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Article

The Impact of Gamification on ESL Learning: Enhancing Student Motivation, Engagement, and Learning Outcomes Through Digital Tools

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Abstract

ESL learners always face challenges while learning, and to overcome them, teachers develop different strategies. Nowadays, the integration of gamification into ESL teaching has gained significant attention because it enables teachers to enhance learners' motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. However, there is a paucity of research on gamification in ESL learning. Therefore, this systematic review aimed to explore the influence of gamification on ESL learning. Moreover, it aimed to highlight its impact on learners' motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. This research has reviewed gamified strategies that utilize interactive mechanisms, including Duolingo, Class Craft, and Kahoot, as they effectively integrate with theoretical frameworks and empirical data collection methods. Results highlighted that prize rewards, progress tracking, and challenging gamification activities can lead to increased student engagement and improved knowledge retention. Different aspects of teacher training, as well as cultural traditions and access to systems, affect the impact of gamification techniques. Moreover, the findings indicated that team-centered approaches are more effective in cultural settings with a collective orientation than in those with an individual, competitive orientation. Sustainable implementation of such a program requires teacher education, and it absolutely needs the backing of the institution. The digital divide in rural areas restricts the use of gamification tools, as these communities often have unequal access to education and technology. Furthermore, this systematic review highlighted that ESL education can experience significant improvements through the use of gaming strategies, provided teachers and policymakers offer support during its careful implementation.

Keywords

Gamification, ESL Learning, Student Motivation, Engagement Strategies, Digital Tools, Cultural Adaptation.

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Introduction

ESL education has become essential in educational institutions in the Middle East due to its widespread use in business operations, international schooling, and communication roles. Students lost their motivation and engagement due to the former traditional ESL teaching techniques. Student participation in language collection receives attention through gaming elements in learning approaches known as gamification, which shows potential effectiveness. The concept of gamification in education is supported by self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that autonomy and competence are fundamental elements influencing motivation. Numerous prior studies have demonstrated that game-based learning benefits students, resulting in improved memory retention and increased engagement (Qadri Tayeh & Malkawi, 2024). Competitive and reward-based learning strategies have a positive impact on students' behavior. The latest technological upgradation and the ability of technical tools have made it possible for gamification tools, such as Kahoot, Classcraft, and Duolingo, to expand their suite of interactive experiences. However, the previous literature lacks sufficient understanding of how various gamification strategies influence students' teaching practices in ESL education across Middle Eastern classrooms. Highlighted that there is a dearth of information about the long-term effects of language acquisition using engaging approaches. Moreover, they demonstrated that many teachers have studied perceptions of gamification, despite some teachers encountering difficulties in integrating gaming-based elements due to technical and institutional barriers. Therefore, it is essential not to remove cultural aspects that play a crucial role in this educational approach, which is the case with gamified learning methods. Middle Eastern students prefer cooperative learning methods to competitive approaches because ranking systems do not always function as favourable motivators (Almufareh, 2021). Cultural elements should be thoroughly understood when creating game-based methods that cater to the needs of each classroom. Thus, this systematic review has not only focused on the influence of gamification on ESL classroom teaching, but it has also determined how cultural elements/factors affect the implementation of gamification techniques in educational settings. The research has focused on the following objectives:

1. To highlight the influence of gamification on students' participation in English as a Second Language classes.
2. To explore how the gamification technique affects language learning.
3. To evaluate the teacher's perspective on using gamified learning and investigate potential barriers to its implementation.
4. To determine the cultural elements that affect the achievements of gamification techniques in educational settings.
5. To highlight the role of gamification techniques for ESL classrooms on learners' motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes.

The systematic review has examined prior research on gamification and ESL education in the Middle East context. It has combined existing research to gain deeper insights into how gamification affects student involvement, motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. Furthermore, this review has investigated practical gamification approaches teachers must use to enhance and improve ESL teaching methods (Antonaci, Klemke, & Specht, 2019).

The Significance of the Study

The systematic review has provided different practical applications for teachers and decision-makers. Moreover, it has guided researchers in developing effective learning strategies for ESL learners. Furthermore, it has helped ESL instructors gain different insights into implementing gamification in their curricula, leading to the development of interactive and engaging educational spaces. The review has provided valuable information to politicians responsible for developing educational policies that support creative teaching methods. Furthermore, the research enables researchers to identify necessary areas for exploration, as it demonstrates long-term effect assessments and cultural considerations in Middle Eastern ESL student classrooms (See Figure 1).



Figure 1: *Gamification Impact on ESL Learning in Middle Eastern Classrooms.*

Literature Review

Overview of Gamification in ESL Education

Gamification is an important educational strategy that enhances the interest of ESL students in their learning environment. Therefore, many teachers/instructors use gamification elements, including point scores, top lists, storytelling, and rewards, to develop a conducive learning environment and motivate learners (Baiden et al., 2022). compared gamified learning with traditional learning and highlighted that students who learn through the gamified form of education have a strong motivation, possess a higher memory retention rate, and can acquire a strong vocabulary. The latest and most commonly used gamification platforms, including Kahoot, Duolingo, and Quizlet, have become standard tools in ESL education because numerous studies have verified their effectiveness in enhancing learning capabilities (Barata et al., 2013). Many studies have reported the significance of gamification, but most have highlighted that its results vary according to the nature of the students. The success of gamification in English Second Language classrooms is associated with various cultural elements and learners' information processing and technological capabilities (Bavelier & Green, 2019). highlighted that the gamification approach is more applicable and enhances students' performance than traditional scoring methods. However, teachers aiming to use gamification in their classrooms must examine the cultural factors, as they influence the effectiveness of game-based approaches when teaching students from diverse backgrounds.

Theoretical framework that supports Gamification

Many psychological theories and educational principles have supported the use of gamification techniques and practices, as well as their role in learning. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that human motivation is influenced by three fundamental factors: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Autonomy shows the competence and relation in social activities that support students' continued interest in learning English as a Second Language. The Gamification features, such as tracking progress, rewarding for achievements, and peer involvement, effectively engage students (Al-Sabbagh, 2023). presented the Flow Theory, which postulates that mental absorption in an activity is a psychological state. Moreover, it contends that students' focus, engagement, and motivation are associated with their capabilities to accept the challenge and accomplish the assigned task. Through gamified learning systems, students experience the "flow" state, which is facilitated by instant feedback provided by the platforms as they establish achievable milestones and enhance performance outcomes (Chan & Lo, 2024). Behaviourist Learning Theory (BLT) is related to gamification. It contends that positive reinforcement establishes a clear pattern, which students will dismiss unless they produce positive outcomes. Marks, points, and performance levels encourage students to participate wholeheartedly in the academic content (Wiggins, 2016). The theoretical perspectives identified by gamification enhance students' motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes.

Gamification Tools and their impact on ESL learning

Gamification is supported by many digital tools that have different applications and advantages. First, the real-time interactive learning platform “Kahoot” is a quiz-based gaming platform that offers students various quizzes. Demonstrated that students who use Kahoot and frequently solve quizzes are more committed to learning vocabulary than students who prefer conventional learning methods. Second, Duolingo is a language education platform that serves as an assessment tool, rewarding learners with points and facilitating progress through levels. The rewards and level progression motivate the learners and enhance their engagement (Anak Yunus & Hua, 2021). Third, ClassCraft is a well-known platform that functions as a role-playing game, focusing on classroom management through team challenges. Many studies have reported that it significantly influences the students’ motivation and develops team spirit (Huseinović, 2024). mentioned that ClassCraft creates a classroom space that supports teamwork and minimizes student anxiety. Fourth, Quizlet is another learning platform that provides students with flashcard technology, enabling independent learning through gamified tests that help reinforce language concepts. All these tools are equally important in enhancing students’ engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes (See Table 1). However, teachers must be aware of the potential risks associated with their use. Moreover, many studies have highlighted that excessive addiction to reward-based tools leads students toward shallow learning behavior instead of deep language concept acquisition. However, the reward-based system may not enhance the learning abilities of some students. Therefore, it is essential to utilize personalized gamification methods tailored to the nature and capabilities of students (Zhang & Hasim, 2023).

Table 1: Overview of Gamification Tools and Their Impact on ESL Learning.

Tool	Description	Primary Impact	Challenges/Risks
<i>Kahoot</i>	Quiz-based platform with real-time interaction	Enhances vocabulary retention and learner engagement (Kim & Castelli, 2021)	May encourage surface learning if overused for memorization
<i>Duolingo</i>	Language learning app with a point-based reward system and level progression	Boosts engagement and motivation (Hung, 2018)	Risk of focusing on rewards over deep comprehension
<i>ClassCraft</i>	Role-playing is a classroom management tool with team-based challenges	Promotes teamwork, reduces anxiety, and increases motivation (Su & Cheng, 2015)	May be complex to manage; requires tech-savvy teachers
<i>Quizlet</i>	Flashcard-based study tool with gamified test modes	Supports independent learning and concept reinforcement	May limit collaborative interaction and deeper context understanding

Challenges and limitations in Gamification in ESL education

The gamification technique can bring about revolutions in teaching ESL, but it is not commonly used due to the challenges and obstacles associated with its implementation. The primary challenge is the lack of training for teachers in developing gamified instructional methods. Highlighted that teachers should not blend gamified aspects into conventional teaching content because gamification approaches have their own instructional goals. A practical implementation of gamification requires proper training to prevent teachers from using ineffective strategies that may harm students. The effectiveness of the gamification experience mainly depends on the cultural factors. The motivation levels of learners differ depending on their background; some learners are motivated by competing learning structures such as rankings and top lists. However, students from collectivist cultures oppose these structures and prefer team-based challenges and peer training activities that utilize gamification (Zhang & Hasim, 2023). In this dynamic era of competition, computers have become a necessity for learners, and every learner must have access to a computer system and the internet. However, many educational institutions still lack access to a digital infrastructure that enables the integration of gamification programs, especially in areas with limited internet connections and technological constraints. Digital discrepancies between different schools lead to learning inequality, as students in equipped facilities receive gamified benefits, while those in resource-deprived environments struggle to use tech-dependent educational tools (Chan & Lo, 2024).

Before implementing gamification in teaching, it is essential to engage students with it. However, many studies have reported that students do not prefer such techniques due to a lack of technological knowledge, or some students are attracted to gamification only for a limited duration. Nowadays, the interest of students in gamified education is decreasing. Therefore, teachers must utilize the latest gamification tools and update traditional gaming methods to retain students' interest in their work and enable them to learn the techniques for coping with challenges. Gamification can have several benefits for learners and teachers, but it's not the only solution to motivate teachers. Figure 2 highlights challenges that students face with Kahoot quizzes to develop better vocabulary knowledge and become more committed than those who use regular learning methods. Teachers can develop a conducive, gamified educational environment by addressing challenges while teaching students from diverse backgrounds (Zahra & Alqurashi, 2024).

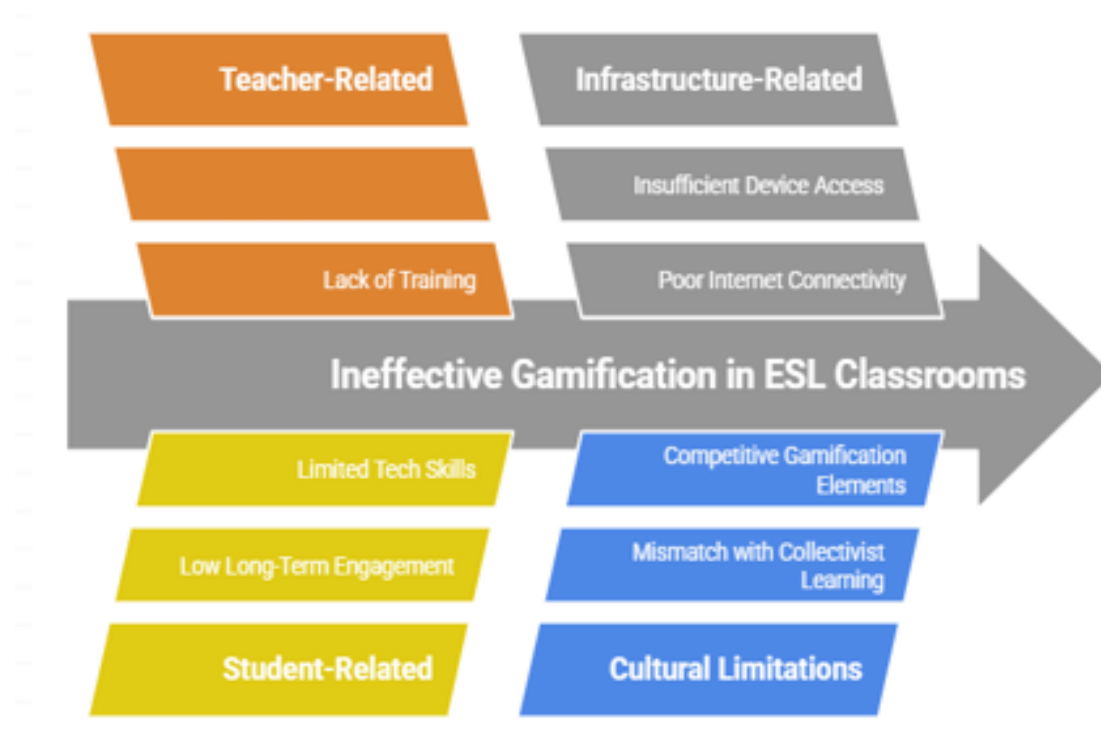


Figure 2: Key Challenges in Implementing Gamification in ESL Education.

Methodology

Study Design

The research employed a systematic literature review approach, reviewing and analyzing existing studies on gamification in English as a second language (ESL) education. This approach entails an extensive evaluation of previous literature to identify significant findings and patterns, as well as to reveal gaps in the existing literature (Kim & Castelli, 2021). The RRISM technique was employed to review the literature, and all its criteria were met.

Data Sources

A proper search strategy was developed to gather relevant literature from various databases. First, the literature (i.e., relevant articles) was searched on Scopus and ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre), and some related studies were shortlisted. Second, the Google Scholar search option was utilized to conduct a comprehensive search for articles, books, and other publications. Third, SpringerLink was used to search for the relevant literature. This exhaustive search strategy aimed to identify and shortlist peer-reviewed articles on the theme of this research. Table 2 shows the databases searched for shortlisting the articles for review (Khudhair et al., 2019).

Table 2: Details of Databases.

Sr No.	Databases	Initial Shortlist Studies
1	Scopus	3
2	ERIC	2
3	Web of Science	3
4	SpringerLink	3
5	Google Scholar	4

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Developing comprehensive, relevant, and technical criteria is important before shortlisting the studies for a systematic literature review. Therefore, thorough, inclusive, and exclusion criteria were developed for this review (Wang & Tahir, 2020). The review evaluated articles originating from peer-reviewed publications that examined the applications of gamification in ESL education. The review preferred studies about gamification in ESL education conducted within the Middle East region while emphasizing cross-cultural research and maintaining relevance to local student populations. The article search included academic literature published in English from 2010 to 2024 (Saeed & Khudhair, 2024). The review process excluded studies that analyzed general education without an ESL focus or traditional gaming-based learning beyond the scope of gamification. Book chapters, non-peer-reviewed articles, and opinion pieces were not considered for the review analysis. Table 3 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 3: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Inclusion Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articles Published from 2010 to 2024 Articles Published in English Peer-Reviewed Articles Studies on the theme “Gamification and ESL” Studies published in peer-reviewed journals.
Exclusion Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articles published before 2010. Articles published in any other language. Non-Peer-Reviewed Articles Studies Published in the Western Context

Data Extraction and Analysis

The selected studies underwent a thorough evaluation, resulting in the identification of essential categories based on prominent themes within the literature. The collection of topics centered on teacher beliefs, examining the benefits and challenges of gamification from the teacher's perspective, according to Topu. The paper examines student motivation and engagement through a gamification methodology for ESL students, as described by Hamari, Koivisto and Sarsa (2014). The research examined which gamification methods were most successful in ESL classrooms by relying on. A thorough analysis revealed both the main components and barriers faced when incorporating games into English Second Language teaching practices. This analysis secured an in-depth comprehension of gamification use in ESL education contexts (Yas et al., 2025).

Results

A detailed study found that gamification in English Second-Language classes motivates students and alters their perspective on learning, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes. The research presents both positive and negative obstacles related to gamified education approaches, cultural elements, and technological constraints that create efficiency problems.

Teachers' Perceptions of Gamification

Research shows that educators use gamification as an excellent ESL teaching tool, as they adopt gaming platforms such as Duolingo and Kahoot in their grammar and vocabulary classes, and observe that students display stronger focus. Teachers must invest more time in planning their lessons, and they often lack the

necessary digital skills. A few educational professionals have noticed their students tend to choose victory over the process of gaining knowledge. The implementation requires proper training, combined with teacher-support systems, to succeed (Seaborn & Fels, 2015).

Student Motivation and Engagement

The gamification method fosters better student engagement through interactive educational content, complemented by incentives. Students perform better in learning activities when gamification elements are incorporated into regular studies than in traditional methods, leading to higher levels of participation and a greater number of tasks being completed (Dirgantoro, Bermuli, & Soesanto, 2022). Student motivation automatically increases as they focus on gaining performance achievements and earning points. Still, the competitive aspects of gamification work better for specific students, yet create distress for others (See Figure 3). Establishing equivalence between competition and collaboration in learning environments is crucial for inclusive practices (Elshiekh & Butgerit, 2017).

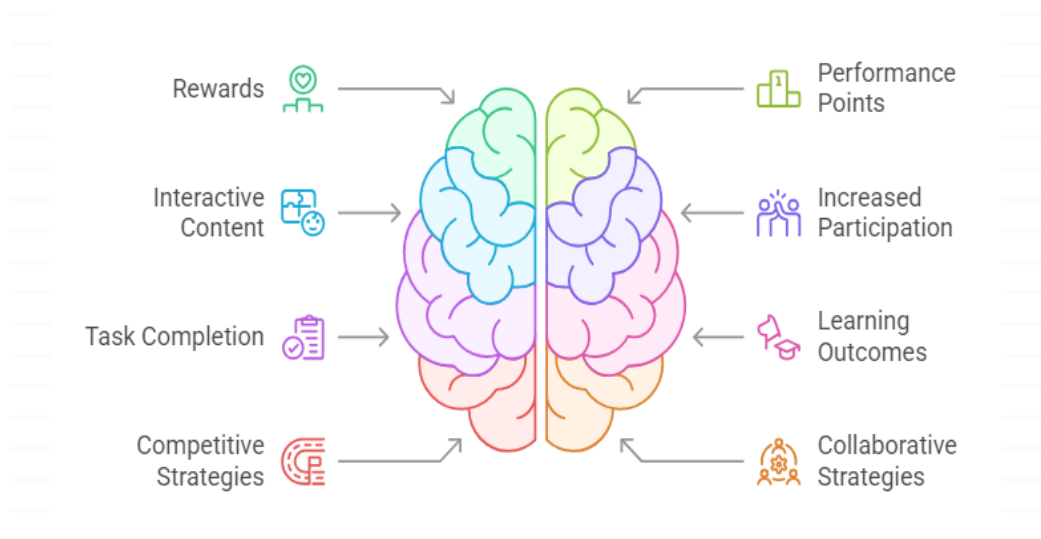


Figure 3: *Effects of Gamification on Student Motivation and Engagement.*

Efficiency of Gamification Tools

Multiple tools found in ESL education that serve different elements of language acquisition were reviewed (Getman et al., 2024) in this analysis. Kahoot provides an interactive quiz platform that helps secondary language students learn in their ESL classroom. Research shows that Kahoot produces better knowledge acquisition and higher student involvement when students practice vocabulary and grammar through its platform. Students maintain their independence in language learning by utilizing the gamified features of Duolingo, which incorporate reward schemes and track learning progress, as noted by Albu-ali. The role-playing game features of Classcraft help students collaborate by providing rewards when they engage with the material and work in groups. Classcraft effectively enhances educational behavior and group dynamics, particularly in ESL teamwork tasks. The Quizlet platform offers flashcard-based vocabulary learning tools that enhance pronunciation, enabling students to memorize new words more effectively. The tools operate effectively, but they lack compatibility across all educational scenarios. The absence of needed technological equipment in certain schools is a barrier to implementing digital gamification tools. The excessive dependence on gamified rewards by some students has been linked to reduced long-term motivation in independent language learning.

Cultural Considerations in Gamification

The impact of gamification methods on ESL education depends mainly on the regional cultural background, especially in Middle Eastern learning environments, as these traditional instruction methods often emphasize teacher-led teaching (Chapelle, 2014). Students from collectivist backgrounds have traditionally preferred teamwork-learning dynamics; therefore, competing gamified elements, such as leaderboard rankings,

are less effective for them (Bavelier & Green, 2019). Researchers have found that Middle Eastern students perform better when Gamification tasks require teamwork to tackle language challenges, rather than individual competition (Bhatia et al., 2023). Education professionals should develop gamification techniques that align with both community expectations and the learning patterns that students prefer (See Table 4).

Table 4: *Cultural Factors Affecting Gamification in Middle Eastern ESL Classrooms.*

Cultural Factor	Impact on Gamification	Implication for ESL Teaching
Collectivist Learning Preference	Students prefer collaboration and group-based learning over individual competition.	Design gamified tasks that promote teamwork rather than solo ranking.
Teacher-Centered Tradition	Traditional classroom models emphasize teacher control and direct instruction.	Blend teacher guidance with student-centered gamified experiences.
Community Expectations	Societal norms regarding discipline and respect for hierarchy shape educational practices.	Ensure gamified elements are respectful, culturally appropriate, and inclusive.
Competitive Elements	Leaderboards and rankings may cause stress or disengagement among students.	Use badges, group progress bars, or non-ranking feedback as alternatives.

Challenges and Limitations

Multiple challenges exist for Gamification systems that need proper resolution to succeed in ESL classrooms over the long term. Many researchers have observed that student enthusiasm toward gamification initially rises and then decreases over time (Hung, 2018). The evidence suggests that gamification approaches should undergo regular updates, which keep students actively engaged in the learning process. The digital distinction remains challenging because some schools and their students lack sufficient access to essential gamification technology (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018). Some areas without steady internet access make it challenging to use digital gamification tools effectively for teaching purposes. The institutional barriers these teachers face prevent them from receiving support for adapting their curricula or gaining training to implement gamification, as educational institutions do not prioritize gamification among their top priorities (Cahyani, 2016). The application of gamification serves as a crucial element for enhancing ESL learning; however, it requires a proper design that addresses cultural, educational, and technological challenges. Teacher education, long-term commitment strategies, and inclusive design implementation produce limited or temporary benefits because proper teacher education is absent.

Discussion

The systematic reviews show that Gamification learning achieves its objectives by maximizing student motivation, together with greater class engagement, while improving classroom interactions. The acceptance of gamification, with demonstrated results, is high among teachers and students. Different elements of teacher preparation, along with cultural preferences and game implementation approaches, determine the actual success rate. The benefits of gamification are noticeable, but implementation obstacles, along with access requirements and the development of a dedicated long-term approach, are necessary for the permanent adoption of ESL education (Cahyani, 2016).

Explanation of Findings

The degree of student engagement in ESL classrooms is directly proportional to the adoption of gamification methods. The reviewed studies demonstrate that students who learn through interactive, reward-based learning methods retain vocabulary more effectively while exhibiting stronger learning enthusiasm (Daryanes & Ririen, 2020). SDT confirms that students become most motivated when their basic requirements for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. The universal effectiveness of gamified systems cannot be taken as a given fact. Students either excel best under competitive education or experience performance-related stress when using leaderboards, according to N. Yas et al. (Methodological design for gamification requires detailed examination to meet different styles and learning preferences of students. Team-based games, alongside

peer-supported challenges, function more effectively in collectivist cultures because members of such communities prefer to receive learning support from groups rather than competing individually (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2021).

The Role of Teacher Education in Gamification

The success rate of Gamification in ESL learning depends heavily on a teacher's readiness to use this approach. Educational institutions must provide formal gamification training to teachers because formal instruction leads them to implement gamification strategies effectively, therefore creating better student learning outcomes and engagement (Fitria, 2023). The primary barrier to gamification adoption is the absence of proper training, and inadequate institutional backing exacerbates this issue. Educational staff face two primary hurdles when incorporating gamification-based elements into their regular lesson plans, including the need to understand integration methods and the challenges of operating digital gamification tools (Dirgantoro et al., 2022). Educational institutions must establish professional training programs that teach teachers effective Gamification strategies for the mass adoption of the methodology. However, teachers must have access to workshops, online workouts, and collaborative learning communities that enable them to approach teaching using game-based instructional techniques. Professional development opportunities allow teachers to identify the correct rationales for a competitive and collaborative balance in the effective implementation of corella-gamified learning activities with defined educational goals (Dicheva et al., 2014).

Gamification and Long-Term Student Engagement

The application of gamification approaches shows evidence of promoting student interest in educational settings at the beginning of learning periods. The study does show that positive gamification effects might have a limited temporal reach. Student enthusiasm toward gamified learning typically decreases when game elements become repetitive and predictable during their duration. This observation requires teachers to employ adaptable and healthy gamification techniques to support student engagement throughout the learning period.

Maintaining long-term commitment requires teachers to employ specific essential guidelines. Teaching methodology requires the regular addition of new activities alongside challenges, as this approach prevents learners from becoming bored during their learning process (Yas et al., 2025). A change in gamified elements between content and format serves as a way for teachers to maintain an engaging learning atmosphere. Teachers who incorporate gamification elements that suit each student's taste get the students more committed. Students maintain their active involvement when the educational system acknowledges their personal learning preferences and individual interests.

Not an adherence to a strict level systems framework, but the students learn best through narrative methods. Learning through such methods enhances student interest while providing direction to their educational path. Recovered from the research, giving intrinsic rewards that enable additional learning opportunities proves more advantageous than awarding extrinsic incentives like points or brands. Students develop better relationships with their learning materials by receiving intrinsic awards, which enable them to understand content at a deeper level (Rodrigues, Oliveira, & Rodrigues, 2019). The extent to which educators use fictionalization techniques that are appropriate for student language learning participation depends. Regular updates in gamification strategies created by teachers lead to sustained student motivation, as well as increased interest in their coursework, across various educational periods (Rapp et al., 2019).

Technological and Cultural Barriers to Gamification

The major challenge of gamification is students' access to the necessary technology equipment. In low-resource settings where digital infrastructure is limited in educational institutions, implementing Kahoot, Duolingo, and Classcraft may not be feasible. Limited Internet accessibility, including proper network connections, hardware tools, and suitable educational software, creates uneven educational opportunities, resulting in better benefits for students using gamification from well-funded schools than their counterparts in disadvantaged institutions. The way people regard gamification differs across cultures. Students who learn in educational systems based on tests commonly view gamified education as less severe and informal than traditional teaching approaches (Subhash & Cudney, 2018). So, do teachers who work in such contexts decline gamification because they worry that it eliminates formal academic teaching practices? The achievement of

cultural acceptance for gamification as an accredited teaching strategy requires education to implement reforms that establish the legitimacy of gamification beyond informal or optional implementation.

The strategic implementation of gamification enables transformation in English as a second language (ESL) learning while facing various obstacles. Teachers, along with decision-makers, need to focus on several essential areas to benefit from gamification fully. Teacher education programs need to develop extensively because they should offer complete design and implementation guidance for gamification. High-quality training provided to educators enables them to effectively apply the knowledge and skills they have gained, implementing gamification systems in classrooms that yield meaningful results (Wang, 2015).

Providing equal access to technology is an essential element. Digital infrastructure funding for schools with low incomes should be allocated so that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can access gamified learning standards without restrictions. The improvement of technological access for all students enables teachers to establish learning spaces that welcome diversity through enhanced participation and student commitment.

Implementing game elements requires teachers to strike a balance between competition and collaboration, as different students have varying preferences and learning styles. Students belong to two distinct groups regarding their learning style preference between competitive environments and collaborative setups. Enhancing teachers' ability to integrate competitive and cooperative elements enables them to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of students, thereby increasing overall classroom engagement levels.

Teachers should act as advocates for gamification methods that incorporate cultural sensitivity into their strategies. Educational values and student expectations should be combined with gamification plans to develop learning experiences that remain relevant to students. Students demonstrate high-level engagement with content when games incorporate their culture because it creates visibility opportunities for their identities. It is necessary to develop new gamification methods that contribute to maintaining students' long-term commitment and motivation. As the needs of education, as well as technological advancements, grow, the strategic approaches to gamification should be adjusted accordingly. Educators who update and refine their gamified teaching approaches can ensure that gamification remains an active and productive technique. Gamification will transition from being a temporary news event to becoming an established and persistent tool that enhances ESL learning by effectively implementing these solutions. The correct deployment of gamification techniques combined with ongoing development allows for fundamental language experience enhancement for students.

Implication

Consequently, the results from the systematic review found that gamification is an effective method in adding value to ESL education. Still, its success depends on properly integrating the techniques into their existing classroom exercises. To ensure that Gamification is not merely a short-lived approach to language learning, teachers, decision-makers, and curriculum developers must consider several key factors. If done correctly, gamification can make the learning environment more engaging and interactive, reducing fear and increasing fun for students when it comes to language learning.

Implications for Teachers

If you are a teacher, using gamification effectively means having a clear understanding of how game mechanics influence learning behavior. It's nothing new that many teachers already know that game-based elements, such as points, top lists, and interactive quizzes, really increase students' participation in the class. Not all of these work in teaching these elements through a structured lesson plan, which fortifies language learning rather than distracting the learner from it. However, if not adequately trained, gamification carries the risk of underutilization or incompetent use, resulting in superficial involvement and limited learning. In response to this, schools and universities can submit applications for professional development to equip teachers with the practical skills necessary to manage the use of gamification effectively. The focus of these workouts should be on selecting suitable gamification tools, regulating competition through collaboration, and adjusting game-based strategies to accommodate different types of learners (Alfartoosi et al., 2021). Teachers who receive proper guidance on gamification are more likely to implement it in a way that stimulates student motivation and learning outcomes. However, teachers will also be aware that not all students will respond to gamification in the same way. While

some students excel in this kind of competitive environment, others may begin to feel demotivated or even anxious when placed at the bottom of the rankings or under extreme pressure. Teachers should also consider other alternative ways of gamification strategies, including team-based challenge, Say Driven Learning (SDG), and Self-evident progress. Many teachers can game the system by making it adaptive so that all students achieve good results, regardless of their learning preferences.

Implications for Educational Institutions and Decision-Makers

Additionally, educational institutions and decision-makers play a crucial role in supporting decisions regarding the implementation of gamification in ESL instruction. Accessibility is the most significant technological obstacle to gamification. The problem is that many schools, particularly those in prisons, lack the digital infrastructure to translate the gamified method into an online learning experience effectively. With this reliable internet, mobile devices, or any interpretive device, means students, in this case, will be unable to enjoy the positive outcomes that come with game-based learning, as far as they are concerned. Educational policymakers should prioritize digital infrastructure management to provide a level playing field for all students. Such tools and resources should be readily available to schools, enabling them to implement gamification effectively. This application should also be rewarded with financing for teacher education and curriculum development to enable GI in ESL education with proper meaning. Furthermore, educational institutions participating in these partnerships can contribute to the development of low-cost gamification solutions for the student marketplace as a whole (Aboelazm, 2021). Another crucial evaluation task for decision-makers is to determine whether gamification aligns with national curriculum standards. Traditional assessment methods still prevail in the majority of educational systems, making it difficult for teachers to incorporate innovative and gaming-based approaches without compromising conventional learning objectives (Kim & Castelli, 2021). For this, decision-makers need to create guidelines to encourage the use of gamification in today's ESL teaching strategies, because, when used correctly, it should be recognized as an integral part of learning rather than an optional activity.

The Future of Gamification in ESL Education

The future of gamification has the potential to revolutionize the way we learn and learn English. However, as the world continues to advance technologically, better gaming-based tools for learning will emerge, providing personalized and engaging modes of instruction. Gamification is likely to become increasingly adaptive through artificial intelligence and adaptive learning platforms, allowing for personalized gamified practices tailored to individual students. This approach ensures that each student learns at their own pace and receives the proper support aligned with their strengths and weaknesses. Continuous research and development will be necessary to realize the potential of gamification fully. Further studies should also investigate which gamification strategies have a lasting impact on long-term language storage and which types are most effectively supported by teachers in their implementation (Yas et al., 2024). Additionally, researchers need to understand how gamification can be customized to fit different cultural and linguistic contexts, and, most importantly, that it will be effective for students with diverse backgrounds. Thus, gamification was not a universal solution before, but if it is well-planned, it can make ESL education more interesting, engaging, and effective. This is why educational institutions can trust that borrowing from teacher education when branching out to access technology and testing gamification in relation to curriculum goals allows them to ensure that game-based learning is a lasting and practical part of ESL education (Aboelazm et al., 2025).

Future Research

However, several areas still require further investigation regarding the role of gamification in ESL education. Existing research has demonstrated that gamification enhances students' motivation to participate in class. While the long-term impact of the environment on language storage and skills is, for the most part, unknown, we have begun by testing whether it can damage language skills at all. Furthermore, the perspectives of teachers, variations in culture, and advancements in technology used in gamified learning have not been fully explored. Closing these gaps in future research will help reduce the scope of gamification, particularly by making strategies more efficient, sustainable, and applicable across different learning environments.

Understand the Long-Term Effect of Gamification

To date, there has been a greater emphasis on short-term engagement and immediate learning outcomes in most gamification studies in ESL classrooms. Although there is strong evidence regarding students' general activity and motivational levels when they learn through game-based activities, little has been explored regarding whether such benefits endure over time. In the future, studies should be conducted to investigate how gamification affects language learning beyond a single academic concept or course. Suppose one needs to determine whether students who learn through gamification retain vocabulary and grammar rules more effectively or communicate skills more effectively than those who approach conventional learning methods. The other key area for research is the effect of repeated exposure to gamified content on language collection. Since gamification usually involves rewards and challenges, and repeating the process to complete these challenges, it is essential to investigate whether this boosts the long-term retention capacity of language. Future studies will examine whether students who are gamified throughout their learning years outperform those who receive traditional instruction in developing an aptitude in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Explore Teaching Perspectives and Professional Development

Although much research has shown that gamification engages students substantially, relatively less focus has been placed on teachers' experience and challenges in implementing gaming-based learning strategies. There is considerable interest in gamification among many teachers who believe in its potential. Still, the reason they could not do so is their lack of time, lack of institutional support, and even their aimlessness in using digital tools. Next, future studies should investigate the factors that influence teachers' ability and willingness to integrate gaming-based techniques into their everyday teaching, as well as how teachers benefit from and struggle with gamification. Another critical area that requires further exploration is professional development. In case of research into the effectiveness of teacher education programs in gamification, the focus should be on determining how much time it takes for teachers to develop and implement their gamified lesson plans and which of the workshops, online courses, or collaborative learning networks help the teachers take the shortest amount of time in developing and implementing such plans. Understanding the impact of teacher education on students' learning outcomes can shed light on the role of educators' emergency preparedness in the success of Gamification.

Cultural Adjustments and Gamification Strategies

Moreover, cultural factors also influence the effectiveness of gamification in ESL education, although this aspect has not been extensively studied. Many existing gamification strategies are designed for Western educational contexts that promote individual competition and performance. Another essential trait revealed by research is that students in collectivist cultures, such as those in the Middle East, may be more inclined towards collaborative gaming-based learning experiences compared to competitive elements like ranking and top lists. Since cultural differences influence the values students learn and their learning preferences, future research should investigate how gamification strategies can be adapted for these diverse cultural environments (Gao et al., 2018). It is important because this also needs to be the key to investigating whether team-based gamification approaches are practical in collectivist cultures compared to individualized, competing models. A deep understanding will demonstrate how cultural backgrounds impact and influence students' motivation and participation in gamified learning, allowing teachers to design more inclusive and culturally responsive gamification.

The Role of Technology in Future Gamification

Artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and adaptive learning technologies are poised to reach groundbreaking affordability, but they are also closely tied to the rapid impact of education on gamified ESL learning. Future studies incorporating this enhanced feature would be as successful as building a learning experience through an AI-driven gamification framework that provides real-time, incremental feedback and personalized challenges tailored to the needs of any student, enabling them to tackle challenges of varying difficulty. Additionally, technological accessibility should be explored further in the future, as not every school or student has equal access to top-of-the-class digital tools and a secure, reliable internet connection. Research should be done to investigate cost-effective and scalable gamification solutions where there is no financial aspect (money) that bars students from benefiting from the gaming-based learning benefits (Khudhair et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Results show that Gamification aims to enhance ESL learning through improved student motivation and scholar dedication, as it helps in memorizing information. Elements from video games, such as points and top lists or interactive quizzes, can be reused in natural ways to transform teachers' learning environment into language-active spaces. The effectiveness of gamification can only function as intended because it depends entirely on teacher readiness, as well as access to digital tools and cultural adjustments. Reward-based methods yield positive reactions among students, although the impact of cultural elements determines how effectively competitive approaches are received. When operating in collectivist environments, it is more beneficial to employ team-oriented gamification structures rather than adopting player rankings. Teacher education plays a crucial role in ensuring the successful implementation of educational initiatives, as numerous educators encounter challenges with both technical matters and educational issues. Studies need to advance research about how gamification techniques permanently affect students' language knowledge retention capacity. The following line of research involves monitoring students' growth across multiple stages of development using an adaptive gamification tool, aiming to address accessibility issues related to digital infrastructure, particularly in under-resourced educational areas. Implementing gamification in ESL education shows promising results for learning improvement because teachers and administrative figures design and support its proper execution. Maintaining focus on solving technological, as well as cultural and institutional, barriers enables gamification to sustain its practical approach to building language acquisition across various educational settings.

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