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INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL OF

2026 / No. 1(2)

Contemporary Pedagogical and Philological Research

USING GAMIFICATION TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract. In the contemporary educational environment, maintaining students' motivation has become a significant challenge in English language teaching. Traditional instructional approaches that rely heavily on memorisation, repetitive exercises, and teacher-centred activities may not always meet learners' diverse needs or encourage sustained engagement. Gamification, defined as the integration of game-design elements into non-game contexts, offers a promising pedagogical approach to addressing this challenge. By incorporating points, badges, levels, missions, immediate feedback, collaborative challenges, and progress tracking into English lessons, teachers can create more interactive and supportive learning environments. This article examines the theoretical foundations of gamification, its relationship with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and its potential to improve students' engagement, confidence, autonomy, and language-learning outcomes. Particular attention is given to practical classroom applications in vocabulary acquisition, grammar instruction, speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Examples of vocabulary quests, grammar investigations, communicative missions, and collaborative problem-solving activities illustrate how gamification can transform conventional language exercises into purposeful learning experiences. The article also analyses challenges associated with excessive competition, dependence on external rewards, technological limitations, and differences in learners' abilities. It argues that gamification is most effective when game elements are aligned with clear educational objectives, supported by constructive

feedback, and adapted to students' individual needs. The article concludes that thoughtfully implemented gamification can complement traditional teaching methods and contribute to a more motivating, inclusive, and learner-centred approach to English language education.

Key words: Gamification, student motivation, English language learning, learner engagement, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, language teaching, educational technology, learner autonomy, digital learning.

Аннотация. В современных условиях образования поддержание мотивации учащихся становится одной из важных задач преподавания английского языка. Традиционные методы обучения, основанные преимущественно на запоминании, повторении упражнений и деятельности, ориентированной на преподавателя, не всегда обеспечивают устойчивую вовлечённость учащихся и учитывают их индивидуальные потребности. Геймификация, представляющая собой внедрение игровых элементов в неигровые образовательные процессы, является перспективным педагогическим подходом к решению данной проблемы. Использование баллов, значков достижений, уровней, заданий, оперативной обратной связи, командных испытаний и отслеживания прогресса позволяет создавать более интерактивную и благоприятную образовательную среду. В статье рассматриваются теоретические основы геймификации, её взаимосвязь с внутренней и внешней мотивацией, а также возможности повышения учебной активности, уверенности, самостоятельности и эффективности изучения английского языка. Особое внимание уделяется практическому применению геймификации при изучении лексики и грамматики, развитии навыков говорения, аудирования, чтения и письма. Приводятся примеры лексических заданий, грамматических расследований, коммуникативных миссий и командных упражнений по решению проблем. Кроме того, анализируются возможные трудности, связанные с

чрезмерной конкуренцией, зависимостью от внешних вознаграждений, ограниченным доступом к технологиям и различиями в способностях учащихся. Обосновывается положение о том, что эффективность геймификации зависит от соответствия игровых элементов образовательным целям, качества обратной связи и учёта индивидуальных особенностей обучающихся. Делается вывод о том, что продуманное применение геймификации может дополнить традиционные методы преподавания и способствовать формированию более мотивированной, инклюзивной и ориентированной на учащегося образовательной среды.

Ключевые слова: геймификация, учебная мотивация, изучение английского языка, вовлечённость учащихся, внутренняя мотивация, внешняя мотивация, преподавание иностранных языков, образовательные технологии, самостоятельность учащихся, цифровое обучение.

Annotatsiya. Zamonaviy ta’lim sharoitida o‘quvchilarning motivatsiyasini saqlab qolish ingliz tilini o‘qitishdagi muhim vazifalardan biri hisoblanadi. Yodlash, takroriy mashqlar va o‘qituvchi markazidagi faoliyatga asoslangan an’anaviy ta’lim usullari har doim ham o‘quvchilarning individual ehtiyojlarini qondira olmaydi yoki ularning darsga bo‘lgan qiziqishini uzoq muddat davomida saqlab qolishga yordam bermaydi. Gamifikatsiya, ya’ni o‘yin elementlarini o‘yin bo‘lmagan ta’lim jarayonlariga tatbiq etish, ushbu muammoni hal qilishning istiqbolli pedagogik yondashuvlaridan biridir. Ballar, yutuq nishonlari, bosqichlar, topshiriqlar, tezkor fikr-mulohazalar, jamoaviy musobaqalar va natijalarni kuzatish kabi elementlar ingliz tili darslarini yanada interaktiv va qiziqarli tashkil etishga yordam beradi. Ushbu maqolada gamifikatsiyaning nazariy asoslari, uning ichki va tashqi motivatsiya bilan bog‘liqligi, shuningdek, o‘quvchilarning faolligi, o‘ziga bo‘lgan ishonchi, mustaqilligi va til o‘rganish samaradorligini oshirishdagi imkoniyatlari tahlil qilinadi. Lug‘at boyligini rivojlantirish, grammatikani o‘rgatish, tinglab tushunish, gapirish, o‘qish va yozish

ko‘nikmalarini shakllantirishda gamifikatsiyadan foydalanishning amaliy usullariga alohida e’tibor qaratiladi. Maqolada lug‘at topshiriqlari, grammatik muammolarni aniqlash, kommunikativ vazifalar va jamoaviy muammolarni hal qilish faoliyatlariga misollar keltiriladi. Shuningdek, haddan tashqari raqobat, tashqi mukofotlarga qaramlik, texnologik cheklovlar va o‘quvchilar qobiliyatlaridagi farqlar bilan bog‘liq muammolar ko‘rib chiqiladi. Gamifikatsiyaning samaradorligi o‘yin elementlarining aniq ta’lim maqsadlariga muvofiqligi, konstruktiv fikr mulohazalar va o‘quvchilarning individual ehtiyojlarini hisobga olishga bog‘liq ekanligi asoslanadi. Xulosa qilib aytganda, gamifikatsiyadan maqsadli va oqilona foydalanish an’anaviy o‘qitish usullarini to‘ldirishi hamda ingliz tilini o‘rganishda motivatsiyani oshiruvchi, inklyuziv va o‘quvchi markazidagi ta’lim muhitini shakllantirishga xizmat qilishi mumkin.

Kalit so‘zlar: gamifikatsiya, o‘quv motivatsiyasi, ingliz tilini o‘rganish, o‘quvchilar faolligi, ichki motivatsiya, tashqi motivatsiya, til o‘qitish, ta’lim texnologiyalari, o‘quvchi mustaqilligi, raqamli ta’lim.

INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential means of communication in international education, business, scientific research, tourism, and digital communication. Consequently, developing English language proficiency is an important objective for students in schools and higher education institutions. However, learning a foreign language is a complex and gradual process that requires sustained effort, regular practice, patience, and the willingness to communicate despite making mistakes. Students must acquire vocabulary, understand grammatical structures, improve pronunciation, develop listening comprehension, and learn to express their ideas clearly in different situations. When these activities are presented primarily through repetitive exercises and teacher-centered explanations, some learners may gradually lose interest, participate less actively, or struggle to maintain consistent motivation. Motivation is particularly important in foreign language education because students need repeated

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opportunities to encounter, practice, and apply the language before they can use it confidently. A learner may understand a grammatical rule during a lesson but fail to apply it spontaneously in conversation. Similarly, students may memories a list of vocabulary items for an examination but forget many of them when they are required to use the words in a new context. These difficulties suggest that successful language teaching should provide more than the transmission of information; it should create opportunities for active participation, meaningful communication, constructive feedback, and continuous improvement. One promising approach to addressing these challenges is gamification. Deterding et al. (2011) describe gamification in terms of using game-design elements in non game contexts. In English language teaching, this involves incorporating points, badges, levels, missions, storytelling, progress indicators, and collaborative challenges into regular learning activities. For example, instead of asking students simply to memories unfamiliar vocabulary, a teacher may organize a vocabulary quest in which learners identify word meanings, construct original sentences, and use the target expressions in a short conversation. Each stage has a clear learning objective, and feedback helps students recognize their achievements and identify areas for improvement. The educational value of gamification lies not merely in making lessons entertaining but in connecting students' emotional engagement with meaningful academic progress. When learners understand what they need to achieve, perceive tasks as manageable, receive constructive feedback, and feel that their contributions are valued, they may become more willing to participate and persist when difficulties arise. Nevertheless, the presence of game elements does not automatically guarantee improved learning. Their effectiveness depends on instructional design, the classroom environment, learners' individual characteristics, and the extent to which activities support genuine language development. The purpose of this article is to examine how gamification can improve students' motivation in English language learning, explore its theoretical foundations, and demonstrate its

practical application in different areas of language education. It also discusses the limitations of gamified instruction and identifies strategies for ensuring that game elements contribute to sustainable motivation and measurable learning outcomes. The article adopts a conceptual, literature-informed approach based on established motivational theories and published research rather than reporting a new classroom experiment.

THE CONCEPT AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GAMIFICATION

Gamification involves integrating selected game-design elements into an existing educational activity to influence participation, engagement, and learning behavior. Common elements include points, badges, levels, leaderboards, missions, rewards, immediate feedback, progress tracking, and storytelling. Each element can serve a different pedagogical purpose. Points can acknowledge successful performance or consistent effort, badges can recognize specific achievements, and levels can represent progression from basic to more advanced skills. Missions can organize learning into manageable stages, while progress indicators help learners understand how far they have advanced towards a goal. It is important to distinguish gamification from game-based learning. Game-based learning uses an actual game as a central medium for acquiring knowledge or practicing skills, whereas gamification incorporates game-design elements into activities that are not necessarily games. For example, students who play a digital adventure game to practice English are participating in game-based learning. By contrast, students who complete regular grammar exercises while progressing through achievement levels and receiving feedback are experiencing gamification. Both approaches can support language education, but gamification is particularly adaptable because teachers can integrate it into existing textbooks, discussions, assignments, and assessments without redesigning an entire course. 2.1. Self-Determination Theory One of the most relevant theoretical perspectives for

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understanding gamification is Self Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) and further discussed by Ryan and Deci (2000). This theory emphasizes three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to having meaningful choices and some control over one's learning. Competence concerns the feeling that one can complete tasks successfully and improve one's abilities. Relatedness refers to feeling connected to others and experiencing a sense of belonging. Gamified English lessons can support these needs in several ways. Autonomy can be encouraged by allowing students to choose between different activities. For instance, after studying a set of new words, students might choose to complete a vocabulary puzzle, record a short dialogue, or write a paragraph using the target vocabulary. All three activities support the same learning objective while providing learners with some control over the process. Competence can be strengthened through achievable challenges and constructive feedback. A student who initially struggles to speak for one minute in English might progress through a sequence of short speaking tasks until they can deliver a two-minute presentation. Relatedness can be promoted through collaborative missions in which students exchange information, discuss possible answers, and support one another in reaching a common goal. However, rewards do not automatically increase intrinsic motivation. When points and badges provide meaningful feedback, they may reinforce learners' sense of competence. When they become instruments of excessive control or public comparison, they may undermine confidence and engagement. Therefore, teachers should design gamified activities to support students' psychological needs rather than simply control their behavior. 2.2. Flow Theory and Appropriate Challenges Another relevant perspective is the concept of flow associated with Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Flow describes a state of deep concentration and involvement in an activity. In educational settings, students may become highly engaged when they have a clear objective, receive understandable feedback, and encounter challenges that match their current abilities

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.For example, beginner-level students might initially match English words with pictures before progressing to definitions, sentence construction, and short conversations. Intermediate learners could then use the same vocabulary to explain opinions or solve problems, while advanced learners might incorporate it into a debate or presentation. Each stage introduces additional complexity without overwhelming the learner. This principle is especially important in language education because students have different proficiency levels and rates of progress. Tasks that are too easy can become monotonous, whereas excessively difficult activities may produce frustration. By gradually adjusting the level of challenge, teachers can create opportunities for learners to experience success while continuing to develop their abilities. 2.3. Feedback, Reinforcement, and Goal Setting Gamification can also support learning through feedback, reinforcement, and clearly defined goals. Students need to understand whether their answers are correct, why a particular response is inaccurate, and what they can do to improve. Immediate feedback can help learners identify errors while the task remains fresh in their minds, but feedback should go beyond simply marking an answer as right or wrong. Consider the sentence, “She go to university every day.” In a gamified grammar activity, students could receive a prompt to reconsider subject–verb agreement and correct the sentence to “She goes to university every day.” They might then earn progress credit for correcting the error and explaining the rule. This approach rewards understanding rather than guessing. Similarly, a weekly objective such as using fifteen target vocabulary items accurately in original sentences gives students a specific and measurable goal. When goals are realistic, feedback is constructive, and achievements reflect genuine improvement, students can develop persistence and more effective study habits.

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THE ROLE OFGAMIFICATION IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

Motivation is central to language learning because progress depends on repeated exposure, sustained practice, and the gradual development of communicative competence. Gamification can support motivation by making learning objectives clearer, progress more visible, and classroom participation more rewarding. Its contribution can be understood through several interconnected areas. Strengthening Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation Intrinsic motivation refers to participating in an activity because it is interesting, enjoyable, or personally satisfying. Extrinsic motivation involves participating to obtain a separate outcome, such as points, a certificate, a grade, or recognition. Both forms can influence English language learning, but their effects depend on how activities are designed and experienced. Consider a student who finds vocabulary difficult to remember. The teacher introduces a weekly "Vocabulary Quest" consisting of three stages: identifying word meanings, writing original sentences, and using the words in a short dialogue. Students receive points for accurate answers and recognition for improvement. Initially, the learner may be motivated primarily by the opportunity to earn points. However, as the learner begins to recognize unfamiliar words in reading passages and use them confidently in conversation, the experience of progress may become motivating in its own right. This example illustrates why rewards should be treated as a means of encouraging participation rather than as the ultimate purpose of learning. Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa (2014) emphasize that the effects of gamification depend on the context and implementation. Similarly, research on gamification in English as a foreign language has reported promising outcomes in some settings, while highlighting the importance of instructional design and learner characteristics (Huseinović, 2023). Consequently, teachers should priorities meaningful language use, personal progress, and genuine achievement instead of assuming that rewards automatically produce lasting

motivation. Increasing Participation and Classroom Engagement Gamification can encourage active participation by giving students opportunities to retrieve information, exchange ideas, solve problems, and make decisions. In traditional question-and answer activities, confident students may dominate while quieter learners remain passive. A well-designed gamified task can distribute participation more evenly by assigning different roles and allowing students to contribute in different ways. For example, during a lesson on environmental protection, students could work in groups to solve a fictional community problem involving plastic pollution, recycling, public transport, and energy consumption. Each group receives different information and must discuss possible solutions in English, justify its decisions, and present a proposal to the class. Points can be awarded for relevant vocabulary, clear explanations, cooperation, and the use of supporting evidence. Unlike a conventional exercise in which students provide isolated answers, this task creates a meaningful reason to communicate. Students need to listen to one another, compare ideas, negotiate solutions, and reach a shared decision. The activity therefore combines language practice with critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving. To ensure that participation remains inclusive, teachers should avoid rewarding only the quickest answers or the most confident speakers. Group roles can be rotated so that different students practice presenting, asking questions, taking notes, and summarizing ideas. In this way, gamification can help learners recognize that successful communication depends on multiple contributions. Reducing Language-Learning Anxiety Fear of making mistakes is a practical obstacle for many English learners. Students may understand grammatical rules but hesitate to speak because they are worried about pronunciation, incorrect word choice, or negative reactions from classmates. Such anxiety can limit opportunities for meaningful communication and slow the development of speaking fluency. Gamification may help reduce these barriers when activities create a supportive environment in which experimentation and revision are expected parts of learning. For example, a role-play

mission called “At the Travel Agency” could require students to work in pairs, with one acting as a customer and the other as a travel agent. They must ask questions about destinations, accommodation, prices, and travel arrangements before agreeing on an itinerary. The teacher provides useful expressions, such as “Could you recommend a suitable destination?”, “How much does the accommodation cost?” and “Would it be possible to change the booking?” Students receive recognition for successful communication, appropriate vocabulary, active listening, and effective responses. Rather than losing all their progress because of a minor grammatical error, they are encouraged to correct misunderstandings and try alternative expressions. This approach shifts attention from producing perfect sentences to achieving a communicative purpose. Nevertheless, gamification alone cannot eliminate language anxiety. Teachers must also establish respectful classroom relationships, provide constructive feedback, and ensure that learners are not publicly embarrassed for incorrect answers. Promoting Learner Autonomy and Persistence Language learning extends beyond the classroom, making independent practice and self regulation particularly important. Gamification can support these qualities through weekly missions, personal goals, progress charts, and optional practice challenges. For instance, a student might establish three weekly objectives: learning fifteen academic words, completing two listening exercises, and recording a two-minute speaking response. A progress tracker allows the learner to monitor completion and identify areas requiring additional attention. If pronunciation remains a challenge, the next task might involve listening to a model recording, practicing difficult expressions, and recording another response for comparison. This process connects goal setting with practice, feedback, and reflection. Students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and learn to take responsibility for their improvement. Personal progress tracking can also help learners remain motivated when development is gradual, because it allows them to compare their current abilities with their previous performance rather than constantly comparing themselves with others.

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Teachers should nevertheless allow flexibility and avoid treating missed tasks as evidence of failure. The objective is to encourage sustainable learning habits, not to create unnecessary pressure or make students dependent on maintaining an uninterrupted sequence of achievements.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF GAMIFICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

The effectiveness of gamification depends on its connection to the particular language skill being taught. An activity should not be considered successful simply because students enjoy it; it should also provide opportunities to practise, retrieve, apply, and demonstrate language knowledge. 4.1. Vocabulary Acquisition Vocabulary development is essential for understanding and producing English, yet learners often forget words encountered only once or memorised without context. Gamification can encourage repeated retrieval and productive use through structured challenges. A “Vocabulary Treasure Hunt” could include four stages. First, students match target words with their definitions. Second, they complete sentences using the words. Third, they create original examples based on academic or everyday situations. Finally, they use the vocabulary in a short conversation with a partner. Suppose the target words are *reluctant, persistent, significant, overcome,* and *achievement*. Students might complete the following sentence: “Despite several difficulties, she remained and continued preparing for the examination.” They must identify the appropriate word, explain its meaning, and use it in a new context. In the final stage, students might discuss a challenge they have overcome or describe a personal achievement. Points can be awarded for accurate meaning, appropriate usage, and clear explanation. This sequence encourages learners to move beyond recognising words towards using them independently. Teachers can further strengthen retention by revisiting the same vocabulary in later lessons. For example, words introduced on Monday could appear again in a speaking task on Wednesday and a short writing assignment on Friday. Such

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spaced review ensures that gamification supports continued learning rather than a single successful performance. Grammar Instruction Grammar can become difficult or monotonous when students encounter rules mainly through explanations and repetitive exercises. Gamification can make grammar practice more interactive by presenting learners with problems to solve. A “Grammar Detective” activity, for instance, requires students to investigate errors in a fictional character’s diary. One sentence might read, “Yesterday, I go to the library and borrow two books.” Students must identify the errors, correct the sentence to “Yesterday, I went to the library and borrowed two books,” and explain why the past simple tense is required. Teams receive points for identifying both errors, providing the correct forms, and explaining their reasoning. More advanced students can create sentences containing deliberate mistakes for another team to investigate. This activity encourages analytical thinking because learners must explain how grammatical structures function rather than simply select an answer. It can also be adapted to different proficiency levels by introducing subject–verb agreement for beginners, tense consistency for intermediate learners, and complex sentence structures for advanced students. The teacher should ensure that students have enough time to discuss their answers and practise the target structures in original sentences. Speed alone is not a reliable measure of grammatical understanding. Speaking and Communicative Competence Speaking requires learners to combine vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, listening, and interaction. Consequently, gamified speaking activities should reward communicative success rather than focus exclusively on grammatical accuracy. A “Mission: Solve the Mystery” activity can provide an effective example. Students receive different clues about an imaginary event and must ask one another questions to determine what happened. One student knows the timetable, another has information about the venue, a third has received a message from the organiser, and a fourth has details about the weather. They must exchange information in English to identify the problem and recommend an alternative plan.

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Points are awarded for asking relevant questions, clarifying information, using target expressions, and contributing to the final decision. Beginners can receive sentence starters, such as “Could you tell me…?”, “What happened to…?” and “I think we should…”. More advanced students can be required to justify their conclusions and respond to alternative suggestions. The task creates an authentic communicative purpose because students cannot solve the problem without interacting with their classmates. It also encourages learners to listen carefully, respond spontaneously, and negotiate meaning, all of which are important components of communicative competence. Listening Comprehension Listening activities can be gamified through missions that require students to identify key information, recognise details, and make inferences from spoken texts. For example, a “Listening Mission” might involve listening to an announcement about a school trip. Students must identify the destination, departure time, required equipment, and any changes to the original plan. They first answer independently, then compare their responses with a partner before listening again to confirm the details. To ensure that the activity develops genuine listening skills rather than guessing, students should explain which words or phrases support their answers. If an announcement initially states that the bus will depart at 8:00 a.m. but later changes the departure time to 8:30 a.m., learners must recognise the correction and distinguish the final information from the original announcement. Teachers can gradually increase the difficulty by introducing longer recordings, unfamiliar vocabulary, or different accents. The emphasis should remain on accurate comprehension and the development of listening strategies rather than simply completing the task quickly. Reading Comprehension Reading lessons can incorporate gamification through text-based mysteries, clue hunts, and collaborative comprehension challenges. Students might receive an article and complete several missions: identify its main idea, locate supporting details, infer the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary, and explain the author’s purpose. For instance, after reading an

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article about environmental protection, learners could work in teams to identify three causes of plastic pollution, two consequences for local communities, and one practical solution proposed by the author. Points are awarded for accurate responses and for identifying the relevant passages as evidence. This approach encourages close reading and critical thinking. Students must distinguish between the main idea and supporting information, interpret unfamiliar expressions in context, and justify their conclusions. Collaborative discussion also allows learners to compare interpretations and explain their reasoning. The teacher should ensure that students refer to the original text rather than relying on memory or guessing. In this way, gamification supports the development of reading comprehension strategies and evidence-based interpretation. Writing Development Writing can be gamified through a sequence of missions that guides students through planning, drafting, revising, and editing. A “Writing Quest” might include four stages: brainstorming ideas, organising a paragraph, writing an initial draft, and revising the text using a checklist. For example, students writing an opinion paragraph about the use of digital technologies in education first identify their position and supporting arguments. They then organize their ideas into a topic sentence, explanations, relevant examples, and a concluding statement. During revision, they check the clarity of their arguments, linking expressions, vocabulary choices, and grammatical accuracy. Recognition is awarded for meaningful revision and improvement rather than merely for submitting the task quickly. Students can also participate in peer-review challenges, exchanging drafts and providing constructive feedback on organization, clarity, and language use. This approach helps learners understand that effective writing develops through several stages. It encourages them to take responsibility for improving their work and to view feedback as an opportunity for development rather than simply a judgement of their performance. Digital Platforms and Low-Technology Alternatives Digital platforms can support gamification through interactive quizzes, matching activities, and immediate feedback. Tools such as

Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Word wall allow teachers to prepare activities for reviewing vocabulary, checking grammar comprehension, and assessing students' understanding of recently taught material. Duolingo provides another example of a language-learning application that uses game-inspired features to encourage regular practice. A teacher might begin a lesson with a short digital quiz on previously studied vocabulary, introduce new material, and then use a second activity to assess whether students can apply the new words correctly. Comparing responses can help identify areas requiring additional explanation and practice. However, effective gamification does not depend on sophisticated technology. Teachers can use flashcards, paper-based quizzes, vocabulary cards, classroom missions, progress charts, and team challenges to achieve similar educational objectives. These alternatives are particularly useful when internet access, digital devices, or technical resources are limited. The central consideration is the quality of the learning design. Technology should support the learning objective rather than become the main attraction of the lesson.

GAMIFICATION AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AMONG LEARNERS

Students differ in their proficiency levels, interests, confidence, prior knowledge, and responses to competition. An activity that motivates one learner may discourage another. Effective gamification therefore requires flexibility and attention to individual differences. For example, students who enjoy social interaction may respond positively to team competitions and collaborative problem-solving, while those who feel uncomfortable speaking in front of the class may prefer individual challenges or pair work. Beginners may need visual support, sentence starters, and frequent feedback, whereas advanced learners may benefit from debates, interpretation tasks, and spontaneous discussions. Differentiation can be introduced within a single activity. During a vocabulary lesson, beginners may match words with definitions, intermediate learners may use the words in complete sentences, and advanced learners may

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incorporate the same vocabulary into a short argument or presentation. All students work towards a shared learning objective while completing tasks appropriate to their abilities. Teachers should also recognize effort, persistence, collaboration, and individual improvement instead of rewarding only the highest scores. Achievements such as “Most Improved Speaker,” “Creative Problem Solver,” “Vocabulary Explorer,” and “Supportive Teammate” acknowledge different forms of progress and encourage a wider range of students to participate. Personal-best challenges can be particularly useful. A student who previously used five target words correctly might aim to use eight in the next speaking activity. This allows learners to recognize their own development without feeling that their success depends on outperforming classmates. By offering different levels of challenge and recognizing multiple forms of achievement, teachers can create a more inclusive learning environment in which students have realistic opportunities to experience progress.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF GAMIFICATION

Despite its potential benefits, gamification is not automatically effective. One important limitation is the risk of excessive dependence on external rewards. If students become primarily concerned with collecting points, earning badges, or defeating their classmates, they may focus on winning rather than understanding and applying English. Their participation may also decline when rewards are removed. To minimize this problem, teachers should connect recognition to meaningful learning behaviors, including accurate language use, thoughtful revision, constructive collaboration, and improvement over time. Rewards should complement the learning process rather than replace students’ interest in developing their language skills. Excessive competition is another concern. Timed quizzes and public leaderboards may create excitement for some students but anxiety for others, particularly those who need more time to process information or are afraid of making mistakes. Repeatedly highlighting low scores can damage confidence and discourage participation. Teachers can address these concerns

by combining individual and collaborative activities, providing sufficient response time, allowing students to practise before assessment, and rewarding personal progress. Competition should remain a means of encouraging engagement rather than the central purpose of language learning. Technical and organizational barriers may also affect implementation. Digital activities sometimes require reliable internet access, suitable devices, and additional preparation time. Furthermore, animations, scores, and visual effects may distract students if they are not closely connected to the educational objective. Teachers can reduce these difficulties by selecting appropriate resources, preparing offline alternatives, and introducing game elements gradually. Another important limitation is that enjoyment does not necessarily demonstrate successful learning. Students may enjoy a quiz without retaining the vocabulary afterwards, and high participation does not automatically indicate improved speaking or writing proficiency. Research reviews of gamification have identified variation in outcomes across educational settings, highlighting the importance of context and implementation (Hamari et al., 2014).Therefore, teachers should evaluate gamification through evidence of learning. Short follow-up assessments, delayed vocabulary reviews, speaking tasks, and writing samples can help determine whether students retain and apply the language they have practiced. This approach ensures that gamification remains a pedagogical strategy rather than an end in itself.

RECOMMENDATIONSFOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

The successful integration of gamification begins with clear learning objectives. Teachers should identify the knowledge or skill they want students to develop before selecting game mechanics. If the objective is to improve speaking fluency, the activity should provide opportunities for meaningful interaction and reward clear communication, relevant vocabulary, and effective responses. If the objective is vocabulary retention, students should retrieve and use target words repeatedly across different contexts. Second, teachers should maintain an appropriate balance between

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challenge and support. Activities should be sufficiently demanding to stimulate interest but manageable enough to prevent persistent frustration. Clear instructions, examples, language prompts, and gradual increases in difficulty can help students participate successfully. Constructive feedback should explain errors and provide opportunities for correction. Third, rewards should recognize more than speed and accuracy. Teachers can acknowledge perseverance, collaboration, creativity, and personal improvement while avoiding public comparisons that may discourage less confident learners. Both individual and cooperative tasks should be available so that students can participate in ways that suit their needs. Fourth, teachers should encourage self-regulated learning. Students can establish weekly goals, monitor their progress, and reflect on the strategies that helped them succeed. For example, learners might record how many target words they can use accurately in conversation at the beginning and end of a learning unit. They could also record short speaking responses and compare their fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation over time. Finally, the effectiveness of gamified activities should be evaluated through evidence rather than assumptions. Teachers can examine participation, completion of optional practice, performance on language assessments, vocabulary retention, and student reflections. Comparing initial performance with later results can help identify areas of improvement, while learner feedback can reveal which activities are engaging, accessible, and educationally useful. These recommendations demonstrate that successful gamification requires thoughtful planning, consistent evaluation, and a willingness to adapt activities to students' needs. It should complement effective teaching methods rather than replace explicit instruction, communicative practice, or meaningful assessment.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this article suggests that gamification can support English language learning when it combines meaningful challenges, constructive feedback, opportunities for interaction, and visible evidence of progress. Its potential

value is consistent with motivational perspectives that emphasise autonomy, competence, relatedness, and appropriately challenging tasks. By dividing complex activities into manageable stages, gamification may help learners understand their objectives, recognize their achievements, and become more willing to participate. The practical examples discussed above illustrate how game elements can be adapted to different language skills. Vocabulary quests encourage retrieval and contextual use; grammar investigations require learners to analyse and correct errors; communicative missions promote interaction and spontaneous language production; and staged writing challenges support planning, revision, and self-assessment. These activities demonstrate that gamification can be integrated into ordinary classroom instruction without requiring every lesson to become a digital game. Nevertheless, the relationship between gamification, motivation, and achievement remains complex. Learners respond differently to competition, rewards, collaboration, and individual challenges. Points and badges may encourage initial participation, but sustainable engagement also depends on whether students perceive activities as useful, achievable, and relevant. Similarly, an enjoyable classroom experience does not necessarily result in lasting language development unless students have sufficient opportunities to practice, receive feedback, and apply what they have learned. For these reasons, gamification should be understood as a flexible pedagogical strategy rather than a complete replacement for established teaching methods. It can complement explicit instruction, communicative language teaching, independent study, and formative assessment. Its success should be evaluated according to clearly defined learning objectives and the needs of the students involved. Further classroom research could investigate which combinations of game elements are most effective for different proficiency levels, whether motivational benefits continue over extended periods, and how gamification influences particular language skills. Such research would help teachers make more informed decisions about the design and implementation of gamified learning activities

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