

EXPLORING PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF GAMIFICATION IN EFL CLASSROOM

Risa Dwi Almandaa¹, Movi Riana Rahmawati², Indah Sri Redjeki³

English Education Program
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Ibn Khaldun, Bogor
risaalmandaa@gmail.com

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji implikasi pedagogis dari penerapan gamifikasi dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) melalui tinjauan literatur kualitatif. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa gamifikasi berperan penting dalam meningkatkan motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa dengan memenuhi kebutuhan psikologis otonomi, kompetensi, dan keterhubungan sosial. Implikasi pedagogis utama meliputi perubahan peran guru dari pengajar tradisional menjadi fasilitator yang mendesain aktivitas pembelajaran yang menarik dan sesuai karakteristik siswa. Selain itu, gamifikasi menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang interaktif dan rendah kecemasan, yang mendukung penguasaan bahasa secara efektif melalui umpan balik langsung dan pengulangan. Namun, keberhasilan implementasi sangat bergantung pada kesiapan guru, ketersediaan teknologi, serta dukungan institusi dan budaya belajar. Implikasi lainnya adalah perlunya keseimbangan antara penggunaan penghargaan eksternal dan penciptaan suasana inklusif agar motivasi intrinsik siswa tetap terjaga. Dengan demikian, gamifikasi memiliki potensi untuk mentransformasi praktik pembelajaran EFL menjadi lebih dinamis, partisipatif, dan bermakna jika diterapkan dengan perencanaan pedagogis yang matang dan adaptasi kontekstual.

Kata kunci : Gamifikasi, Implikasi Pedagogis, Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing

ABSTRACT

This study examines the pedagogical implications of implementing gamification in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning through a qualitative literature review. The analysis shows that gamification plays an important role in increasing student motivation and engagement by fulfilling the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and social connectedness. The main pedagogical implications include a change in the role of the teacher from a traditional lecturer to a facilitator who designs learning activities that are engaging and appropriate to students' characteristics. In addition, gamification creates an interactive and low-anxiety learning environment, which supports effective language acquisition through immediate feedback and repetition. However, successful implementation is highly dependent on teacher readiness, technology availability, as well as institutional support and learning culture. Another implication is the need to balance the use of external rewards and the creation of an inclusive atmosphere to maintain students' intrinsic motivation. Thus, gamification has the potential to transform EFL learning practices to be more dynamic, participatory and meaningful if implemented with careful pedagogical planning and contextual adaptation.

Keyword: Gamification, Pedagogical Implications, English Foreign Language (EFL)

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, technology-based learning strategies have increasingly become an integral part of education, driven by the growing demand for teaching methods that are more innovative, engaging, and relevant to the characteristics of today's learners. In line with the demands of Education 4.0, educators are encouraged to

implement active and student-centered learning approaches that can improve students' engagement and motivation (Gita Almaid & Jaelani, 2021). One strategy that stands out in this development is gamification, which refers to the use of game elements in a non-game context to encourage user participation and engagement (Deterding, O'Hara, et al., 2011; Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). It involves

embedding systems of points, badges, levels, leaderboards, and specific challenges designed to create a more enjoyable and motivating learning experience (Deterding, Dixon, et al., 2011). Gamification has also been acknowledged for its ability to transform passive learning environments into dynamic and student-centered experiences (Deterding, Dixon, et al., 2011). In the context of English Foreign Language (EFL) learning, gamification is becoming increasingly relevant as it addresses common challenges faced by teachers and students, such as low motivation to learn, lack of student interaction, and anxiety about using a foreign language in public (Burke, 2014). Therefore, exploring the pedagogical implications of gamification in the EFL classroom is important, given its great potential in transforming the way teaching and learning are conducted.

From a theoretical standpoint, gamification is supported by several prominent learning theories. One of the most relevant is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Deci and Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes the importance of fulfilling three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—to foster intrinsic motivation. Game elements such as task choice (autonomy), point accumulation and level progression (competence), and collaborative tasks (relatedness) align directly with these principles. Additionally, behaviorist theory contributes to the foundation of gamification through its emphasis on reinforcement, where rewards such as points or badges serve as stimuli for desirable learning behaviors (Skinner, 1953). Gamification is also supported by constructivist and sociocultural learning theories, particularly those advanced by Vygotsky (1978), which highlight the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning in knowledge construction. Through gamified learning environments, students are encouraged to engage with peers in meaningful and contextualized tasks, thereby promoting active participation and cooperative learning.

A number of studies affirm the positive impact of gamification in EFL classrooms. Su and Cheng (2015) demonstrate that incorporating game elements significantly boosts students' participation and motivation, particularly when the design reflects students' needs and preferences. Similarly, Alsawaier (2018) highlights how

gamification fosters a competitive yet enjoyable learning atmosphere, resulting in increased cognitive and emotional engagement. In practice, platforms like Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Duolingo have become popular tools for integrating gamification into language instruction. However, the effectiveness of these tools is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to align game mechanics with specific learning objectives. As Lee & Hammer (2011) emphasize, gamification in education is not simply about adding games to instruction, but about designing learning experiences that provide challenges, immediate feedback, and a sense of accomplishment.

The pedagogical implications of implementing gamification in the EFL classroom include a shift in the role of the teacher from a content deliverer to a facilitator who designs engaging and meaningful learning experiences. According to Zainuddin et al. (2020), teachers who implement gamification are required to have the ability to design activities that match student characteristics and learning objectives, as well as be flexible in responding to changing classroom dynamics due to a more participatory approach. In addition, gamification also encourages student-centered learning, where students are encouraged to be more active, independent and reflective in their learning process. However, it is important to note that the successful implementation of gamification is highly influenced by a number of contextual factors, such as teacher readiness, availability of technology infrastructure, institutional support, and student learning culture. This is in line with Buckley & Doyle (2016) findings that the effectiveness of gamification in educational settings is highly dependent on the context in which it is implemented, including teachers' digital competencies and adequate technological support. Unequal availability of technology or lack of teacher training in designing gamification can be significant barriers that need to be anticipated from the start (Domínguez et al., 2013).

In addition to these practical considerations, some critical perspectives on gamification must be addressed to develop a more comprehensive pedagogical understanding. Some scholars express concern that an overreliance on external rewards may undermine students' intrinsic motivation. Kohn (1993) argues that while points

and prizes can drive short-term engagement, they may reduce students' natural curiosity and long-term commitment to learning when used excessively. Furthermore, not all students respond positively to competition; for some, a competitive classroom environment may provoke anxiety or feelings of inadequacy. Therefore, pedagogical sensitivity is essential—teachers need to carefully balance competitive and collaborative aspects of gamification and ensure that the learning environment remains inclusive and accessible to all students.

Thus, exploring the pedagogical implications of gamification in EFL classrooms is a timely and relevant endeavor. By synthesizing theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and practical considerations, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how gamification can support and transform language teaching and learning in today's digital era.

METHOD

This study employed qualitative literature review approach to explore the pedagogical implications of implementing gamification in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. This approach was chosen as it was considered most appropriate for synthesizing the diverse theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and practical insights that had developed over the past decade regarding the use of gamification in educational contexts. Snyder (2019) emphasized that a qualitative literature review allowed researchers to build a strong conceptual understanding by integrating the results of previous studies, especially in emerging fields such as technology-based learning innovations. As outlined in the introduction, gamification had gained widespread attention for its potential to transform traditionally passive learning into a more interactive and student-centered learning experience. Through a systematic review of the literature, this study aimed to critically analyze how this transformation occurred and under what conditions gamification was most effective in the context of language teaching.

The data sources in this study were obtained from various credible academic databases, including Google Scholar, Publish or Perish, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate. The inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed journal

articles and conference proceedings, written in English, and specifically addressing gamification in the context of EFL or ESL learning. Articles selected included discussions on the theoretical basis of gamification, implementation strategies, learning outcomes, and challenges or limitations in its application. According to Booth et al. (2016), the selection of relevant and credible literature is an essential step in ensuring the validity of findings in a literature review.

The collected data were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach, which enabled the researcher to identify and categorize key recurring themes related to the use of gamification in the EFL classroom. Braun & Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis is very effective in uncovering important patterns in qualitative data, especially when the research objective is to understand meanings and experiences from multiple perspectives. The main themes in this study include aspects of learning motivation and engagement, teachers' roles in designing game-based learning, learning outcomes achieved, implementation barriers, as well as contextual factors such as digital infrastructure and learning culture characteristics. Each theme is then analyzed in relation to previously discussed learning theories, such as Self-Determination Theory, behaviorism, and sociocultural theory. With this approach, the literature is analyzed not just as a collection of information, but as material for deep pedagogical reflection.

As such, this method directly supports the main objective of the study, which is to explore how gamification can have a pedagogical impact on learning and teaching processes in EFL classrooms. Through the triangulation of multiple sources and perspectives, it is hoped that the results of this study will not only reflect isolated examples, but also illustrate broader and academically agreed educational practices. This is in line with Torraco's (2005) view, which states that a good literature review not only reviews what has been found, but also highlights implications and directions for further development in the field under study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of the selected literature revealed several key pedagogical implications of gamification in EFL classrooms. These findings align with the theoretical perspectives, practical

considerations, and contextual factors discussed in the introduction and literature review.

1. Enhancing Motivation and Learner Engagement

A prominent benefit of gamification in EFL learning is its capacity to enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Numerous studies consistently demonstrate that game elements—such as points, badges, and levels—boost learners' interest and encourage sustained participation (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021; Su & Cheng, 2015). These results support Self-Determination Theory Deci & Ryan (2000), which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as critical to sustaining intrinsic motivation. When students have agency in task selection (autonomy), receive rewards for achievements (competence), and engage in collaborative activities (relatedness), their engagement increases significantly. This dynamic shifts learners from passive recipients of knowledge to active, goal-oriented participants.

2. Shifting the Teacher's Role Toward Facilitation

Gamification also prompts a pedagogical shift in the teacher's role—from knowledge transmitter to learning designer and facilitator. As Lee & Hammer (2011) emphasize, effective gamification requires more than simply adding game elements; it involves crafting experiences that incorporate challenge, timely feedback, and meaningful progression. Zainuddin et al. (2020) highlight the need for EFL teachers to design gamified activities that align with learners' linguistic proficiency and preferences. This finding underscores the critical role of teacher creativity and agency in successful gamified instruction, resonating with constructivist and sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978) that view learning as socially mediated and contextually grounded.

3. Supporting Language Acquisition and Learning Outcomes

Gamification facilitates various aspects of language acquisition. Interactive platforms like Duolingo, Quizizz, and Kahoot! enhance vocabulary building, grammar practice, and listening comprehension by providing immediate feedback and opportunities for repetition. Alsawaier (2018) reports heightened cognitive

engagement and emotional involvement among learners in gamified contexts. These findings suggest that well-designed gamification creates low-anxiety, high-engagement environments conducive to retention and practical application of language skills—key factors in effective language learning.

4. Contextual Factors Influencing Implementation

Despite its potential benefits, the success of gamification depends heavily on contextual factors such as infrastructure, teacher readiness, and institutional support. Buckley and Doyle (2013) note that schools lacking digital tools or trained educators face significant challenges in implementing gamified strategies effectively. Furthermore, Domínguez et al. (2013) highlight that misalignment between game design and curricular objectives can lead to learner disengagement. These insights emphasize that gamification should not be a one-size-fits-all approach but must be thoughtfully integrated within the specific teaching context.

5. Critical Perspectives: Balancing Rewards and Inclusivity

Although generally advantageous, gamification also presents potential pitfalls. Kohn (1993) cautions that excessive dependence on extrinsic rewards like points and badges may undermine intrinsic motivation over time, especially if learning becomes primarily reward-driven. Additionally, not all learners thrive in competitive settings; for some, competition induces anxiety or lowers confidence. Therefore, pedagogical sensitivity is essential to balance competition with collaboration and ensure inclusivity. Teachers must design gamified activities that cultivate a safe, supportive, and motivating learning environment for all students.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight several important pedagogical implications of using gamification in EFL classrooms. Primarily, gamification effectively enhances student motivation and engagement by providing game elements that satisfy learners' needs for autonomy, competence, and social connection, encouraging active and sustained participation. This requires

teachers to adopt a facilitator role, designing meaningful and tailored gamified activities that align with learners' language levels and curricular goals. Moreover, gamified environments support language acquisition by creating interactive, low-anxiety spaces where students receive immediate feedback and ample practice opportunities, which improve retention and application of language skills. However, the successful implementation of gamification depends heavily on contextual factors such as the availability of technology, teacher readiness, and institutional support, emphasizing that gamification should be thoughtfully integrated rather than applied uniformly. Additionally, educators must balance extrinsic rewards and competition with inclusivity and learner well-being to prevent anxiety or decreased intrinsic motivation. Overall, these findings suggest that when carefully designed and contextually adapted, gamification can be a powerful pedagogical tool that fosters a motivating, supportive, and effective language learning environment in EFL classrooms.

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