

GAMIFICATION AS A CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract. Gamification represents a modern pedagogical approach that integrates elements of games, challenges, and rewards into the teaching process with the aim of increasing students' motivation, engagement, and learning. The aim of this study was to examine the application of gamification in English language teaching in primary school and to analyze its impact on students' motivation, engagement, and language skill development. The research was conducted on a sample of 135 sixth-grade students using a closed-question survey questionnaire. The results show that the majority of students recognize the presence of gamified elements in lessons and perceive them as motivating and engaging components. More than half of the respondents express a high level of motivation and enthusiasm for participating in gamified activities, while a significant percentage of students indicate increased teamwork and collaboration. The findings align with contemporary theoretical approaches that emphasize the importance of autonomy, feedback, and the perception of progress in learning.

Keywords: gamification; English language teaching; primary education; student motivation; active learning

Introduction

Oral communication constitutes one of the fundamental forms of interpersonal interaction through which individuals articulate ideas, attitudes, and emotions, while simultaneously establishing social relationships. Given that English is widely recognized as a global lingua franca, the development of students' speaking competence represents one of the central objectives of contemporary foreign language instruction. Classroom is regarded as the most appropriate environment for fostering these skills, as it facilitates interaction, collaborative learning, and practical application of language in controlled conditions. The effective development of speaking competencies also depends on adequately equipped classrooms, the availability of resources for planning and implementing teaching activities, as well

as the continuous improvement of programs based on modern technologies and aspects of programming and computer science, especially in the context of higher education and in accordance with labor market needs (Cvjetković et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the acquisition of speaking skills in English poses a considerable challenge for many learners due to the fear of making errors, insufficient self-confidence, and limited opportunities for active language practice. According to Rao (2019), speaking is among the most demanding skills that learners are required to master.

One of the innovative approaches that has attracted significant attention in contemporary pedagogy is gamification. Gamification is defined as the application of game elements in contexts that are not primarily game-based, with the aim of increasing motivation, engagement, and the effectiveness of the learning process. According to Kapp (2012), playing games that involve uncertainty can change the way learners feel about learning, increase their interest, and, more importantly, enhance long-term retention. It is important to emphasize that gamification does not imply replacing educational content with games, but rather integrating game elements in order to improve the learning process and achieve defined educational outcomes. Gamification can be implemented through various forms and instructional activities, including digital platforms, mobile applications, online learning environments, as well as diverse didactic games and classroom activities (Azar & Tan, 2020).

Gamification is frequently defined as the use of game elements in non-game contexts with the aim of increasing participants' motivation and engagement (Welbers et al., 2019). This approach enables the transformation of traditional activities into interactive and motivating tasks, providing learners with opportunities for active participation and engagement. The use of gamification in education can make the learning experience both challenging and enjoyable, while simultaneously motivating students to progress (Vassileva, 2008). In the field of foreign language instruction, gamification has proven to be particularly significant, as students often perceive language learning as a complex and demanding process, which may negatively affect their motivation and interest.

Traditional English language instruction often relies on direct teaching, in which the teacher transmits knowledge while students assume a passive role as listeners. Such an approach may reduce students' motivation and engagement. Contemporary methods, including computer-assisted learning and gamification, provide a more interactive and stimulating learning environment. Through game elements such as points, challenges, and rewards, gamification actively involves students, fosters collaboration and motivation, and contributes to more effective acquisition of language skills. Learning through play enables students to explore, experiment, and develop skills through active participation (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1962).

The implementation of gamification in English language teaching facilitates the creation of an interactive and supportive learning environment. By introducing game elements such as points, levels, rewards, challenges, and leaderboards, the instructional process becomes more dynamic and oriented toward active student participation. Effective application of gamification also contributes to the development of intrinsic motivation, which represents one of the key factors in successful foreign language acquisition (Flores, 2016). This approach not only enhances the development of communicative language competencies, but also promotes collaborative learning and enables continuous monitoring of students' progress.

Gamification naturally supports the provision of immediate feedback; however, the teacher plays a crucial role in this process. Educators may employ various strategies to provide prompt and meaningful responses to students, such as immediate verbal feedback during interactive lessons or written comments on electronic submissions that students can access without delay. By effectively incorporating the principles of gamification, teachers can create engaging and motivating learning experiences that foster deeper understanding and retention of subject matter (Kayımbaşıoğlu et al., 2016). Quick polls or simple hand-raising activities during a lesson may also serve as instant checks of students' comprehension. When these traditional methods are combined with game elements such as points, badges, and levels, they generate a wide range of opportunities for immediate feedback that sustain student engagement and motivation throughout the learning process (Smiderle et al., 2020).

The successful implementation of gamification in education extends far beyond merely adding badges, points, or leaderboards; game-based incentives alone are insufficient to guarantee improved learning outcomes. Research indicates that students do not appreciate gamification solely because of rewards, but rather because of the satisfaction derived from challenges, feedback, and the process of mastering tasks (Hamari et al., 2014). If game elements are not thoughtfully integrated into the pedagogical design, and if tasks do not reflect authentic learning objectives, the implementation of gamification may prove ineffective. For this reason, the teacher's focus in a gamified environment must be on the meaningful organization of the learning process rather than on the superficial application of game mechanics. Gamification typically enables students to create engaging, enjoyable, and educational content, thereby fostering sustained engagement throughout teaching and learning activities (Nistor & Iacob, 2018).

When gamification is integrated into the classroom, there is no single approach that suits all students. Its successful implementation requires careful planning, a deep understanding of students' needs, the contextual specifics of the educational environment, as well as a willingness to experiment and adapt new pedagogical approaches in practice (Deterding et al., 2011). Accordingly, the use of new

media and digital technologies in education is increasingly becoming essential for enhancing the teaching and learning process. The Internet of Things, as the youngest yet fastest-growing discipline, provides an illustrative example of how innovations and technological trends can shape modern education and support the development of student competencies (Arsenijević & Arsenijević, 2021). It is also important to be open to experimentation, reflect on learning outcomes, and adapt activities based on evaluation results.

Beyond the classroom, gamification has also been applied in areas such as business and education. The primary purpose of gamification is to increase participation (Dichev & Dicheva, 2017). Thus, this approach demonstrates that gamification not only boosts the number of participants but also promotes active engagement and motivation across various contexts.

Review of the literature on gamification indicates that different terms are often used to describe similar game elements, yet certain aspects are consistently associated with positive learning outcomes. Among the most important elements, the following can be highlighted:

Freedom to fail

A fundamental principle of gamification in the classroom is the concept of “freedom to fail,” which allows students to experiment, take risks, and regard mistakes as an inherent part of the learning process. Traditional educational approaches often stigmatize errors, generating stress and anxiety among learners. In contrast, gamification conceptualizes failure as a natural and necessary step toward skill mastery, thereby fostering a growth-oriented mindset and promoting greater perseverance in learning.

Immediate Feedback

Immediate feedback constitutes another essential component of gamification. It enables students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in near real time, thereby enhancing engagement and accelerating the learning process (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Within digital learning environments, software and applications frequently provide automatic feedback following each response or task, encouraging students to promptly adjust their strategies. Even conventional methods, such as polls, classroom questioning, or interactive quizzes, can effectively deliver instant feedback when integrated with gamified elements.

Leaderboards

Leaderboards are a commonly used gamified element that provide immediate feedback, but they may produce both positive and negative effects. While leaderboards can stimulate a competitive spirit, if not carefully designed, they may discourage students who are not at the top. Pedagogically meaningful leaderboard design should celebrate individual progress and effort, rather than solely maximum achievement, in order to foster an inclusive and motivating classroom environment (Seaborn & Fels, 2015).

Progression

Another key element of successful gamification is progression, which involves gradually increasing the complexity of tasks through which students advance, similar to the structure of video games. This approach allows students to clearly track their progress, set realistic goals, and experience satisfaction upon achieving them. Progression in a gamified environment functions as an instructional “scaffold,” enabling learners to move from their current zone of knowledge to the next level of challenges (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976).

Storytelling (Narrative Context)

Storytelling, or narrative, represents a powerful aspect of gamification, as stories provide context and meaning to learning activities. Through narrative, students do not perceive tasks as isolated exercises; rather, they engage with a coherent and meaningful structure that fosters motivation and focus. When narrative is integrated into educational activities, it links students’ progress to an engaging and clear “story” with a beginning, middle, and end (McGonigal, 2011).

The use of digital tools allows educators to implement gamification in a practical and pedagogically justified manner, thereby enhancing student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. Gamification has demonstrated positive effects on student motivation and achievement by increasing autonomy, competence, and social interaction (Deterding et al., 2011). Digital platforms such as Kahoot!, Moodle, and Socrative enable teachers to design engaging lessons through quizzes, leaderboards, badges, and immediate feedback, key components of effective gamification (Domínguez et al., 2013).

Kahoot!

Kahoot! is an interactive quiz-based platform that allows teachers to assess students’ understanding of lesson content in real time and provide immediate feedback during classes. Quizzes are displayed on a shared screen, while students respond via mobile devices or computers, supporting both competitive and collaborative aspects of learning (Wang, 2015). Empirical findings indicate that the use of Kahoot! increases student engagement and participation, particularly in larger groups where traditional knowledge checks may be limited (Ismail, 2019).

Moodle

Moodle is a learning management system (LMS) that enables the creation of a personalized and flexible learning environment. Through Moodle, teachers can organize content, assignments, tests, and discussion forums, track student progress, and integrate various gamification elements such as tokens, badges, and levels. Research shows that LMS platforms with integrated gamification elements promote deeper cognitive engagement and allow students to take a more active role in the learning process (Al-Azawi, Al-Faliti & Al-Blushi, 2016).

Reward Systems

Reward tools such as BadgeOS and Mozilla Open Badges facilitate systematic tracking and verification of acquired skills and achievements through digital badges. These badges function as formal tokens of accomplishment that can be utilized both within and beyond the educational system, contributing to transparency and mobility of student competencies. BadgeOS allows badge integration within LMS environments, while Mozilla Open Badges provides a standardized format that enables recognition of digital achievements across various platforms and contexts (Mozilla Foundation, 2018). Research indicates that such systems not only enhance students' intrinsic motivation but also support the development of metacognitive skills through reflection on progress and learning goals (Gibson et al., 2015).

2. Research methodology

Research on this approach can contribute to the improvement of teaching methods and strategies. Understanding how gamification influences learning can assist teachers in adapting their approaches and creating a more dynamic and effective learning environment. These needs and motivations make the study of gamification in English language teaching particularly relevant and valuable, especially for primary school students, as examined during the 2024/2025 academic year.

The aim of the research is to investigate the application of gamification in English language teaching at the primary school level and to analyze its impact on students' motivation, engagement, and development of language skills. The study focuses on determining the role of game elements (points, rewards, challenges, and competitions) in enhancing the learning process, as well as evaluating their contribution to the acquisition of language competencies – reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Special emphasis is placed on the effects of gamification on knowledge retention and the development of social skills through collaborative and team-based activities.

The research objectives are:

To determine the prevalence of gamification in English language teaching.

To examine the impact of gamification elements on students' motivation and engagement.

To analyze the contribution of gamification to the development of cooperation and teamwork among students.

The research hypotheses are as follows:

It has been assumed that gamification is applied in English language teaching at the primary school level.

It has been assumed that students engaged in gamified activities demonstrate higher levels of motivation compared to students participating in traditional instruction.

It has been assumed that gamification increases student engagement and active participation during the learning process.

It has been assumed that the implementation of gamification contributes to the development of cooperation and teamwork among students.

The research was conducted using a quantitative approach, through a student survey aimed at assessing motivation, engagement, and perceptions of the effectiveness of gamified teaching activities. Additionally, a content analysis of the literature was performed to examine theoretical and empirical findings regarding the application of gamification in foreign language teaching. The collected data were processed using statistical methods and presented in tables and graphs.

Data were collected via a questionnaire administered through the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire contained 10 closed-ended questions. The study was conducted in November 2025, with the assistance of English language teachers. The research sample consisted of 135 sixth-grade students from the primary school "Vuk Karadžić" in Novi Pazar.

3. Analysis of the results

The results regarding students' achievement in English indicate that the majority of respondents attain good and very good results. The most frequent grade was very good (31.43%), followed by excellent (28.57%), while good was achieved by 25.71% of students. A smaller proportion of respondents received a satisfactory grade (11.48%), and a failing grade was recorded for a minimal number of students (2.86%). These findings point to a relatively high level of student achievement in English, providing a strong basis for further investigation into the impact of contemporary teaching approaches, such as gamification, on the enhancement of language competencies.

Analysis of the survey data also established the structure of the sample according to gender, age, and academic performance in English. A total of 135 sixth-grade students participated in the study, with a slightly higher representation of male students (57.14%) compared to female students (42.85%). Regarding age distribution, the majority of the sample consisted of 12-year-old students (65.71%), while a smaller proportion were 11 years old (34.29%), indicating a relatively homogeneous age structure within the sample.

Table 1 reveals the responses to the fourth survey question: Does the teacher frequently incorporate gamification elements in lessons, such as quizzes, badges, and team competitions?

Table 1. Gamification elements in lessons

	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2,85 %
Disagree	0,00 %
Partially	11,42 %
Agree	31,42 %
Strongly agree	54,29 %

The fourth survey question addressed the frequency of using gamification elements in English language teaching (quizzes, badges, team competitions). The results show that 54.29% of respondents fully agree with the statement that the teacher frequently applies gamification elements, while 31.42% agree. Partial agreement was expressed by 11.42% of students. A minimal percentage of respondents (2.85%) indicated that they do not agree at all, and no student selected the option “disagree.”

Overall, the majority of students express agreement with the statement.

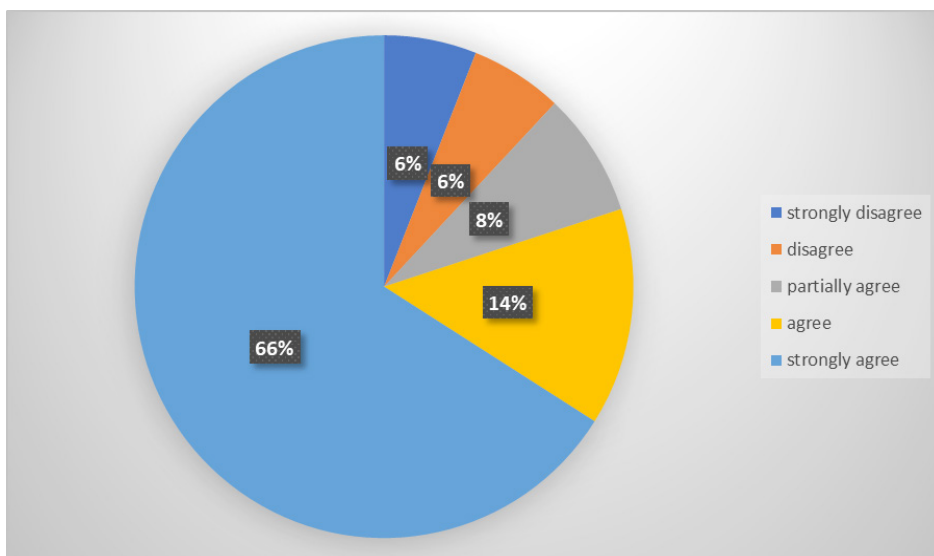


Figure 1. Motivation for learning through the use of gamification in teaching

Figure 1 shows the results related to students' motivation in learning through the use of gamification in teaching. The largest percentage of respondents (66%) fully agree with the statement that using gamification increases their motivation compared to traditional teaching approaches. The remaining respondents express varying degrees of agreement, while there is no significant percentage of negative responses.

The data indicate a predominantly positive student attitude toward the impact of gamification on learning motivation.

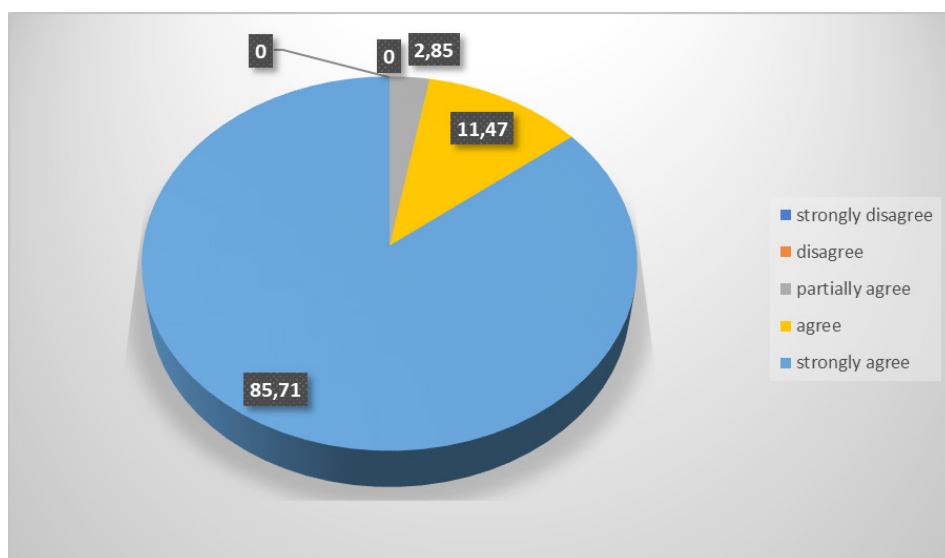


Figure 2. Representation of student engagement in gamified teaching

Figure 2 presents respondents' answers regarding student engagement in gamified teaching. The largest percentage of students (85.71%) fully agree with the statement that gamification increases their engagement during lessons. Additionally, 11.47% of respondents agree with the statement, while 2.85% express partial agreement. No negative responses were recorded.

The results indicate a high level of student consensus regarding engagement in lessons that incorporate gamification elements.

Table 2 shows the results on the following survey question: I feel more motivated and enthusiastic about teamwork when gamification elements are included in the lessons.

Table 2. Enthusiasm about teamwork

	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0,00 %
Disagree	5,71 %
Partially agree	5,71 %
Agree	20 %
Strongly agree	48,57 %

The question addressed students' assessment of their motivation and enthusiasm for teamwork in lessons that incorporate gamification elements. The results show that 48.57% of students fully agree with the statement that they are more motivated for teamwork when gamified elements are present, while 20% of respondents agree. Partial agreement was expressed by 5.71% of students, the same percentage (5.71%) indicated disagreement, and no respondent selected "strongly disagree."

Overall, 68.57% of students express agreement (either agree or fully agree) with the statement, indicating a predominantly positive attitude toward the use of gamification in the context of teamwork.

4. Discussion

The research results indicate a range of significant educational effects of gamification in the English language teaching, and the levels of support for the hypotheses show that students not only recognize the presence of gamified elements but also perceive them as motivating and engaging components of the instructional process.

The first research hypothesis, concerning the recognition of gamification in English language lessons, was confirmed, as 54.29% of students strongly agreed that gamified elements are used during instructional activities. This finding indicates

that gamification is not an abstract or imperceptible addition to the teaching process; rather, students genuinely perceive the presence of these elements. This aligns with the work of de Marcos et al. (2016), who emphasize that gamification should be integrated in a way that allows students to clearly identify its components, such as challenges, rewards, and progression structures, so that they can consciously experience and communicate their perception of engagement.

The results related to motivation further reinforce this conclusion. Specifically, 65.71% of the respondents strongly agreed that gamification significantly increases their motivation compared to traditional teaching methods. This high percentage indicates a positive impact of gamified elements on students' intrinsic motivation, meaning that students do not "learn because they have to," but because they want to participate in the activities. This aligns with the findings of de Marcos et al. (2016), who emphasize that gamification can enhance students' sense of autonomy and competence, two core factors of intrinsic motivation according to self-determination theory. Additionally, Sailer et al. (2017) note that elements such as challenges, feedback, and progression directly support motivational mechanisms, as students experience a sense of achievement and goal-directed activity that keeps them engaged over time.

The extremely high level of agreement regarding student engagement (85.71% strongly agreeing) indicates that gamification not only motivates but also actively fosters participation and interaction in the classroom. In the context of English language teaching, where communication and verbal interaction are crucial for the development of language skills, this aspect is particularly important. Deterding et al. (2011) explain that gamification, through the application of game elements in non-game contexts, creates a distinct "gameful" experience that enhances student engagement, as learners become active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. This means that students do not rely solely on teacher instruction; they initiate interactions, seek feedback, communicate with peers, and actively participate in tasks.

Furthermore, the findings related to collaboration, with 48.57% of the students strongly agreeing that gamification makes teamwork more engaging and effective, highlight the significant social aspect of gamification. This indicates that gamified elements influence not only individual motivation but also the dynamics among students. Hakulinen et al. (2015) point out that rewards such as badges, levels, or competitive elements can enhance interaction among students, particularly in team-based tasks where collective effort leads to goal achievement. This is especially important in foreign language teaching, where collaboration and communication allow students to develop speaking, listening, and comprehension skills through mutual interaction and support.

A systematic review of the literature conducted by Seaborn and Fels (2015) further supports these findings: properly designed gamification elements positively

impact students' intrinsic motivation and perception of autonomy, thereby increasing engagement and active participation. The connection between perceived autonomy and higher levels of involvement is crucial: when students feel that they have choice and control over their learning, which gamification often facilitates through various progression paths and activity options, they are more likely to commit emotionally and cognitively to the tasks.

Despite these positive findings, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The study was conducted with a relatively small number of participants, meaning that the results should be interpreted with caution and cannot be directly generalized to all students. Nevertheless, the high percentages of agreement and the consistent support for the hypotheses indicate a strong tendency for students to perceive gamification as both motivational and educationally beneficial. Additionally, the relative homogeneity of the sample (same educational environment and developmental age) allows for a clear interpretation of the specific effects of gamification in the context of English language teaching, while also highlighting the need for larger and more diverse samples in future research.

In conclusion, the research results, supported by relevant theoretical sources, clearly indicate that gamification offers multiple pedagogical benefits: it increases student motivation and engagement, promotes interaction and collaboration, and contributes to active and participatory English language instruction. Despite the challenges and limitations, these findings are reinforced by a broad range of empirical studies and theoretical analyses, confirming gamification as a relevant and effective strategy in contemporary educational contexts.

Conclusions and summary

Gamification represents a promising strategy for enhancing English language teaching, as it integrates motivational and interactive elements into the learning process. Proper implementation and the continuous development of gamified elements increase student engagement, encourage active learning, and contribute to the achievement of long-term language competencies. Motivated and involved students demonstrate greater persistence in learning English, as well as more active participation in classroom activities.

Gamification enables students to systematically acquire vocabulary, practice grammatical structures, and develop productive language skills through interactive activities. The gamified approach provides a safe and supportive environment in which students can experiment with language, apply acquired knowledge, and develop communicative competencies. Additionally, activities that incorporate collaboration and social interaction contribute to the enhancement of teamwork, interpersonal communication skills, and critical thinking.

Immediate feedback and progress visualization enable students to self-regulate their learning, identify areas for improvement, and adjust their learning strategies.

However, the implementation of gamification presents challenges, including technological limitations, pedagogical design, and assessment methods. Teachers must strike a balance between the motivational elements of gamification and the instructional objectives, supported by appropriate professional guidance and training.

In conclusion, gamification proves to be an effective and relevant tool in English language teaching, as it enhances motivation, engagement, collaboration, and active learning. By integrating gamified methods in accordance with pedagogical principles, educators can create dynamic and effective learning experiences that empower students to become competent, autonomous, and confident users of the English language.

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