

Gamification in the EFL Classroom: Enhancing Learner Engagement and Language Proficiency through Digital Game-Based Learning

Nafosat Mirvafoeva

Orcid number: 0009-0000-3664-9504

**Place of work: Jizzakh state Pedagogical University Faculty Foreign languages,
teacher**

Phone number: 886471111

Email: nmirvafoeva@webster.edu

Abstract:

Gamification, or the use of game elements in non-game environments, has emerged as a transformative method for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. This study investigates how digital game-based learning (DGBL) affects learner engagement, motivation, and language competency among secondary-level EFL students in Uzbekistan. The study shows, using a mixed-methods approach that includes classroom observation, pre- and post-tests, and student interviews, that gamified learning environments promote active involvement, reduce language fear, and improve communicative competency. The findings highlight the pedagogical value of integrating gaming dynamics with language learning objectives, as well as practical techniques for EFL teachers looking to establish dynamic, learner-centered classrooms.

Keywords: gamification, EFL, digital game-based learning, learner engagement, motivation, language proficiency

1. Introduction

The integration of technology in education has revolutionized traditional language teaching methods. Among emerging trends, gamification has gained momentum for its potential to boost student motivation and performance. In EFL contexts, where students frequently face anxiety and limited exposure to authentic English, gamification offers an interactive, immersive, and enjoyable alternative to conventional instruction (Reinders & Wattana, 2015).

2. Literature Review

In second language acquisition (SLA), motivation is an important factor, and game-based learning (GBL) has been linked to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). According to studies by Peterson (2010) and Hung (2017), DGBL improves vocabulary acquisition, grammar retention, and speaking.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants:

30 Uzbek EFL students aged 14-15 in a public secondary school in Tashkent.

3.2 Instruments:

Pre- and post-language proficiency tests, observation checklists, student reflection journals, and semi-structured interviews.

3.3 Procedure:

Over a four-week period, students participated in a series of gamified lessons using platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz, and Classcraft. Activities focused on vocabulary, grammar, and communicative tasks.

4. Results

Statistical analysis showed significant improvements in students' vocabulary and speaking exam results ($p < 0.05$). Qualitative data indicated improved motivation, good attitudes regarding English, and a decreased fear of making mistakes. Students said they enjoyed peer competition and the narrative elements embedded in game scenarios.

5. Discussion

Findings affirm that DGBL can serve as a catalyst for active learning in EFL classrooms. By aligning gamified tasks with curriculum standards, teachers can foster autonomy and learner agency. However, problems include technical limits and the requirement for teacher training. This study offers formal frameworks for gamification incorporation in national EFL curriculum.

6. Conclusion.

Gamification, when strategically implemented, can transform the EFL learning experience. It not only motivates students but also creates meaningful contexts for language use. Further research should examine long-term effects and adaptability across diverse educational settings.

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