreign language during COVID-19. The results show that: online lessons meet the learning needs of adults, but they still prefer the face-to-face ones, the digital version of the game Story Cubes motivated students to participate more in the lesson, to collaborate with their classmates and to express themselves freely. The aforementioned game created a positive atmosphere in the classroom and finally it had a positive effect on the students' speaking.*

**Keywords:** Digital games, speaking, storytelling, story cubes, e-classes, Greek as L2

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### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic completely changed the traditional educational environment. Teaching was transformed from face-to-face to online at all levels of education. All educators had to completely modify and change their traditional face-to-face to e-classes regardless they had any previous experience. All these changes imposed new demanding tasks on teachers and students as well. Especially teachers acquired four different roles in this process of online teaching: a) pedagogical and intellectual role, b) social role, c) managerial and organizational role, and d) technical role (Klimova, 2021). In the context of their social role, trying to create a pleasant and friendly learning environment, many of them implemented digital games in the teaching of a foreign language.

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In the above-mentioned context, this research aims to gather and evaluate students' opinions about on-line courses, their thoughts about application of games in their e-classes, and in particular their thoughts about playing the game *Story Cubes*. To this end, the following research questions were investigated:

- 1) What are the perspectives of students about online education?
- 2) What are the perspectives of students about the implementation of games in e-classes?
- 3) What are the perspectives of students about the effectiveness of the board game *Story Cubes* in speaking?

### **Literature Review**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge for foreign language education at all education levels as it forced teachers and students to change the traditional approaches without being fully prepared for this. The role of students changed during distance education. Several research has attempted to highlight the perspectives of learners of a foreign language via online courses during the pandemic.

Learners of a foreign language, according to Klimova (2021) felt motivated to study online during the COVID-19 pandemic, they considered the online language classes effective, but they also argued that face-to-face classes could not be replaced by the on-line ones and in this respect teacher's role as well. The results of another research (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021) revealed the protective role of retrospective enjoyment of on-line learning "in difficult times" or for students with lower performance. This research shed light on students' preferences for certain online resources during the pandemic, as well as for PowerPoint presentations. It also emphasized their views on foreign language teaching in the post-COVID period in a pleasant learning atmosphere, while the correlation between stress and foreign language learning was similar to that found in pre-pandemic research.

Other findings showed that graded e-materials helped international students to become autonomous and independent in developing their language skills during the pandemic in foreign languages e-learning courses. However, in terms of learning culture, international students were less autonomous and relied heavily on their teachers for learning and problem solving (Chen, 2021).

On the other hand, it has been shown that the connection between computers and language teaching is successful (Komis & Dinas, 2011). Young people are familiar with games, digital reality and technology in general (Lenhart et al., 2015; Shu & Liu, 2019), and students are increasingly using mobile phones, computers and digital games (Kirstavridou et al., 2020).

Many researchers highlight that digital games are more likely to help students. Recent meta-analyzes have shown that under certain guidelines, a game-based teaching works better for students than a process that does not include games at all (Martin et al.,

2019). Another factor that reinforces the need to implement digital games in education is the fact that technology is an integral part of our lives nowadays. For modern technocratic societies, technological means are considered basic means of facilitating our daily lives. Consequently, many of us could also use them as a learning tool (Collis & Moonen, 2001).

Therefore, the use of a greater variety of media and learning resources is gradually emerging as a complementary tool for the teacher, aiming to reduce student passivity (Collis & Moonen, 2001; Nazarova & Galiullina, 2016), especially in emergencies. In modern societies, where technology is gradually becoming more prevalent, it becomes necessary for teachers to enhance such skills in their students as much as possible (Gros, 2007). Digital Game based learning in language education can contribute to this.

The international literature refers to this type of teaching as Digital Game Based Learning, and in this case with regard to language teaching, as "Digital Game Based Language Learning" (DGBLL). The term gamification is often used, which is generally used to denote the application (mechanisms) of play in non-game environments in order to enhance the processes established and the experience of those involved (Caponetto, Earp & Ott, 2014).

Digital Game-Based Language Learning (DGBLL) is an innovation in education and may have a positive effect on the hitherto traditional teaching framework. Gradually, educational digital games begin to accompany educational practice (Gros, 2007; Kirstavridou et al., 2020; Shu & Liu, 2019; Vandercruysse et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2008). The research community is increasingly interested in the impact of digital games on the learning process (Brom et al., 2014; Caponetto et al., 2014) in terms of innovation.

Innovation, in this light, does not only mean the use of material from sources other than the textbook, but mainly the inclusion of games in teaching and let alone the foundation of the educational process itself on them (Kirstavridou et al., 2020). Without a doubt, digital games place the user at the center of the learning process (Nazarova & Galiullina, 2016), create challenges for him and consequently push him to develop problem-solving strategies (Gros, 2007). One of the most essential reasons for integrating games into the educational process is that in this way fertile ground is created for a deeper learning experience, to which the student is committed and develops a variety of skills (Shu & Liu, 2019). The present article focuses on the use of digital games for online teaching of Greek as a foreign language during COVID-19.

### **Digital Games in Teaching**

The main categories of games that can be used by the educational community as complementary tools of the teaching process, are defined by researchers. According to Nazarova and Galiullina (2016) there are:

1. *Imitation games*, which use more communicative activities, with the main goal of developing students' respective skills.
2. *Script cards games*, when the teacher's goal is to develop the skill of producing and/or understanding spoken language. The teacher can use script cards consisting of standard second / foreign language native phrases, thus applying Game Scenes. Story Cubes game belongs to this category.
3. *Sociodrama*, which are games that present in more detail the characters of the game, thus developing the ability to describe and psychograph characters by students (Nazarova & Galiullina, 2016).

All these categories of games are not directly related to the challenge of increased cognitive outcomes, as their character is not purely educational. But they can support students' effort to speak in the foreign language. Students thus have many opportunities to use the second language, as they interact and communicate (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012).

A teaching based on digital games can be considered successful when it is successfully performed in terms of the following parameters according to Chik (2014). The first parameter is the success of educational - learning goals, the second the social interaction between students and the third factor is considered the content of the course to be properly designed, so students have an incentive to participate in the lesson. Finally, success is judged by the feedback that students will give (Chik, 2014).

The special motivation that students show in the content of knowledge when it is in the form of play, remains the primary reason that the teacher will want to adopt such procedures (Caponetto et al., 2014). According to Herzberg, an American psychologist who researched the link between motivation and performance, when the work itself is exciting for the participant, then it performs to the maximum (Wallace et al., 2008).

The main point, however, that involves learning through play is student commitment (Caponetto et al., 2014). Combined with motivation, as mentioned above, they are two of the most important factors for learning (Barnes et al. 2008). A study analyzing the relevant research linking game to language teaching (120 studies from 2014 to 2019) confirms that the words "motivation", "mobilization" and "dedication" are the most common and this confirms the close relationship of educational games with the corresponding emotions of students (Caponetto et al., 2014). Since games therefore involve the terms motivation and engagement, then they are also very likely to lead to learning by reinforcing it (Barnes et al., 2008).

In the most modern educational research that studies and supports the introduction of games in teaching, the "flow" factor emerges as a fundamental factor that is also involved in playful teaching (Brom et al., 2014). "Flow" seems to be a state of "flow", in which the student loses the sense of time, shows feelings of joy and high commitment (Rachels & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2017; Shu & Liu, 2019). In particular, the

situation is characterized by a particularly high concentration in an activity, understanding it, a sense of balance between teaching requirements and student performance and student autonomy (Brom et al., 2014).

Regarding foreign language learning, performance in individual activities and a more complete understanding of content in a language, different from the mother tongue, are two of the dominant positive outcomes that have been proven to be associated with the parallel introduction of games in the lesson (Brom et al., 2014). In fact, here lies the difference between educational game in relation to games in general (Shu & Liu, 2019). It is pointed out, however, that the connection of digital games in a second language with the learning of structures outside the vocabulary has not yet been sufficiently proven (Chik, 2014; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). Therefore, students who adopt digital language games show greater performance and development in their cognitive skills in the long run (Wouters et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2008).

### **The Game *Story Cubes***

Story Cubes game is a storytelling board game which encourages players to tell a story with the help of dice. Story Cubes is a set of nine dice with different pictures on each side used to prompt a story. It is a simple and easy game without strict rules, so it can be played in many different ways. In the present study students were asked to take turns and narrate a story in order to practice speaking by using the vocabulary (Thomou et al., 2009) of the thematic axis “*Traveling*” that it’s included in CEFR (2001) and CEFR Companion Volume (2018). The game starts when the teacher rolls the first dice and gives a starting sentence as an introduction to the story. The first student continues the story, and every student has to build on and add to his/her classmates’ story with a new dice, in order to strengthen the story until each student has spoken (Figure 1 shows a possible set of figures). There are no wrong or right answers and there is no score either. The only rule is that each student has to use minimum two or maximum three sentences in order to continue the story. In that manner there is a balance in how long each student talks. In the present study, prior to the beginning of the game, students brainstormed ideas in order to retrieve from their memory the relevant vocabulary of the thematic axis “*Travelling*” that they had been taught (Tegou et al., 2021). At the same time their teacher was writing it down on the blackboard, and thus creating a semantic map. The semantic map was initially built on the basic thematic subcategories of the thematic unit and then extended to the basic vocabulary items of each of them.

**Figure 1***Story Cubes*

Source: <https://davebirss.com/storydice-creative-story-ideas/>

### Research Methodology

Data in this research were collected using a) classroom observation and b) an e-questionnaire (Appendix 1) which has been answered by the students. Before conducting the research, the researchers designed an observation form (Appendix 2) based on the advantages and disadvantages encountered during the implementation of the game *Story Cubes*. Observations were made during six different online classes (where the number of students ranged between 4-10) in terms of participation, students' psychology, motivation, vocabulary usage (Thomou, 2008; Rousoulioti et al., 2020b) related to the thematic axis *Travelling* and duration of the game. Class sessions were observed, and questionnaires were administered to the students. The questionnaire was translated to students' first language (Turkish), the questions that appeared on it were formulated on the basis of the research questions and according with other research in the field (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018; Phuong & Nguyen, 2017; Zboun & Farrah, 2021).

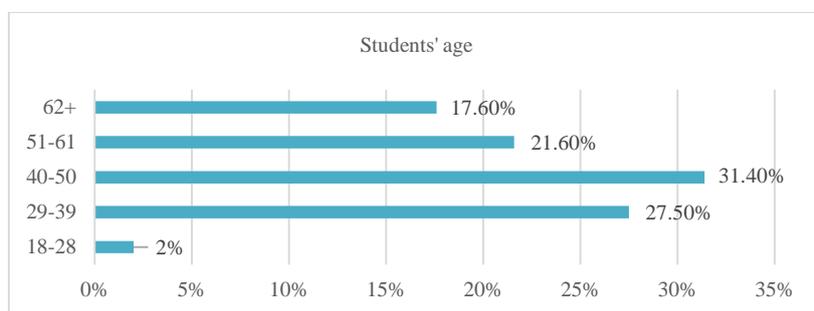
The questionnaire was divided in three sections, according to the research questions, and it contained seven items referring to the first research question, seven items referring to the second, and eight items referring to the third one. The fifty-one participants were asked to choose one from a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 2 = little, 3 = enough, 4 = much, 5 = very much) for each item inquiring their opinion best fits in the questions regarding: online teaching, the implementation of games in their online classes and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the game *Story Cubes*. Data were analyzed statistically using SPSS (version 27). Furthermore, two open-ended questions were used in order to detect what the students liked most about the game, and what was their opinion compared to the board game version of *Story Cubes* in face-to-face classes.

## Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted during the Fall Semester of the academic year 2021/2022 in online lessons. The participants consisted of students, teachers, and three researchers who observed the implementation of the game. Fifty-one students, 16 males and 35 females, who were adult learners of Greek as L2 in Istanbul/Turkey participated in the study. All the students' proficiency language level was intermediate B1/B2, *Independent user* according to the Common European Framework for languages (CEFR, 2001) and the e-diagnostic test of the Centre for the Greek Language (Rousoulioti et al., 2020a). Their age ranged between 18-62+ and they were classified in five groups as Figure 2 shows below.

**Figure 2**

*Students' Age*



Four teachers, two females and two males, participated in the study and their age ranged between 34 and 39. Three of them hold a MA, one of them BA and their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 12 years. Two of them stated that they had participated in seminars, training programs or workshops related to teaching Greek as a foreign language while all of them are members of *Dialog-os*, a digital community which supports teachers of GFL in Turkey.

## Research Results

### Students' Perspectives About Online Education

The research question aims to highlight the general attitude of students about distance education by focusing on the learning process, as it is described in *Table 1*. The majority of the participants was not familiar with online lessons in Greek classes before COVID-19 pandemic [*statement 1* ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = .73$ )]. A few students report that they prefer online lessons to face-to-face ones [*statement 2* ( $M = 2.43$ ,  $SD = 1.9$ )], as they believe that the interaction between them and the teacher is reduced [*statement 5* ( $M = 2.12$ ,  $SD = .89$ )]. On the other hand, they believe that online lessons cover their learning needs

enough [statement 6 ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). Certainly, online lessons are not a stress factor [statement 4 ( $M = 1.78$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ), while it seems that students' participation in the lesson is not related to online lessons [statement 3 ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). Regarding the platform through which the lessons are conducted most of participants are very satisfied [statement 7 ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ).

**Table 1**

*Perspectives About Online Education*

Statements	Mean	SD
1. I was familiar with online lessons before COVID-19 pandemic.	1.53	.73
2. I prefer online lessons in comparison with traditional.	2.43	1.19
3. I participate more in online lessons.	2.73	1.02
4. I feel anxiety in online lessons.	1.78	1.00
5. Interaction with the teacher in online lessons is better than face-to-face lessons.	2.12	.89
6. Online lessons satisfy my learning needs.	3.00	1.00
7. I am satisfied with the platform that we use.	3.59	1.06

**Students' Perspectives About the Implementation of Games in E-Classes**

Generally, students have a positive attitude towards the game in the implementation of games in the class as it is described in Table 2. They often play games in the class [statement 8 ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = .73$ ). Almost all of them like it from scale 3=enough till scale 5= very much [statement 9 ( $M = 5.45$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ). Games motivate them to participate more in the lesson [statement 11 ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) and they feel that they cooperate better with their classmates [statement 10 ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .85$ ). They believe that games are a useful tool to practice speaking [statement 13 ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) and they feel relaxed when they play [statement 14 ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = .82$ ). Additionally, they prefer to play a game rather than to answer to vocabulary exercises [statement 12 ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ).

**Table 2**

*Games in Digital Environment*

Statements	Mean	SD
1. We often play games in class.	2.71	.73
2. I like when we play games in class.	5.45	1.64
3. When I play games in class, I feel that I cooperate better with my classmates.	3.43	.85
4. When I play games in class, my motivation to participate in it increases.	3.45	.94
5. I prefer to play a game than to answer to vocabulary exercises.	3.29	1.04
6. I find that games are useful for practicing speaking.	3.75	.87
7. When I play games in class, I feel relaxed and I don't feel shy to speak.	3.35	.82

### Students' Perspectives About the Effectiveness of the Board Game *Story Cubes* in Speaking

Students generally responded very positively in the evaluation of *Story Cubes* as they agree *much* in most of the statements, described in *Table 3*. Most of the students agreed that the game *Story Cubes* was an ideal choice for their language level [*statement 21* ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .88$ )]. They also agree that they did not face any difficulties related to the instructions or the rules of the game, so it is a simple game from this perspective [*statement 15* ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = .82$ )]. The images on the dice were very helpful for speaking [*statement 16* ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = .89$ )], while vocabulary practice through *Story Cubes* makes the lesson more interesting [*statement 19* ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = .95$ )]. Not having to face any score was very encouraging to them in order to speak fluently [*statement 18* ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ )]. The fact that there are no correct or wrong answers decreased their anxiety very much [*statement 17* ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = .97$ )] and they definitely want to play again [*statement 22* ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = .97$ )]. In terms of vocabulary memorization, they reported that they remember better the vocabulary used while playing the game *Story Cubes* [*statement 20* ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = .98$ )].

**Table 3**

#### *Evaluation of Story Cubes*

Statements	Mean	SD
1. <i>Story Cubes</i> game's design is simple and I didn't face any difficulties to understand how it's played	3.18	.82
2. Pictures on dice helped me speak	3.27	.89
3. The fact that there are no right or wrong answers decreased my stress for speaking	3.71	.97
4. The fact that in the game there is no score, encouraged me to speak	3.57	1.04
5. Practicing vocabulary playing the game <i>Story Cubes</i> makes the lesson more interesting	3.67	.95
6. I remember better the vocabulary used (by me, by my classmates or by my teacher) during the <i>Story Cubes</i> game	3.37	.98
7. <i>Story Cubes</i> game was ideal for my language level	3.59	.88
8. I want/look forward to play the game <i>Story Cubes</i> again	3.76	.97

### Students' Answers in the Open-ended Questions

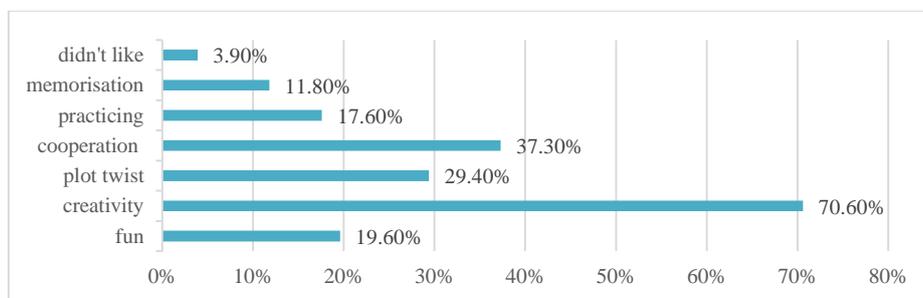
Additionally, students had to answer in two open-ended questions. The first question was what students like the most about the game *Story Cubes*, which intended to be complementary to their answer to the third research question and their answers described in *Figure 2*. The majority of them liked *Story Cubes* mostly because it is a creative game (70.6 %) and promotes cooperation in the class (37.3 %). The students enjoyed the fact that there was a common goal, creating a story all together, while every

time there was a plot twist at the end of the story (29.4 %). This creates a fun environment, which was mentioned by the students (19.60 %) and probably increases their excitement. Some students reported that they liked practicing speaking and recycling vocabulary through the game (17.6 %) (Rousoulioti et al., 2020a). Furthermore, some students mentioned that the short duration of the game was an advantage because they did not get bored, the images on the dice were very useful and helped them come up with ideas and/or continue the story. There was just a small percentage of the participants, 3.9%, who reported that they did not like the game.

In the second open-ended question, students were asked if they have ever played the game in face-to-face classes, and what was their opinion about it compared to the online version. Only a few students, 25.5 %, had played the game in their face-to-face classes. Half of them preferred it and the other half did not mention any differences between the online and the face-to-face version. For the rest, 74.5 %, it was their first experience playing this game. Due to the small number of students, further research is needed to confirm students' answers to this question.

**Figure 3**

*What Students Liked the Most in Story Cubes Game?*



#### **Data from Observation**

Most of the students played the game for the first time, so the teacher explained in detail how the game was conducted. The first impression was very positive. The students saw the game as a challenge for all of them to create a story together. They were curious to play, and the participation was really satisfactory. In all classes the game was played twice for two reasons: In the first place, the first round was to warm up and secondly, the classes were small and therefore there was enough time. The pictures on the dice were useful and helped students speak. It is interesting that many students did not use the image itself, but they created sentences based on what that image reminded them or what it symbolized. That shows that images or pictures trigger associations in students' minds (Van Amelsvoort, 2013; Zainuddin & Idrus, 2016), and the absence of strict rules allows self-expression and boosts rapid thinking (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018). Consequently, a defined thematic axis (*Travelling*, in the present paper) did not work as

expected. Students did not focus on the specific thematic and did not try to use the vocabulary based on trips. The game worked as a tool for self-expression and images sparked the students' imagination, which led them to create funny and surrealistic stories. In lower levels, where the students have limited vocabulary repertoire, they mainly tried to focus on specific vocabulary, something that is worth further research.

Students enjoyed it a lot and in general they were laughing with the flow of the story. They were excited with every new roll of the dice because nothing was predictable. Every student/storyteller was twisting the plot and the next in line felt like she or he had to be alert and ready to add something new to the story. Some difficulties that have arisen were the following: There were a few long pauses where students needed some extra time to think. All students were not in a mood to play, or they did not understand clearly the rules, so when it was their turn to speak, they interrupted the game for clarifications. Furthermore, some of them did not follow the first-person or third-person narrative, that was defined indirectly from the previous student-player. In these cases, the teacher had to intervene so the story could make sense. Storytellers did a few grammar mistakes, which were not important enough hinder/ to (negatively) impact the other storytellers or the story itself. Last but not least, in two classes there were some technical problems, such as weak internet connection and problems with sound, which distracted the students and they had to stop their narration. As a result, the flow of the story was interrupted, and they needed more time to complete the round of the game.

Teacher's feedback was an important factor for the outcome of the story. When the teacher made any grammar and vocabulary corrections the flow of the story was disrupted. Probably, it would be better if the teacher kept his/her own notes of the mistakes and gave his/her feedback when the game was over. Other times, when the teacher reacted in a positive way during the outcome of the story e.g., s/he smiled, s/he laughed, s/he made comments as "nice", "let's see what will happen now" etc., that was encouraging for the students, and it boosted their confidence.

## Discussion

RQ1: What are the perspectives of students about online education?

The current study reveals that, although most of the learners believe that online classes meet their learning needs, they still prefer face-to-face classes, as they feel that there is better interaction between them and their teacher. Face-to-face classes and the teacher's role in them could not be replaced by the on-line ones (Klimova, 2021).

The role of digital games in distance education is also important to create a pleasant learning environment, as it has been shown by this research. This could be counterbalanced by the usage of board games in the lesson, as they offer a highly interactive classroom environment (Gaşior, 2019) and a pleasant learning atmosphere. The level of stress when learning a foreign language remains the same between face-to-face courses and distance education during the pandemic (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021).

RQ2: What are the perspectives of students about the implementation of games in e-classes?

The motivation that students show almost each time they play educational games is the main reason for their adoption in the educational process (Caponetto et al., 2014). According to learners' perspectives of the implementation of games in e-classes, *Story Cubes* contributed to the learning process satisfactorily. First of all, students claimed that the game motivated them to participate more in the lesson and helped them to express themselves freely in speaking.

Additionally, they reported that this game promoted collaboration and eliminated their anxiety; factors that could be a reason for speaking difficulties (Hosni, 2014), which consequently throw a spanner in communication. Under these conditions, teaching based on the afore mentioned digital game can be considered successfully performed in terms of the three parameters according to Chik (2014) related to the educational suitability of a game: the success of educational - learning goals, the social interaction between students and the motivation of students to participate in the lesson.

Furthermore, the findings of the current study are in line with the claim that board games promote student-centered learning (Branch, 2009), enhance social and emotional development, and promote creativity. Through a (digital) game, a suitable ground is created for strategies such as cooperative learning and the task-based method (Gros, 2007; Shu & Liu, 2019). According to the above data, playful teaching includes elements/strategies, which improve both the performance and motivation of students (Chen et al., 2019).

RQ3: What are the perspectives of students about the effectiveness of the board game *Story Cubes* in speaking?

Board games can support students' effort to speak in a foreign language. Students thus have many opportunities to use the second language, as they interact and communicate (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). *Story Cubes*, a storytelling game, has been implemented in e-classes during the COVID-19 pandemic as a mean of recycling vocabulary and speaking. According to participants' answers, the game was an ideal choice for their language level. Regarding the benefits of the game, participants reported that they liked it because it has a simple design, it does not have strict rules and it promotes self-expression. Also, the pictures on the dice not only help them speak, but also inspire them to think in a different way, enhancing creativity and sparking their imagination. Supplementary to the questionnaire administrated to the students, data were collected through classroom observation to cross-check students' answers regarding the implementation of the game.

According to research findings, the game *Story Cubes* created positive atmosphere in the class and boosted team spirit. Students' performance in speaking has been enhanced. Thus, it can be concluded that students unconsciously learn by playing, while acting like this they confirm the theory of indirect knowledge acquisition after DGBLL (implicit learning) (Chik, 2014).

Students were eager to participate in the game, they worked together to narrate a common story and they enjoyed it. The above, confirms the research fact that students may experience feelings of satisfaction, pleasure (Chen et al., 2019; Nazarova & Galiullina, 2016; Rachels & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2017; Shu & Liu, 2019), greater motivation and attention, and particularly increased interest in the educational act (Caponetto et al., 2014; Chik, 2014) by playing digital games. This issue has also attracted the attention of educational researchers in recent years, as it is a common phenomenon for students to show reduced interest during teaching and to be provoked by feelings such as laziness or distraction.

Students' laziness is one of the major issues that concerns teachers during teaching. (Shu & Liu, 2019). However, by supporting teaching with activities that are entertaining like digital games, such feelings are alleviated, even eliminated, as students show a particularly high motivation to learn and participate in the lesson (Brom et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2008). In fact, the pleasure-satisfaction that accompanies such process is a primary motivation for learning (Shu & Liu, 2019), and as a result learning and practicing a second/foreign language often becomes unconscious (Chik, 2014).

In the research that support the implementation of games in teaching, the "flow" factor emerges as a fundamental factor that is also involved in playful teaching (Brom et al., 2014). "Flow" seems to be a state of "flow", in which the student loses the sense of time, shows feelings of joy and high commitment (Rachels & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2017; Shu & Liu, 2019).

In fact, the simultaneous use of games as a means of entertainment and education, can lead children to great autonomy (Chik, 2014). The autonomy that the student can feel is related to the degree of their goal setting, that is their intention to turn an otherwise entertaining process into a learning process, thus changing the free learning into a targeted one (Chik, 2014).

In addition, students are attracted to digital teaching materials, as it is more suited to their personal interests (Kirstavridou et al., 2020). The learning process is influenced by students' emotional - personal situation, so they need to change their role, from a passive receiver to an active co-creator of the lesson (Nazarova & Galiullina, 2016).

Storytelling belongs to productive activities that contribute more to the memorization of new vocabulary (Hulstijn & Trompetter, 1998) offering students the opportunity to practice and recycle the vocabulary, that they already know, in a creative way. Digital games as *Story Cubes* are a fertile ground for the development of collaborative learning (Gros, 2007; Shu & Liu, 2019). This opportunity enhances social interaction and collaboration between students. In addition, it can also help students who have difficulties in socializing and expressing their views in the classroom.

The students stated that *Story Cubes* helped them to some extent in practicing the already known vocabulary. However, further research is needed. According to Chik

(2014), who studied vocabulary learning through digital games, it is concluded that frequent users of such games show increased lexical performance, but in a more every day and frequent vocabulary, which is usually the basic language of digital games.

In order to transmit the learning skills and strategies through games to the students, it is of great importance for the teacher to guide them gradually, giving them the appropriate guidelines (Martin et al., 2019). This is confirmed by the relevant study of Chen et al. (2019), who concluded that students' repetitive efforts in the context of teaching based on digital games, were associated with the state of "flow", with the performance and finally with the learning outcomes presented by the students.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the education sector had to be transformed and strengthened with the use of technology in order the learning process to be continued unexpectedly, after the closure of educational institutions. Undoubtedly, there has been a shift from face-to-face to fully online synchronous and/or asynchronous training. In order to respond to this new situation from a technological point of view, it was necessary for students to have either a smart mobile device or a personal computer or an advanced mobile phone.

From a pedagogical point of view, it was important to continue to provide a high-quality education and to create learning environments that actively involve students to the learning process. In this context, digital board games make the learning process pleasant, playful, and unconscious to students. In addition, playful activities - including digital board games- help students develop motivation, as the learning becomes entertaining and motivate students to meet the demands of the game better and better. The aforementioned characteristics are very beneficial in the era of COVID-19, during which the replacement of face-to-face training by distance learning lasts for hours (Krouska et al., 2022).

Game-based teaching makes it possible to monitor students' progress in a non-invasive way. For example, the teacher can easily attend the language usage and not only the behavior of his/her students during the game and record their linguistic achievements. Several studies have dealt with the adoption of playful strategies in the learning process during COVID-19 and their correlation with students' motivation and the resulting learning outcomes (Nieto-Escamez & Roldán-Tapia, 2021). Teaching through playful activities is a relatively innovative strategy that is also attractive and effective for students. Through them learning can be achieved in a fun way. In relevant research, some students reported that videoconferencing in order to play educational games with each other helped them communicate with their classmates during periods of lockdown, fighting the feeling of social isolation (Nieto-Escamez & Roldán-Tapia, 2021).

The aforementioned hypothesis is reinforced by data collected during the lockdown, in Italy. From a psychological point of view, these data highlighted the role of digital technology in maintaining social relationships and combating the negative consequences of social distancing imposed to reduce the spread of COVID-19. In particular, according to research results, digital technologies and virtual encounters within their usage can develop a sense of social support, which is able to combat feelings of loneliness, boredom and irritability and cultivate a sense of belonging (Gabbiadini et al., 2020).

### Conclusion

Therefore, the use of a greater variety of media and learning resources is gradually emerging as a complementary tool for the teacher, aiming to reduce student passivity (Collis & Moonen, 2001; Nazarova & Galiullina, 2016), especially in emergencies but not only in them. From many studies (Caponetto et al., 2014; Chen, Law, Huang, 2019; Shu & Liu, 2019; Yang, Wu, Huang Chien, 2008), it is clear that when a teacher uses games and even supports teaching a foreign/second language by them, the results may be positive.

Without a doubt, digital games put the user at the center of the learning process (Nazarova & Galiullina, 2016), create challenges for him and consequently push him to develop problem-solving strategies (Gros, 2007). One of the most essential reasons for integrating games into the educational process is that in this way fertile ground is created for a deeper learning experience, to which the student is committed and develops a variety of skills (Shu & Liu, 2019).

Finally, since games involve the terms motivation and engagement, then they are also very likely to lead to learning by reinforcing it (Barnes et al., 2008). The performance in individual activities and a more complete understanding of content in a language different from the mother tongue are two of the dominant positive outcomes that have been proven to be associated with the parallel introduction of games in the lesson (Brom et al., 2014). In fact, here lies the difference between educational game in relation to games in general (Shu & Liu, 2019). It is pointed out, however, that the connection of digital games in a second language with the learning of structures outside the vocabulary (Chou, 2012; Sulistianingsih et. al., 2019) has not yet been sufficiently proven (Bush, 2015; Chik, 2014; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012).

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## **Pandemi Döneminde Çevrimiçi Yabancı Dil Eğitiminde Dijital Oyunların Konuşma Becerilerine Etkisi: Öğrencilerin Bakış Açıları**

### **Öz**

*Bu çalışma, dijital oyunların dil kurslarında konuşma gelişimi ve etkileri üzerine devam eden tartışmayı detaylandırmaktadır. Bu araştırma, COVID-19 pandemi döneminde İstanbul/Türkiye’de yabancı dil olarak Yunanca öğrenen 51 yetişkin öğrenci üzerinde yapılmış olup, uzaktan eğitim derslerindeki dijital oyunların yabancı dilde konuşma gelişimini ele almaktadır. Sonuçlar: Çevrimiçi dersler yetişkinlerin öğrenme ihtiyaçlarını karşılamaktadır, ancak yine de geleneksel olanlar tercih edilmektedir. Story Cubes oyununun dijital versiyonunun öğrencileri derse daha fazla katılmaya, sınıf arkadaşlarıyla ortak çalışma yapmaya ve kendilerini ifade etmeye motive ettiğini gösteriyor. Sözü edilen oyun sınıfta olumlu bir hava yaratmış ve nihayetinde öğrencilerin konuşmalarına olumlu etki yapmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dijital oyun, konuşma dersi, dijital öykü, hikaye küpleri, Yunanca yabancı dil

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Anket

##### Cinsiyetiniz:

Kadın	Erkek
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##### Yaşınız:

18-28	
29-39	
40-50	
51-61	
62 ve üzeri	

##### Yunanca'da hangi seviyedesiniz?

A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
----	----	----	----	----	----

Aşağıdaki soruları kendinize en uygun seçeneğe göre işaretleyiniz

	hiç	az	yeterince	çok	çok fazla
<i>Online dersler</i>					
1. Pandemiden önce online derslere aşınaydım.					
2. Yüz yüze derslere göre online dersleri tercih ediyorum.					
3. Online derslerde derse daha çok katılıyorum.					
4. Online derslerde kendimi stresli hissediyorum.					
5. Online derslerde öğretmenle etkileşim yüz yüze derslere göre daha fazladır.					
6. Uzaktan eğitim, ders ile ilgili ihtiyaçlarımı karşılıyor.					
7. Derslerin gerçekleştiği platformlardan memnunum.					
<i>Derste oyun</i>					
8. Derste sık sık oyun oynarız.					
9. Derste oyun oynadığımız zaman çok keyif alıyorum.					
10. Derste oyun oynadığımız zaman sınıf arkadaşlarımla daha iyi çalıştığımızı düşünüyorum.					
11. Derste oyun oynadığımız zaman oyuna katılma motivasyonum artıyor.					
12. Kelimeleri pratik yapmak için; alıştırmaları çözmektense oyun oynamayı tercih ederim					

13. Konuşma pratiği yapmak için oyunların faydalı olduğunu düşünüyorum.					
14. Sınıfta oyun oynadığımızda daha rahat hissediyorum ve konuşmaktan çekinmiyorum.					
<i>Story Cubes oyunu</i>					
15. Story Cubes oyunu basitti ve beni zorlamadı.					
16. Story Cubes oyununda resimleri kullanmak konuşmama yardımcı oldu					
17. Story Cubes oyununda doğru ve yanlışın olmaması stresimi azalttı.					
18. Story Cubes oyununda oyunun puansız olması beni konuşmaya teşvik etti.					
19. Story Cubes oyunu aracılığıyla kelime alıştırmayı yapmak dersi daha ilginç hale getirir.					
20. Story Cubes oyunu sırasında (benim tarafımdan, sınıf arkadaşlarım veya öğretmen tarafından) kullanılan kelimeleri daha iyi hatırlıyorum.					
21. Story Cubes oyunu seviyem için idealdi.					
22. Bir daha Story Cubes oynamayı isterim.					

23. Story Cubes oyunuyla ilgili en çok neyi sevdiğinizi kısaca yazabilir misiniz?
24. Story Cubes oyununu yüz yüze derslerinize oynamış mıydınız? Yüz yüze dersle kıyaslayınca nasıldı?

**Appendix 2**  
**Έντυπο παρατήρησης**

**ΦΥΛΟ:** Άντρας  Γυναίκα   
**ΗΛΙΚΙΑ:** .....

- **ΣΠΟΥΔΕΣ**

Κάτοχος πανεπιστημιακού τίτλου

Κάτοχος μεταπτυχιακού

Κάτοχος διδακτορικού

- **Επιμορφώσεις σχετικά με τη διδασκαλία της ελληνικής ως δεύτερης/ξένης γλώσσας.**

- **Χρόνια διδασκαλίας ελληνικής ως δεύτερης/ξένης γλώσσας: .....**

Ζητούμενα	Παρατηρήσεις
Πλεονεκτήματα του παιχνιδιού όσον αφορά  Α) τη συμμετοχή Β) την ψυχολογία των μαθητών Γ) τα μαθησιακά αποτελέσματα (χρήση αναμενόμενου λεξιλογίου κλπ.)	..... ..... ..... .....
Δυσκολίες που παρουσιάστηκαν κατά την εφαρμογή του παιχνιδιού	1. 2. 3.

Χρειάστηκε περισσότερος ή λιγότερος χρόνο για την ολοκλήρωση του παιχνιδιού; Γιατί;	Ναι (πόσος χρόνος χρειάστηκε).....  Όχι,..... .....
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