

Effectiveness of Gamification Elements in English Language Classrooms for Anxiety Reduction

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Abstract

This research investigates the perspectives of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers working in secondary schools about the incorporation of gamification aspects into English language classes. Through qualitative interviews, the research investigates the experiences, problems, and perceived benefits that are related with gamification from the perspective of instructional professionals. According to the findings, there was a good influence placed on student involvement, motivation, and anxiety reduction, which is consistent with the findings of earlier study. However, problems like as technological limitations and the need for a balanced approach highlight the significance of continued assistance for educators. According to the findings of the study, there is a wide range of perspectives held by educators, which underscores the need of customizing instructional methods. The findings provide recommendations for improving the incorporation of gamification in ESL instruction, including focused professional development, collaborative platforms for knowledge exchange, and a flexible, adaptable approach to accommodating varied classroom dynamics.

Keywords: Gamification, ESL Learners, Student Engagement, Motivation, Anxiety Reduction, Speaking Anxiety, Challenges.

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1. Introduction

The English language, which is sometimes referred to be the lingua franca of the world, is extremely important in many different aspects of life (Malik & Pervaiz, 2023). According to Huang and Flores (2018), its relevance extends beyond language borders, leaving an everlasting imprint on fields such as education, business, and worldwide communication. Given the fact that English is the language of diplomacy, science, and technology, the ability to communicate effectively in English is of the utmost importance in our modern, complicated world (Akram et al., 2021). As a means of keeping up with the most recent developments in their respective industries, individuals must have a strong command of this language. When analyzing Pakistan's educational environment, Akram (2020) and Akram and Yang (2021) argue that policies and practices have

far-reaching repercussions. These findings highlight the importance of inclusive approaches that include students with domain-specific English proficiency (Azar & Tanggaraju, 2020), technology-driven learning (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023), student interests (Khanam et al., 2022), and learning satisfaction (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022).

In the context of education, particularly at the university level, the importance of English is emphasized to a particularly prominent degree. According to Zhang and Tsung (2021), English is the language of choice for a wide variety of academic endeavors, including research and projects that involve collaboration. In addition to making it easier to communicate effectively, having a strong command of the language enables one to have access to a treasure trove of knowledge and opportunities. A student's educational path is inextricably linked to their proficiency in English, which serves as the medium through which major educational discourse occurs (Panhwar & Bell, 2023).

Conversely, the path to English competency is not always easy, particularly for individuals learning English as a second language (ESL). According to Tercan and Dikilitaş (2015), ESL students in Pakistan's higher education institutions typically face a particular challenge known as speaking anxiety. According to Chen and Hwang's research from 2020, this syndrome, which is marked by worry and fear while speaking English, can have a major influence on academic performance as well as the learning process. Teachers and organizations seeking to provide an equitable and supportive learning environment for ESL students must have a thorough awareness of the elements that contribute to Speaking Anxiety. When it comes to reducing pupils' nervousness about public speaking, teachers have a variety of options at their disposal.

In recent years, a unique and creative method to English language instruction has acquired substantial traction: incorporating gamification components into regular classes (Kıyançık & Levent, 2022). Gamification is the process of introducing game-like aspects and ideas to non-game environments in order to improve engagement, motivation, and learning results. When used in English language schools, this strategy has demonstrated promising outcomes in creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment (Rahmani, 2020).

By capitalizing on the intrinsic attractiveness of games, gamification is able to capitalize on the natural human tendency to compete, succeed, and be rewarded. Educators have the ability to convert ordinary language classes into exciting experiences by incorporating components such as points, levels, challenges, and incentives into the learning process (Huseinović, 2024). This technique is especially essential in the context of English language instruction, where retaining student interest and involvement is sometimes difficult.

According to Panmei and Waluyo (2022), one of the most significant advantages of incorporating gamification into English language courses is the augmentation of how motivated students are to learn. When it comes to maintaining students' attention over an extended period of time, traditional techniques of language acquisition may not always be successful. Gamification adds an element of fun and excitement to the learning process, making it more pleasurable and hence motivating for students (Kaya & Sagnak, 2022). The competitive feature, in which students may gain points or reach different levels based on their language skills, fosters a sense of success and encourages continuous participation.

Furthermore, gamification allows for more individualized learning experiences. Each student works at their own speed, taking on challenges that are appropriate for their present level of language competence. Learners are guaranteed to receive education and practice that is specifically tailored to their unique requirements and shortcomings via the utilization of this specialized

technique. Adaptability is especially important in diverse classrooms with pupils of different language competency levels (Fernández-Portero & Castillo-Rodríguez, 2022).

By using gamification, one may also improve their ability to work together and communicate effectively. According to Perez and Masegosa (2022), a significant number of games that are created for educational purposes include collaborative components, which encourage students to work together in order to accomplish shared objectives. This not only promotes a feeling of community in the classroom, but also improves students' capacity to communicate effectively in English as they work together on language-related activities and obstacles.

Furthermore, gamification's instant feedback loop has the potential to speed language acquisition. Students receive fast feedback on their performance, allowing them to quickly detect and correct faults (Wang, 2023). This approach for providing fast feedback is essential for resolving misunderstandings in real time and ensuring that accurate language usage is continuously reinforced.

Gamification has gained widespread acceptance in a variety of sectors, but its use in language instruction, particularly in the sphere of anxiety reduction, shows great potential and deserves additional investigation. The possible influence of gamification on anxiety reduction in language learners may provide significant insights that add to the continuing discussion of successful pedagogical practices, particularly from the perspective of instructors. As a result, this project attempts to address the following research questions:

1. How do secondary school ESL instructors view the usefulness of incorporating gamification aspects into English language lessons to reduce student anxiety?
2. What specific insights do secondary school ESL instructors provide on the obstacles and advantages of implementing gamification tactics in English language teaching, particularly in terms of anxiety reduction?

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the introduction of gamification components into educational settings has gained traction as a viable solution to a variety of language learning issues, including anxiety. This literature review goes into prior research to offer a full overview of the success of gamification in ESL classes, eliciting feedback from educators and putting light on both the obstacles and benefits of this unique method.

Gamification is an educational method that uses game-like aspects in non-game environments to increase engagement and motivation (Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli, 2021). It is based on game design concepts. One of the most noteworthy instances of this new approach is the research that was carried out by Saleem et al. (2022). This technique has received a lot of attention and has been investigated in a considerable number of studies. Gamification transforms standard educational settings into interactive places that capture students' attention, resulting in a more engaging and pleasurable learning experience (Huseinović, 2024).

In its most fundamental form, gamification looks to the inherent attractiveness of games as a source of inspiration. It does this by utilizing components like as points, levels, challenges, and rewards. Educators want to capitalize on the intrinsic human desire for competitiveness, accomplishment, and advancement by incorporating these elements into instructional activities (Pujolà & Appel, 2020). The final result is a learning environment that goes beyond the traditional, often boring, approach to education, providing students with a more appealing and inspiring path to acquire information and skills (Perez & Masegosa, 2022). Ramzan et al. (2020) have described the power of mass as influencing our lives directly or indirectly. Ramzan et al. (2023) have claimed that

technology and the internet have enhanced the dominance of the English language in this digital age.

Studies, like those done by Rivera and Garden (2021), have repeatedly shown that gamification improves student engagement. The introduction of game-like features makes the learning process more entertaining, resulting in increased engagement and interaction. Gamification's competitive components, such as earning points, unlocking levels, or receiving rewards, provide excitement and challenge, stimulating students' intrinsic incentive to achieve (Kaya & Sagnak, 2022). Ramzan et al. (2023) have confirmed there are not any significant statistical differences among ESL motivational gender levels but Chen and Ramzan (2024) have further stated that Facebook posts about learning English as a second language (L2) provide primary motivation for learners and promote their performance that is another way of online learning. Ramzan et al. (2023) have claimed that modern digital classrooms are platforms for the continuous endeavor of worldwide educators to boost up motivation

Furthermore, gamification has proven beneficial in meeting students' different learning styles and preferences. Gamified learning's dynamic and adjustable nature enables a tailored strategy that addresses individual strengths and shortcomings (Bouchrika et al., 2021). This adaptability is especially essential in today's educational scene, when classrooms are frequently populated by a varied range of students with various demands and learning speeds.

According to Rahmani (2020), gamification has demonstrated potential in the field of language instruction, particularly with regard to the enhancement of language learning and skill development. Language acquisition, which is sometimes seen as difficult and anxiety-inducing, benefits from the lighthearted and encouraging environment provided by gamified techniques. The use of language-related tasks, quizzes, and interactive games not only reinforces linguistic ideas but also alleviates the anxiety associated with traditional language training (Redjeki and Muhajir, 2021).

Furthermore, gamification's built-in real-time feedback loop is critical to the learning process. Students receive rapid feedback on their performance, allowing them to quickly fix faults and reinforce proper language usage (Amin, 2021). This quick feedback system not only speeds the learning curve, but it also helps to reduce anxiety by giving learners confidence in their skills through actual, verifiable progress (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023).

This problem becomes especially obvious for students who are learning a second language (Akram et al., 2019). Anxiety is a persistent obstacle in the area of learning (Bhutto et al., 2019), and it manifests itself in a variety of ways. The multidimensional nature of language acquisition, along with the dread of making mistakes and the pressure to perform well, frequently causes increased anxiety among ESL students (Horwitz, 2010). In response to this common worry, research such as those undertaken by Dörnyei (2020) have looked into the possibilities of gamification as a unique technique for reducing anxiety and establishing a better learning environment.

Adding aspects that are similar to games to situations that are not games in order to increase engagement and motivation is the core concept behind gamification. This strategy has shown potential in reducing the stress associated with learning a new language, particularly among ESL students (Vallejo Balduque, 2018). Gamification's interactive and pleasurable nature instills a sense of humor in language training, producing an environment that counteracts the anxiety commonly associated with traditional learning approaches.

Gamification is a unique method for lowering anxiety by changing the dynamics of language acquisition (Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Traditional language classes can unintentionally increase stress, particularly for ESL students who are already dealing with the difficulties of adjusting to a

new linguistic and cultural setting. The addition of game-like aspects, as investigated by Edwards (2022), is a break from traditional teaching approaches, providing a more interesting and less intimidating platform for language acquisition.

Because of the participatory nature of gamification, English as a Second Language (ESL) students are able to engage in language tasks in a manner that is not scary to them. Language-related challenges, quizzes, and interactive activities are presented as fun games, allowing students to engage without fear of being judged or facing negative consequences (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). The transition from a learning environment that is high-pressure to one that is more relaxed and fun is a key contributor to the reduction of anxiety levels. Additionally, the competitive components of gamification may be utilized in a constructive manner to inspire students who are learning English as a second language. According to Perez and Masegosa (2022), the aspect of rivalry is changed into a source of encouragement and success, rather than a cause of stress. Points, incentives, and level progression all serve as success indicators, instilling a sense of achievement and boosting learners' confidence in their language abilities.

To summarize, by providing an interactive and entertaining environment, gamification not only makes language acquisition more engaging, but it also acts as a strong technique for reducing the tension and anxiety associated with learning a new language. As instructors look for new ways to improve language instruction, the use of gamification stands out as a viable option for establishing a happy and supportive learning environment for ESL students.

3. Research Method

A qualitative study technique was used to gather in-depth insights into the viewpoints of 26 secondary school ESL teachers in Lahore on the use of gamification components in their courses. The qualitative technique, notably semi-structured interviews, enabled a thorough study of individual gamification experiences, perspectives, and practices (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). This study included 26 secondary school ESL instructors who were purposefully chosen from a variety of educational institutions. The inclusion criterion centered on instructors who have previously employed gamification components in their English language lessons. The selection process ensured a diverse range of teaching backgrounds, experience levels, and opinions.

4. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the major data gathering strategy. These interviews provided a flexible platform for participants to express themselves while also exploring significant gamification-related concepts. The interview questions were aimed to elicit thorough replies on instructors' experiences, obstacles, and perceived advantages from gamifying their ESL courses. The interview methodology included open-ended questions meant to collect complete data. The technique allows for probing follow-up questions to probe further into individual replies and elicit nuanced data.

5. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to find patterns, themes, and similarities in the obtained data. The analytical procedure included rigorous coding of interview transcripts to categorize replies, which aided in the discovery of common themes. This inductive technique sought to capture the breadth and diversity of teachers' views on gamification.

6. Ethical considerations

The research followed ethical guidelines, preserving the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Each participant provided informed permission, stressing their ability to withdraw from the research at any stage. All data was securely saved, and participants were given pseudonyms to safeguard their identities while reporting.

7. Validity and reliability.

To improve the study's validity, data sources were triangulated by comparing interview findings to relevant literature (Dockrell, 2004). Furthermore, member checking, in which participants examined and approved the interpretation of their replies, helped to ensure the study's trustworthiness.

8. Results

The semi-structured interviews with 26 secondary school ESL instructors yielded a detailed picture of their experiences, obstacles, and perceived benefits related with incorporating gamification components into their classes.

8.1.Positive Teacher Experiences

The majority of teachers reported excellent experiences using gamification in ESL instruction. They stated that gamified components, such as point systems and interactive challenges, helped to increase student engagement. Teachers reported that incorporating game-like characteristics created a more dynamic and entertaining learning environment. Some of the participants mentioned that:

"I introduced a points system for participation, and the students loved it. Suddenly, even the shy ones were eager to contribute, and it completely transformed the class dynamic."

"I used interactive challenges as a review before exams. The excitement in the room was palpable, and it turned what could have been a mundane review session into a lively learning experience."

8.2.Enhanced Student Motivation

One of the most common topics that emerged from the interviews was the favorable influence of gamification on student motivation. Teachers observed improved student excitement, indicating better levels of involvement in class activities and a greater readiness to take on language-learning obstacles. A few participants said:

"Students started volunteering for activities without hesitation. It was like they were competing against themselves to earn more points, and it significantly boosted their motivation to participate actively."

"I noticed a shift in their attitudes. Instead of viewing language learning as a chore, they saw it as a game, and that made all the difference in their level of engagement."

8.3.Effective Anxiety Reduction Strategies

Several teachers praised gamification's ability to reduce anxiety among ESL pupils. Gamified features were seen as useful tools for fostering a helpful and low-pressure learning environment. Gamification exercises were shown to be very effective in reducing language-learning anxiety because they are both competitive and collaborative. Some of the participants mentioned that:

"The friendly competition created a supportive environment. Students were more willing to take risks in their language use without the fear of judgment, fostering a sense of camaraderie."

"The gamified activities acted as icebreakers. It was heartening to see students who were initially reserved open up during these interactive sessions."

8.4.Challenges in Implementation

Despite their favorable experiences, teachers discussed the limitations of implementing gamification tactics. Technical challenges, scheduling limits, and the need for extra resources were frequently mentioned as obstacles. Some lecturers underlined the need of achieving a balance between the enjoyable parts of gamification and academic rigor. A few participants said:

"Technical issues were a hurdle. Not all students had access to the same devices, and it sometimes disrupted the flow of the activities."

"Balancing the fun elements with the curriculum was tricky. I wanted to ensure they were learning while enjoying the gamified aspects, and finding that equilibrium was a continuous challenge."

8.5.Diverse Perceptions on Effectiveness

The interviews revealed a range of perspectives on the usefulness of gamification. While some teachers were confident in its favorable influence, others expressed misgivings and mistrust. These opposing viewpoints were influenced by differences in teaching approaches and class dynamics. Some of the participants mentioned that:

"Every class is different, and what works for one may not work for another. It depends on the students' preferences and the teacher's adaptability to different teaching styles."

"Some colleagues prefer more traditional methods. They believe in a structured approach, and the idea of incorporating game-like elements doesn't resonate with everyone."

8.6.Desire for Professional Development

A major result was the expressed need for professional development possibilities in gamification. Teachers emphasized the importance of training sessions to help them improve their ability to properly integrate gamified aspects into their ESL program. A few participants said:

"Training sessions could provide us with more strategies and ideas. I'd love to learn from others who have successfully integrated gamification into their teaching methods."

"It's about staying updated. Gamification is evolving, and having access to workshops or resources would definitely help us refine our approach and keep it fresh for the students."

Overall, the results indicated that gamification holds promise as an engaging and motivational tool in secondary school ESL classrooms. However, the challenges identified underscored the importance of providing teachers with the necessary support and resources to optimize the implementation of gamification strategies in language education. The diverse range of perspectives also suggests that individualized approaches may be key in successfully integrating gamified elements into ESL classrooms.

9. Discussion

Our findings are consistent with and contribute to a growing body of research on the inclusion of gamification aspects in ESL classes.

Our findings support earlier research, which shows that gamification improves student engagement and motivation (Rivera & Garden, 2021). The incorporation of points systems and interactive challenges created a dynamic and entertaining learning environment, consistent with research showing that gamified components increase student involvement and excitement (Bouchrika et al., 2021).

Our findings are consistent with current evidence (Vallejo Balduque, 2018), indicating that gamification is an effective method for lowering anxiety among ESL students. Gamified exercises offer a supportive and low-pressure setting, which aligns with earlier research highlighting gamification's potential for reducing language-learning anxiety (Zhang & Chen, 2021).

Challenges noted by instructors in our study, such as technological challenges and the requirement for a mix of fun and academic rigor, are consistent with earlier studies (Akram et al., 2021). The requirement for professional development and training sessions, as mentioned by teachers in our study, is consistent with suggestions in the literature for assisting educators in overcoming implementation issues.

Our findings are consistent with the varied range of views revealed in prior study (Gul et al., 2021). While some teachers are certain that gamification will have a good influence, others are skeptical. This variation emphasizes the significance of understanding diverse teaching styles and tailoring gamification tactics to the specific dynamics of each classroom.

Professional development for teachers is critical in improving their pedagogical efficacy (Akram et al., 2022). The indicated need for professional development among instructors in our survey is consistent with the literature, which highlights the importance of continual training to improve teachers' ability to integrate gamification effectively (Prabjandee, 2020). This is consistent with recommendations for providing educators with tools and assistance to improve the adoption of gamification tactics in language instruction (Paesani, 2020).

Future research can expand on the insights gained from this study and the current literature by investigating new routes. Longitudinal studies are required to investigate the long-term influence of gamification on language competence and retention, since they provide a more complete picture of its long-term consequences. Cross-cultural study is critical for understanding how cultural variables impact the success of gamification in ESL classes, given the various educational environments. Comparative studies allow for the evaluation and comparison of the efficacy of various gamification tactics, offering significant insights into best practices for adoption in language instruction. Furthermore, the emphasis on teacher training programs becomes critical, indicating the need to design and evaluate professional development initiatives tailored to improve teachers' proficiency in effectively integrating gamified elements, thereby ensuring successful implementation and maximising the benefits of gamification in language learning environments.

10. Conclusions

This research offers a detailed investigation into the viewpoints of English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors working in secondary schools on the incorporation of gamification aspects into their courses. The beneficial impact on student engagement, motivation, and anxiety reduction is consistent with the findings of earlier research, which highlights the potential of gamification to improve the experiences of language learners. On the other hand, the difficulties that have been noted, such as the necessity for a balanced approach and the presence of technological obstacles, highlight the need of providing educators with continuing support and professional development opportunities. Because of the wide variety of perspectives, it is essential to take a customized strategy, taking into account the fact that what is successful in one setting might not be appropriate in other similar situations. While we are navigating the gamified landscape of English as a Second Language (ESL) education, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the incorporation of game-like features in a strategic manner, in conjunction with focused training for instructors, offers the potential to create language classrooms that are more dynamic and inclusive.

11. Suggestions for Future Implementation

For the purpose of enhancing the incorporation of gamification in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, educational institutions and policymakers should take into consideration the following proposals. To begin, making an investment in comprehensive professional development programs that are specifically designed to meet the requirements of English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors will provide them with the ability to effectively traverse the hurdles that are connected with gamification. A second benefit of providing a collaborative environment for educators to exchange best practices and success stories is that it may contribute to a collective learning experience, which in turn promotes the ongoing refining of gamification tactics. Last but not least, acknowledgement of the many points of view about gamification and encouragement of an approach that is flexible and adaptable will make it easier to create inclusive learning

environments that are tailored to the specific dynamics of each English as a Second Language classroom. By putting these recommendations into action, educators and other stakeholders will be able to fully use the potential of gamification, which will ultimately result in the creation of environments that are more stimulating and encouraging for language acquisition.

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