



THE ROLE OF GAMIFICATION IN INCREASING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract

Motivation is widely acknowledged as a critical determinant of success in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Nevertheless, many learners demonstrate low levels of motivation due to conventional instructional approaches that lack engagement. This study aims to investigate the impact of gamification on students' motivation in English learning. A mixed-method design was adopted, involving quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative insights from classroom observations. The participants consisted of 60 secondary school students. Statistical analysis using paired sample t-tests revealed a significant improvement in students' motivation following the implementation of gamified learning activities ($p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that gamification elements—such as points, badges, and leader boards enhance student engagement, foster both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and create a more supportive learning environment. These results reinforce recent empirical evidence supporting gamification as an effective pedagogical approach in EFL contexts.



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INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate in English has become increasingly essential in the context of globalization, particularly in education, technology, and international communication. Despite its importance, many students encounter difficulties in acquiring English proficiency. One of the primary factors contributing to this challenge is insufficient learning motivation.

In order to address that issue, educators have explored innovative instructional strategies, one of which is gamification. Gamification involves integrating game-related elements into educational settings to create a more interactive and engaging learning experience. This study seeks to examine how gamification contributes to increasing students' motivation in learning English.

Gamification refers to the incorporation of game mechanics—such as scoring systems, rewards, and competition—into non-game environments. In educational contexts, it is used to enhance learner engagement and participation. Rather than transforming lessons into full games, gamification enriches instructional activities by embedding elements that stimulate motivation. (Putz & Treiblmaier, 2019) concept of Gamification, defined as the application of game design elements in non-game contexts, has emerged as a powerful strategy in educational settings, particularly in language learning (Babar, 2021). By incorporating elements such as points, levels, and rewards, gamification aims to create engaging and motivating learning environments. Research indicates that gamification can significantly enhance student engagement and foster a positive learning atmosphere, ultimately leading to improved

educational outcomes (Aminah et al., 2024). In the context of EFL, gamification not only makes learning more enjoyable but also encourages active participation, which is crucial for language retention and skill development (Diaz et al., 2026). Recent studies have shown that gamification can significantly improve language learning outcomes, particularly in areas such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar understanding, and speaking skills. Moreover, it promotes active learning by encouraging students to participate more consistently.

The Importance of Motivation and Retention in EFL Learning Motivation plays a pivotal role in successful language learning, influencing both the effort students invest and their persistence in overcoming challenges (Zhang & Crawford, 2024). High levels of motivation are associated with increased engagement and a greater likelihood of achieving language proficiency. Furthermore, retention the ability to recall and apply learned material is essential for long-term language acquisition. Studies have shown that gamification can enhance both motivation and retention by providing immediate feedback, fostering a sense of achievement, and encouraging collaborative learning experiences (Putz & Treiblmaier, 2019). The interplay between motivation and retention is critical in EFL contexts, where learners often face the challenge of maintaining interest in language studies over extended periods.

Motivation plays a pivotal role in language acquisition, as it influences learners' willingness to participate, persist, and succeed. Students with high levels of motivation tend to be more actively engaged and achieve better academic outcomes. In contrast, traditional teaching practices, which often emphasize teacher-centered instruction and repetitive tasks, may fail to stimulate learners' interest (Bristi et al., 2025). Motivation is commonly divided into intrinsic and extrinsic types. Intrinsic motivation arises from internal interest or enjoyment, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or incentives. Both forms are essential in EFL learning, as they influence students' engagement and persistence.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are critical concepts in the context of language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Intrinsic motivation refers to the drive to engage in an activity for its inherent satisfaction, enjoyment, or interest, while extrinsic motivation involves performing an activity to achieve a separable outcome, such as rewards or recognition (Noori, 2023). In the digital classroom, gamification can significantly influence both types of motivation. For instance, gamified elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards can enhance extrinsic motivation by providing tangible rewards for learners' efforts (Noori, 2023). Conversely, he added that when learners engage with gamified content that is enjoyable and meaningful, their intrinsic motivation can also be fostered, leading to deeper engagement and sustained interest in language learning (Noori, 2023). Research indicates that incorporating gamification strategies can create a more engaging learning environment, which is essential for maintaining motivation in digital contexts (Panagiotidis & Arvanitis, 2023).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) highlights three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Gamification supports these needs by allowing students to make choices, experience achievement, and interact with peers. According to SDT, fulfilling these psychological needs is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation. In gamified learning environments, autonomy can be supported by allowing learners to make choices about their learning paths, such as selecting tasks or challenges that align with their interests (Alfahad, 2021). Relatedness can be enhanced through collaborative gamified activities that promote social interaction among learners, fostering a sense of community and support (Panagiotidis & Arvanitis, 2023). Lastly, competence is addressed through the provision of immediate feedback and achievable challenges, which help learners feel a sense of progress and mastery in their language skills. Studies have shown that when these needs are met, learners are

more likely to engage deeply with the material and persist in their language learning efforts (Alfahad, 2021).

The role of motivation in language learning, especially in digital environments, has been extensively studied. Research consistently highlights that motivation is a key predictor of success in EFL learning (Aminah et al., 2024). For instance, a study found that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations positively correlate with learning outcomes in blended learning environments, with intrinsic motivation being particularly influential (Aminah et al., 2024). Furthermore, digital tools and gamification strategies have been shown to enhance learners' motivation by making the learning process more engaging and enjoyable (Noori, 2023). The integration of technology in language learning not only facilitates access to resources but also allows for personalized learning experiences that cater to individual preferences and learning styles (Panagiotidis & Arvanitis, 2023). However, challenges such as the digital divide and varying levels of digital literacy can impact motivation, underscoring the need for educators to create inclusive and supportive learning environments (Karim et al., 2023). Overall, fostering motivation through gamification and digital tools is essential for effective EFL learning in the contemporary educational landscape.

Recent studies examining the relationship between gamification and motivation in EFL contexts have yielded promising results. For instance, research by (Tsai, 2024) demonstrated that Gamification significantly Increase student engagement and participation. Similarly, Zhang, (Zhang & Crawford, 2024) study which revealed that Gamification significantly Improve motivation and learning outcomes. Furthermore, study by (Aminah et al., 2024) point out that Gamification significantly Enhance retention and comprehension. These findings underscore the potential of gamification as a tool for creating engaging learning experiences that promote both motivation and retention. Then, study by (Zuhri et al., 2025) found that Gamification significantly Reduce anxiety in language learning. These findings suggest that gamification is a promising approach for modern language education.

METHOD

The Design of Research

This study employed a mixed-methods approach that systematically combines quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative component of this study involves the analysis of responses to a questionnaire distributed to participants. Meanwhile, the qualitative component focuses on direct classroom observations to capture the real and contextual dynamics of learning.

Population and sample

The population or subjects in this study comprised all pupils enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. From this population, a specifically selected research sample consisted of 60 tenth-grade pupils who were active participants in the EFL classroom environment. This sample was selected to represent the characteristics of typical students within a secondary school context.

This study was conducted at State Senior Secondary School (SMA) 7 in Tidore Island, which is one of the senior secondary schools in the province of North Maluku. The location was chosen based on the characteristics of the learning environment and the availability of participants relevant to the focus of the research.

Instrument

To collect empirical data, this study used a Motivation Questionnaire. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the role of gamification in their English language learning process. Specifically, a Likert-scale questionnaire was used to measure the difference in students' motivation levels before and after the implementation of gamification methods. The instrument included indicators such as: Interest in learning English, Classroom participation, Self-confidence in speaking and

Enjoyment of learning activities.

All responses to this questionnaire were measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents 'strongly disagree' and 5 represents 'strongly agree'.

Data Analysis

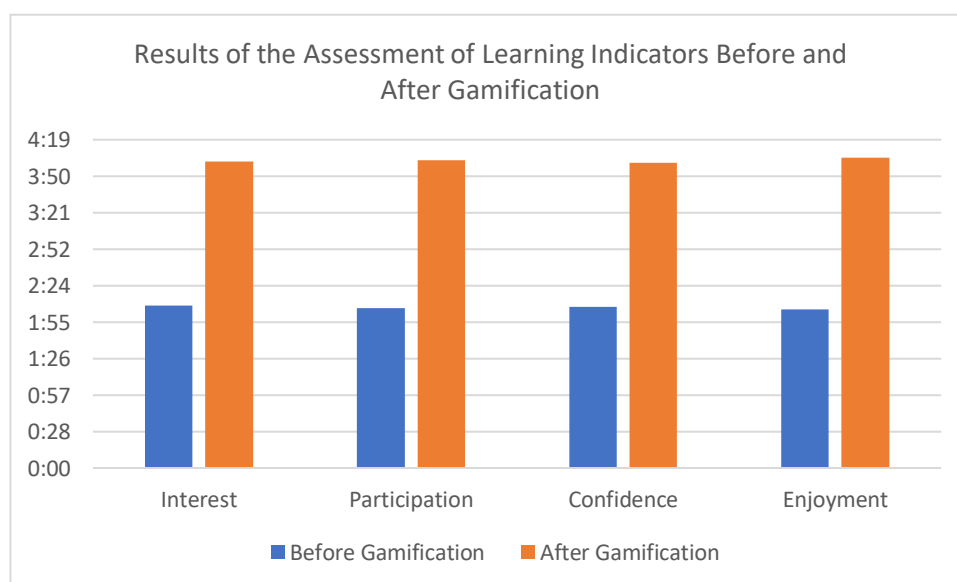
The procedures of Data analysis were conducted separately according to the characteristics of each data type. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and a paired t-test. The purpose of this statistical analysis was to determine whether there was a significant difference in students' motivation levels before and after the gamification intervention. Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained from classroom observation sheets were analysed thematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 1. Results of the Assessment of Learning Indicators Before and After Gamification

	Before Gamification	After Gamification
Interest	2.8	4.2
Participation	2.6	4.3
Confidence	2.7	4.1
Enjoyment	2.5	4.5



The results show a notable increase in students' motivation after the implementation of gamified learning activities. All measured indicators demonstrated improvement, particularly in terms of enjoyment and participation. The table above compares the values of four psychological/behavioural indicators before (Before Gamification) and after the implementation of gamification (After Gamification). In general, all indicators show a significant upward trend.

Here are the detailed data for each indicator:

- Interest: Before the implementation of gamification, the interest score was 2.8. After gamification was implemented, the score increased to 4.2 (a rise of 1.4 points).
- Participation: The initial participation score was 2.6. This value jumped to 4.3 after gamification was implemented (a rise of 1.7 points).
- Confidence: The confidence indicator recorded an initial score of 2.7 and increased to 4.1 at the end of the observation period (an increase of 1.4 points).
- Enjoyment: The enjoyment aspect recorded the lowest score before gamification, at 2.5. However, after gamification was implemented, this indicator saw the highest increase, reaching a score of 4.5 (an increase of 2.0 points). Based on this data, the implementation of gamification had a very positive impact. The “Enjoyment” aspect showed the most rapid growth, followed by increases in active participation, interest, and self-confidence.

Statistical Analysis

Table 2. Statistical Analysis of Motivation Scores Before and After Gamification

Variable	Mean Before	Mean After	Sig. (p-value)
Motivation Score	2.65	4.28	0.000

The table displays data from statistical tests or comparisons of the mean values of the motivation level variable before and after an intervention. The following is a breakdown of the data in the table:

- Mean Before: The initial mean score for motivation before the intervention was 2.65.
- Mean After: After the intervention was implemented, the average motivation score increased significantly to 4.28 (an increase of 1.63 points).
- Sig. p-value (Significance Value): The recorded probability value (p-value) is 0.000.

The paired sample t-test results revealed a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-intervention scores ($p < 0.05$) and there was a fairly sharp increase in the motivation score from 2.65 to 4.28. This indicates that gamification had a measurable positive effect on students' motivation.

Results of the Questionnaire Analysis

Table 3. The Percentage Distribution of Student choices

Response	Percentage	Number of Students
Agree / Increased Motivation	86,7% ($\pm 87\%$)	52 students
Disagree / does not increase motivation	13,3% ($\pm 13\%$)	8 students
Total	100%	60 students

The table above shows that, based on questionnaire data collected from 60 students, 86.7% (52 students) stated that the implementation of gamification successfully increased their learning motivation significantly. This finding is fully supported by the statistical data in the motivation indicator table. The most notable increase in motivation was felt by students in the “Enjoyment” (pleasure in learning) aspect, which jumped from an average score of 2.5 to 4.5, as well as in the “Participation” aspect, which rose from 2.6 to 4.3. Although 13.3% (8 students) felt that the impact was minimal, overall, the percentage data and average indicator scores confirm that the gamification approach had a massive

positive impact on students' affective performance in the classroom.

Thematic Findings from Observations (Observational Insights)

Based on qualitative data collection techniques carried out through direct classroom observations, the researcher obtained empirical evidence that supports the quantitative findings regarding increased student engagement during the learning process.

In detail, the observed changes in behaviour and classroom atmosphere are described as follows:

- **Increased Enthusiasm and Active Participation:** Throughout the intervention, students appeared much more enthusiastic about participating in the teaching and learning process. They actively participated and were directly involved in completing the assignments given by the teacher in class.
- **Increased Self-Confidence:** Through observation of verbal and nonverbal behavior, students demonstrate greater confidence when practicing and using English during learning activities.
- **Changes in the Learning Environment:** The implementation of this new method has significantly transformed the classroom atmosphere. The learning environment has become more dynamic and lively, and most importantly, it has reduced the pressure or stress that students typically feel when learning a foreign language.

Discussion

Based on the research results presented, the implementation of gamification-based learning activities has been shown to have a statistically significant positive impact on students' motivation and psychological engagement. This success is clearly evident both from the descriptive analysis of each indicator and from the overall results of the statistical significance test.

In general, the total average motivation score (Motivation Score) surged from 2.65 to 4.28. Statistical testing yielded a Sig. (p-value) of 0.000, which is far smaller than the standard significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$). This highly significant p-value result confirms that the increase in motivation is a real effect of the gamification intervention, not due to chance.

Furthermore, when analysed in more detail by indicator, the dynamics of this increase reveal an interesting pattern:

1. **Emotional Appeal (Enjoyment):** The enjoyment indicator showed the most significant increase, rising by 2.0 points (from 2.5 to 4.5). Before gamification, this aspect had the lowest score, indicating that conventional learning methods tended to be monotonous for students. The inclusion of game elements (such as leader boards, badges, or challenges) successfully transformed the learning atmosphere into a recreational experience, thereby triggering the release of intrinsic motivation.
2. **Active Engagement (Participation):** In line with the increase in enjoyment, the participants' participation rate also surged sharply by 1.7 points (from 2.6 to 4.3). When students enjoy the process, they voluntarily take an active role in learning activities without feeling burdened.
3. **Interest and Confidence:** Both of these indicators showed steady and comparable growth, each rising by 1.4 points. Gamification mechanisms that provide immediate feedback upon completing challenges help build students' sense of self-efficacy, which ultimately boosts their self-confidence and sustains their interest in learning over the long term.

Theoretically, these findings support the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), according to which gamification can fulfil three basic human psychological needs: autonomy (choice within the game), competence (completing challenges/scoring), and relatedness (collaborative participation). The integration of these elements cumulatively leads to a measurable increase in students' overall motivation.

Gamification Enhances Engagement

The findings of this study confirm that gamification plays a significant role in enhancing students' motivation in EFL learning. The use of game elements creates an interactive environment that encourages active participation.

Impact on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

From the perspective of intrinsic motivation, gamification makes learning more enjoyable and meaningful. Students engage in activities not only to gain rewards but also because they find the process interesting. Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation is reinforced through rewards such as points and rankings.

Observational Insights

Based on classroom observations, further empirical evidence was found regarding an increase in student engagement, as they appeared to be more enthusiastic, actively participated in completing assigned tasks, and demonstrated greater confidence in using English. In addition, the classroom learning atmosphere became much more dynamic and less stressful for students. The qualitative findings obtained from these direct observation sheets were consistent with and supported by various literature and previous research in the field of language education. These positive changes in student engagement and classroom atmosphere reinforce the theory that the implementation of gamification (game-based learning) has proven effective in increasing student engagement, while significantly reducing their anxiety and fear regarding the absorption of the taught material (Zhang & Crawford, 2024).

Alignment with Previous Studies

These results are consistent with previous studies, which highlight the effectiveness of gamification in improving engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. Furthermore, gamification helps reduce anxiety, allowing students to practice language skills more confidently (Aminah et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis and discussions regarding the application of gamification methods in learning activities, this study successfully measured the tangible impact of integrating game elements on students' motivation to learn. Statistical analysis revealed significant changes that reinforce the relevance of this strategy in the field of education.

The application of gamification methods in learning activities has been empirically proven to significantly and effectively increase student motivation. This is demonstrated by the results of the statistical analysis, which showed a p-value of 0.000 and an increase in the average motivation score from 2.65 to 4.28. In line with the result, this study concludes that gamification is an effective strategy for increasing students' motivation in learning English. By incorporating game elements into instructional practices, teachers can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment. The findings suggest that gamification should be considered as a valuable approach in EFL classrooms. In addition, future research is recommended to explore long-term effects and to examine the application of gamification in different educational levels and contexts.

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