



## GAMIFICATION IN ELT

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**Abstract:** Learning a foreign language, including English, can sometimes be really boring process for students as complex grammar structures and learning a new vocabulary are challenging tasks that can demotivate learners. Gamification in language teaching-the application of game elements in language learning environment that makes it more engaging, motivating and more interactive - is one of the practical solutions to alter boring classes and make the learning process more intriguing. It not only makes the language learning process more exhilarating or enjoyable, but also motivates students during the lesson and has several benefits for teachers, too. This article discovers this benefits and challenges of gamification in English language teaching, firstly introducing the term “gamification”, its key elements and providing the examples of applying gamification in classroom.

**Key words:** gamification, ELT( English Language Teaching), education, interaction, digital platforms

### Introduction to gamification

The word “gamification” is an universal term which is not only used in education, but also can be applied in other spheres of life such as marketing and customer engagement, health and fitness, corporate training and others. But in all fields it refers to the applying certain elements of game in non-game context to increase user’s engagement and motivation. But in the sphere of education, mostly in pedagogical context, it appeared between 1980-1990s.[1] Previously it took a form of board or card games which were mainly used to taught vocabulary and grammar, but with the development of technology, today, the digital version of it is more preferable than paper-based format. According to the literature review about gamification and education, even though the term was firstly introduced in 1980s and 1990s, it didn’t get popularity until 2011-2014.[2] According to this review, the term gamification did not appear in the title of different academic articles about education until 2011 which refers to the late emergence and application of the term in the field of study and education. However, after that period the number of academic publications about gamification increased significantly. For example, while in 2011 the number of articles about gamification represented only for 7, after a year this accounted for 26 publications and surprisingly in the following year, in 2013 this numbers skyrocketed to approximately 80, explaining the rapid growth in academic interest to this subject. To this, it can be concluded that the gamification has proven its effectiveness in education due its capacity to increase students engagement and motivation. Indeed, the rewarding part of the gamified task triggers participant’s extrinsic motivation and most students are motivated by extrinsic rewards during the participation rather than intrinsic ones.[3] It again confirms that gamified environment during the language learning cycle is one the most essential tools to boost productivity, engagement and motivation of students which makes the lesson more enjoyable.

### Key elements

Gamification in education has many forms and can be designed differently according to the particular audience in preferred style that teacher opts for. Nowadays incorporating features of game in language learning environment via digital platforms is the most convenient and attractive both for teachers and students. However good gamified content requires specific features- mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics- to provide efficient and powerful service for learners.[4] Mechanics basically include rewarding components of game such as points, badges, leaderboards and others. As of the main functions of games which motivates players is rewarding system, well organized and effective rewards boost student's motivation to learn more and complete the task. As noted above this rewards include points- rewarding students with points according to their performance, completing tasks and achievements during the game; badges- this are also given for achievements and can be in the form of visual symbols; leaderboards- ranking participants according to their participation and achievements in game which helps to establish competitive atmosphere during the game. Dynamic tools of rewarding part integrate engaging students through stories and narrative. Brief introduction of interesting story easily captures the learner's attention improving their mostly listening, reading, writing and speaking skills while learning English. [5] Foremost, clear storyline introduced by teacher can develop learner's prediction skills as while listening to the beginning of the story unconsciously students start to predict the possible scenario which is one the most crucial sub-skill of the listening in English.

Moreover good storytelling can also improve student's critical thinking and engagement as teachers can pause in the middle of the story and ask learner's to continue the line, discussing the topic together to make the learning process more engaging and interactive. When it comes to speaking, great improvements can be made via storytelling, especially by using dialogue method. Teachers can structure their stories like a dialogue with learners to develop their fluency and spontaneity in speaking. This real-life dialogues not only efficiently help students to boost their critical thinking, motivation and engagement to the lesson, but also it upgraded their real-life language use. Because in "dialogue method storytelling" the language is spoken spontaneously and informally preparing students to practical communications in daily life. Therefore, they can become comfortable with natural speech patterns and use them easily in informal contexts. Surprisingly, it can also enhance learner's reading skills particularly by practicing loud reading or oral reading as it sometimes named, teacher can help students to develop their pronunciation, articulation, intonation, stress and rhythm. In addition, storytelling can also be applied in writing in the form of writing short stories, poetry, diary writing, dialogue writing or just speech writing. And finally last significant key component in gamification is aesthetics. Even though, the aesthetic background of the game design is mostly underestimated, it is one of the vital factors to engage students. Because elements like pleasing graphics, smooth navigation, and user friendly interface can create positive environment for students, making them more engaged, motivated and comfortable.

### Application to learning process

The terms "gamification" or "gamified environment" does not solely refer to completely replacing the whole process of teaching language with games. Instead, it only means integrating game-like elements to the language learning process to make it more intriguing which helps to enhance student's engagement, motivation and participation. In order to design effective game

that works well for all learners, firstly we need to explore the player types who are divided to achiever, explorer, socialiser, killer and builder.[6]

- Achievers are those who are oriented to specific goal- collecting all rewards from game such as points, badges, levels and others. Their intrinsic motivation forces them to perform well to strive for mastery in given task.

- Explorers are more likely to discover new game mechanics and uniqueness of the game rather than just achieving specific goal. This type of learners take pleasure from discovering new things and mostly interested to integrated approaches.

- Socialiser players are tend to interact more with others rather just focusing on game. By nature, they like to interact with a group of people and they are attracted by more interaction rather than just focusing on game. Their main values in games are strong relationship with other participants and teamwork.

- Killer participants are the most competitive players who prioritize winning as their primary goal. They are ready to distract others to achieve their own goal.

- Builders are mostly attracted by games that involve content creation or animation. This type of students like arts and crafts in education.

Understanding the type of players in game based learning environment helps teachers to deeply analyze their audience to create the most appropriate content that works well for the rest of them. For example, according to the type for players different games can be designed by teacher, achievers like points and badges while killers live more challenging tasks. Mixing this diverse motivation drivers according to learner's type can bring to effective results. Nowadays, especially, integrating a technology to the lesson is one the most productive and powerful tools. There different kinds of digital platforms such as Forum(Moodle), Nearpod, Kahoot!, and H5P which help teachers to integrate gamification in classroom. [7]

Focusing on forums like Moodle has several benefits like enhancing writing and communication skills. With the help of this platform different kind of discussion boards can be an efficient topic for discussions as this websites allow users to upload relevant information, post questions for discussion and broadcast video.

Next user-friendly and interactive digital platform which is easy to use and offers highly interactive features for enhancing student's engagement is Nearpod. This platform can also be integrated with a help of Moodle that is noted above, making it accessible for educators. Nearpod offers variety of services, including gamified quizzes, drawing on diagrams, collaborative boards and multiple-choice quizzes. Moreover it also enables teachers to use as assessment tool. They can track student's progress in real time and maintain records.

Kahoot is also one the most popular and comfortable tools to gamify the lessons. Many teachers use this platform to create different quizzes related to the topic of the lesson and present it to students. It enables students to answer the questions individually or with group and gives them an instant feedback via leaderboard which increases the competition between students. This platform is really user-friendly and easy to access- it works well on any tools, including smartphones, tablets and computers. Furthermore it also includes pre-made content (teachers can choose over 40 million freely available Kahoot games), making it more convenient and appealing for teachers.

H5P is free and open source technology that allows educators to create and share interactive and HTML5 content. This allows educators access to interactive web experiences,

creating and editing interactive videos, games, presentations and others. Unlike other platforms it also offers a unique option like pausing the video to prompt student responses, providing feedback and additional information.

Gamification is totally “independent” and “free” process of creating a content for particular audience. Therefore teachers can always creatively design online or offline game based content for their students according to their needs.

### **Challenges and benefits**

Integrating gamification includes several challenges and complexities which is not always the easy process for educators. While establishing a gamified environment educators face some limitations and challenges that highlight the main problems of applying gamification knowledge classroom. This challenges can include 100% student engagement to the game, not fully completed tasks, negative impact on performance, cheating or procrastination.[8]

Even though gamification is really engaging process, not all student in the classroom can be interested in process due to different reasons. This reasons include demotivation because of loosing and learner’s type. As noted above there are different type of players who demand for different styles of games and sometimes it can be difficult to design a game that suits well for all participants.

In gamified environment, particularly when it takes a digital form, it is hard to detect whether all student are participating and completing tasks equally or not. It mostly happens due to the complexity of the given task as during the lesson some students can not manage to understand the topic completely and therefore fail to complete the task. To avoid this problems teachers should carefully check student’s understanding and then give them task.

Gamification can sometimes negatively affect student’s performance, especially for those who are less educated than others. In other words, in each class there are two types of students as high-achievers and low-achievers. While high-achiever students perform better than others and take all rewards, low-achiever students are tend to be demotivated by this which negatively effect to their academic performance.

In digital platforms, it is always difficult to control the “honesty” of student while giving them a task related to the lesson in gamified version. The likelihood of cheating, mostly in online mode is high compared to other types of activities in the classroom which is one of the other drawbacks of online gamification. Moreover, when the given task is extended over a long period, some students are likely to procrastinate the task and complete it the last minute. This also negatively affects their overall performance and understanding the task.

Nevertheless, despite all this disadvantages and challenges faced in gamification, the noticeable benefits of it never have to be underestimated. Foremost, gamification is really engaging tool when it comes to altering traditional boring task. While learning a language, including English, different tasks on textbooks related to the topic( especially grammar and vocabulary) are tend to be boring for student. When they are gamified wherever in online digital platforms or offline, it tend to be more engaging and interactive for students. This type of activities are highly likely to increase student’s motivation, improving their overall academic performance positively. Moreover, gamification also improves learner’s critical thinking, too. Gamified task in English classrooms make students to think, solve problems, make decisions in English which not only enables them to use their language skills, but also develops critical thinking, analytical thinking and problem solving skills.

### Conclusion

Gamification is really effective tool in education, including language learning, which helps teachers to make lessons more engaging and interesting. It incorporates game-like elements like badges, points, leaderboards and others to create interactive tasks related to the topic. Applying gamification in classrooms is not always an easy task as it requires deep analysing of the audience and their needs; encouraging all students to the gamified task according to their special characters can be really challenging task for educators. However when it's incorporated correctly, it brings numerous benefits for learners, boosting their motivation and confidence, making the learning process more engaging and appealing for them.

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