

IMPLEMENTING GAMIFICATION IN ESL/EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. Games have long played a significant role in child development offering a range of benefits such as increasing motivation, enhancing memory and retention, encouraging collaboration and better use of social skills. Given these benefits, educators have increasingly turned to gamification- the use of game elements in non-game contexts - as a way to enhance learning in the classrooms, particularly in ESL/EFL settings. Among the first institutions that researched impacts of games in language acquisition and conducted experimental lessons - MIT and Carnegie Mellon University were the first to explore digital game-based learning (DGLB). The fact that this method is applied by such prestigious institutions demonstrates the importance of the matter. This article examines benefits of gamification in detail, offers practical strategies for implementation with the example of game-based tools (Kahoot, Classcraft, Quizzlet) and discusses challenges while applying this method and presents solutions for them. Real-life examples and case studies are stated to give better understanding of the topic.

Key words: Gamification, games, benefit, development, tool.

According to Cambridge Dictionary Gamification is “the practice of making activities more like games in order to make them more interesting and enjoyable”. It is one of the simplest and brief definition of the term. Points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, and quests are typically seen as a key elements of the games. The objective of using gamification method in education is getting better learning outcomes by improving student motivation. The theoretical background of gamification is based on Self-Determination Theory, in which individuals are motivated by the feeling of autonomy (with activities which involve making free choices and being independent), competence (using all the learned to win and achieve goals), and relatedness (by being in a team or in pairs). The profits of playing games has been researched by many and game based learning has been found to improve social skills, empathy, cooperation, and reduce aggression in young children. Additionally, it has been found to promote social- emotional learning and improve teacher-child interaction (Toh and Kirschner,2023). In ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as foreign language) classroom students are expected to master four skills namely Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing to reach a particular level in the language. Grammar and Vocabulary are the 2 main branches that help students build foundation to speak and understand English language. Main problems faced by teachers are lack of student engagement, difficulty in maintaining attention, and a lack of desire to participate in activities and these problems can be solved by

applying game-based learning by teachers. Several case studies on the game Kahoot! has proven that students tend to be more active and eager when they are offered to compete, this case being valid even with introvert individuals. Although many are aware of the usefulness of the games, knowing practical strategies to implement them has been main task for language teachers.

Applying online learning platforms and activities require the ability to choose the best fitting platform according to the context and the objective of the lesson. Knowing how to use digital technologies and introducing them to the students in an understandable way is another important factor. Games and online learning platforms are used in several ways such as:

- Classroom management solution
- Gamifying activities
- Role-play and Storytelling with levels and rewards
- Project-based learning with game elements

In this technologically developing world, getting students together and sharing tasks should have been instant and online, platforms like ClassDojo, Google Classroom are the classic examples of a highly beneficial in managing those tasks. Students will get together in an online class, where they can chat, run profiles, and doing homework creatively with themes and backgrounds proved to improve student engagement and concentration. Moreover, as all members can see other's activity in these profiles, students are found to be more responsible under their classmates' views.

Matching pairs, finding definitions, or giving answers to questions on the ESL/EFL textbooks may seem mundane to many students but not with games like Kahoot!, Quizzlet, and Escape rooms. These can have significant impact in making activities exciting as they involve sense of competition and movement. Making quizzes online can be time efficient and different personages at the end of the game Kahoot! has made students addicted to participate each time the game played. In the case study carried by the Institution of higher education of central region of Portugal where total of 135 English learners were involved, 93% of the respondents considered Kahoot! to be important or very important and only 7% of them thought it was not.

Online resources are easily available and many gamification techniques can be done online. However, it must not mean that classic style is less effective nor it should worsen it's value. For instance storytelling and role-playing (according to levels) have been widely used and have undeniable benefits. Below we can see how teachers could integrate all skills with only one role-play:

Game title: The Quest of Wordia

Story premise: You are brave adventurers from the land of Wordia. The evil Silence wizard has stolen Crystal of all Knowledge. To get it back, you must journey from 5 lands, each representing a different English skill: Vocabulary valley, Grammar gorge, Pronunciation picks, Speaking swamp, and listening lake.

Structure of the game: Students are given different tasks based on the valleys (English skills) to get Crystal of all Knowledge (should be prepared beforehand from paper or plastic).

Final reward: After completing all levels, students unlock the Crystal of all Knowledge and become Guardians of Wordia. They get a certificate or small prize (e.g. sticker, badge, or treat).

This game can be customized for any age or topic, gives a sense of relatedness by being a part of exciting narrative, sets responsibility to each student in a creative way and most importantly makes learning an adventure not a chore.

Another essential part of modern teaching method of English learning classrooms is Project based learning (PBL) with elements of game. PBL increases long-term retention, improves problem-solving and collaboration skills and improves students' attitudes towards learning (Strobel, 2009). This powerful combination enhances social skills of students by getting them together, boosts confidence as projects are seen less complicated in a game version and improves overall outcomes. To illustrate this, a well-known game is presented below.

Project title: Shark Tank (EFL edition).

Duration: 1-2 weeks project.

Skill focuses:

- Speaking (pitching, persuasion)
- Writing (advertising, business plans)
- Vocabulary (product, business, persuasive language) Teamwork and creativity)

Project scenario: Students are young entrepreneurs with big ideas! They must invent a product or service and pitch it to a panel of “Sharks” (judges) to get funding.

Structure of the game: The game is started with group formation with 3-5 students holding these roles: CEO, Marketer, Designer, Presenter. The second part will be product creation using brainstorming sheets, following with visual aids such as posters, slides, prototypes, or drawing. The next step will be writing the pitch (script or outline) including: Product name and slogan, Problem/solution, How it works, Price and profit ideas, Why investors should invest. The final stage is Pitch Day. Here, each team presents their pitch to the Sharks (teacher and peers), and Sharks ask question and give money if they buy a pitch.

Gamification elements:

- Pitch point: Teams earn points based on creativity, teamwork, English use, and persuasion.
- Investor Bucks: Give teams classroom cash as an investment.
- Badges: “Best Ad”, “Best Pitch”, “Most persuasive speaker”. Leaderboard: Track team scores.

Assessment: English accuracy, teamwork, presentation skills.

Projects like these are fun and memorable that provide unforgettable moments while improving student's language skills. This method can be implied in EFL/ESL classrooms where creativity and collaboration is valued along with language acquisition. As Ronald and Newell states "Engaging the whole person in authentic experiences allows for a young person to not only know and do, but to be someone".

Although having a lot of profits, implying games is still being problem in some classrooms due to several factors. The world has many modern and equipped schools though some are still lack stable internet connection, monitors and other devices which hinders students learn language in a fun way. This is one of the basic and non personal issue. However, improving classroom effectiveness highly depends on teachers, so teacher readiness to imply game-based learning is a significant factor. Even with ready and available resources some teachers are still not trained to imply new methods, and are resistant to change. It takes a long time to adapt and create suitable games in context based classrooms, students may feel overactive creating noisy class, these being reason for some educators to keep their lesson non-interactive. Moreover, Assessment in game-based classrooms is more challenging than traditional assessment methods given that shy or weaker students may present less while still participating in the game so marks could be under discussion by strong students. Cultural views and norms should also be concerned as some games and topics could not fit with some cultures. For instance role-playing that involve dating is not recommended to Asian cultures. No matter how much they are, these problems could be solved by efficient teacher training and rewarding system, equipping schools with important devices, and preparedness to asses students.

Conclusion:

Incorporating gamification into ESL/EFL classrooms has numerous profits such as enhancing student motivation, attention and participation, giving feeling of relatedness, making classes interactive and improving teacher-student communication. Knowing strategies of implementation to run classrooms, gamify activities, conduct PBL sessions and organize both online and face to face gamified classes help teachers to better engage students' attention, make them do the tasks and finally get expected outcomes. While there are some challenges faced while using this method such as lack of technological devices, teacher training and pedagogical knowledge, gamification is still seen as a must used method because it can be a revolutionary factor for some language learners.

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