THE EFFECTS OF GAMIFICATION-BASED INSTRUCTION ON LEARNERS' MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: *Gamification refers to the use of game elements (points, badges, levels, leaderboards, quests, and rewards) in non-game settings such as education. In English language learning, sustaining motivation and engagement is often challenging due to anxiety, fear of mistakes, monotonous tasks, and limited interaction. This study investigates the effects of gamification-based instruction on university learners' motivation and engagement in English classes. Using an experimental design, the research compares an experimental group taught with structured gamification elements and a control group taught with conventional instruction. Data were collected through motivation questionnaires, engagement observation checklists, and learning performance tasks. Results indicate that gamification increased students' attendance consistency, participation frequency, task completion rate, and willingness to communicate. Learners also reported higher enjoyment and lower anxiety. The study concludes that gamification can effectively enhance motivation and engagement when aligned with clear learning objectives and fair assessment practices.*

Keywords: *gamification, motivation, engagement, English language learning, rewards, higher education, classroom participation*

Introduction

Motivation and engagement are critical factors in successful second language acquisition. Even when learners understand the importance of English for academic

and career development, they may experience low motivation due to repetitive activities, fear of speaking, and lack of immediate feedback or recognition. In many classrooms, students' participation is uneven: a small number of confident learners dominate discussions, while others remain silent. Gamification has emerged as a promising educational strategy that can make learning more interactive and emotionally engaging. Unlike purely "game-based learning" where learners play full educational games, gamification integrates selected game mechanics into regular lessons. These mechanics can include progress tracking, rewards, challenges, competition, collaboration, and immediate feedback. When implemented effectively, gamification can address common motivational problems by providing clear goals, visible progress, and a supportive learning atmosphere.

From a psychological perspective, gamification can support both extrinsic motivation (external rewards like points and badges) and intrinsic motivation (enjoyment, autonomy, mastery). According to self-determination theory, learners are more motivated when learning activities satisfy needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Gamified instruction can strengthen these needs by offering achievable challenges, choice, and teamwork. However, there are also concerns: if gamification is poorly designed, it may create unhealthy competition, discourage lower-performing students, or shift attention from learning outcomes to reward collection. Therefore, the key issue is not whether gamification is used, but how it is designed and aligned with pedagogical goals.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to examine the effects of gamification-based instruction on learners' motivation and engagement in English language learning at the university level.

Research Questions

1. How does gamification influence learners' motivation to study English?
2. How does gamification affect learners' engagement (participation, task completion, interaction)?

3. What classroom behaviors and attitudes change when gamification is implemented?

Methods

Research Design

The study used an experimental design with two groups:

• Experimental group: English lessons delivered with structured gamification elements

• Control group: English lessons delivered through conventional instruction (non-gamified)

Participants

Participants were 3rd-year students from the Narpay Faculty of Foreign Languages at Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages. A total of 40 students were involved:

• 20 students in the experimental group

• 20 students in the control group

Both groups were similar in general English proficiency level at the beginning of the study.

Gamification Model and Instructional Procedure

Gamification was implemented through a structured classroom system designed around learning objectives. The approach combined progress mechanics and feedback mechanics rather than entertainment.

Gamification Elements Used

1. Points (XP) system:

• Students earned points for attendance, completing tasks, speaking participation, and teamwork.

2. Badges:

• “Active Speaker,” “Vocabulary Builder,” “Team Helper,” “Task Master” badges were awarded weekly.

3. Levels:

• Students progressed through levels (Level 1 → Level 5) based on consistent effort.

4. Quests (missions):

• Weekly tasks such as short presentations, dialogue recordings, vocabulary challenges, or mini projects.

5. Leaderboards (balanced):

• Instead of a single "top list," leaderboards were used in categories (e.g., "Most Improved," "Best Teamwork") to avoid discouraging weaker learners.

6. Immediate feedback:

• Short feedback after each activity (micro-feedback), not only at the end of the lesson.

7. Reward policy:

• Rewards were academic-friendly (extra speaking chance, "choice of topic," "bonus practice sheet"), not material rewards.

Data Collection Instruments

1. Motivation questionnaire:

• Measured interest, perceived usefulness, confidence, and enjoyment (Likert-type items).

2. Engagement observation checklist:

• Recorded frequency of speaking, task completion, group cooperation, and attention in class.

3. Performance tasks:

• Short speaking and vocabulary tasks used to observe learning behaviors and outcomes.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by comparing trends between the two groups:

• changes in motivation indicators (survey results)

• engagement behaviors (observations)

• quality of task performance (speaking attempts, completion rate, participation)

Results

1) Increased Motivation and Positive Attitudes

Survey data showed that learners in the experimental group reported:

• higher enjoyment of English lessons

• greater willingness to participate

• stronger belief that they could improve (increased self-efficacy)

• lower fear of making mistakes

In contrast, the control group demonstrated relatively stable motivation, with some students reporting boredom during repetitive tasks.

2) Higher Engagement in Classroom Activities

Observation results indicated that the experimental group:

• participated more frequently in speaking activities

• completed more classroom tasks on time

• collaborated more actively in pairs and groups

• demonstrated higher attention and involvement during tasks

Gamified "quests" appeared to improve consistency: even quieter students attempted tasks to gain points and badges, which gradually increased their confidence.

3) Improved Task Completion and Practice Frequency

The experimental group showed a higher rate of homework/task submission due to structured weekly missions and visible progress tracking. Learners' practice frequency increased because gamified goals created short-term achievable targets.

4) Behavior Change: More Initiative and Peer Support

Students began to:

• ask more questions

• support teammates (peer correction and encouragement)

• volunteer more often for mini-presentations

• treat feedback as part of a “progress system” rather than criticism

Discussion

The findings suggest that gamification-based instruction can significantly improve motivation and engagement in English language learning. This can be explained in several ways:

1. Clear goals and progress visibility:

Points and levels helped students see progress, which strengthened their sense of competence.

2. Immediate feedback:

Frequent micro-feedback reduced uncertainty and supported learners’ confidence.

3. Social interaction and teamwork:

Category-based leaderboards and team quests increased cooperation rather than negative competition.

4. Reduced anxiety through playful structure:

When speaking tasks became “missions,” learners perceived them as manageable challenges rather than high-stakes performance.

Nevertheless, gamification must be carefully designed. Overemphasis on leaderboards can demotivate low-ranking students. Similarly, rewards that are too frequent or unrelated to learning outcomes may reduce intrinsic motivation. The success in this study likely depended on aligning game mechanics with meaningful learning tasks and ensuring fairness.

Limitations

• The sample size was relatively small (40 students).

• The study focused mainly on motivation and engagement; long-term proficiency gains require further investigation.

• Observation-based engagement measurement may include subjective interpretation.

Recommendations

• Use balanced leaderboards (e.g., “most improved,” “best teamwork”) instead of only “top scores.”

• Combine gamification with communicative tasks (role-plays, debates, projects).

• Provide rewards that support learning (choice, feedback, learning privileges) rather than material prizes.

• Train teachers to design gamification systems aligned with objectives and fair evaluation.

• Future research should measure long-term effects on speaking fluency and retention.

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