



**UNIVERSIDAD ESTATAL PENÍNSULA
DE SANTA ELENA
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN E IDIOMAS
INSTITUTO DE POSTGRADO**

TÍTULO DEL TRABAJO

**GAMIFICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING ON
MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**

AUTOR

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Resumen

Este trabajo reconoce el impacto de la gamificación en la motivación y compromiso de estudiantes de secundaria en la enseñanza de inglés. El propósito es mitigar la baja participación y la ansiedad lingüística mediante la innovación metodológica. Se empleó un método de estudio de caso en un noveno grado con nivel de suficiencia A2, aplicando el marco "The Quest for Fluency", el cual integra elementos narrativos, puntos de experiencia (XP) y herramientas digitales como Duolingo y Quizizz. Se concluye que una gamificación bien diseñada disminuye el filtro afectivo y vincula la realidad digital de los jóvenes con los objetivos académicos, promoviendo una adquisición del lenguaje más efectiva y persistente.

Palabras claves: Gamificación, Motivación, Compromiso.

Abstract

This study shows the impact of gamification on the motivation and engagement of secondary school students in English Language Teaching (ELT). The purpose is to mitigate low participation and linguistic anxiety through methodological innovation. A case study method was employed with a ninth-grade class (A2 proficiency level), applying the "The Quest for Fluency" framework, which integrates narrative elements, experience points (XP), and digital tools such as Duolingo and Quizizz. It is concluded that well-designed gamification lowers the affective filter and links the students' digital reality with academic goals, promoting more effective and persistent language acquisition.

Keywords: Gamification, Motivation, Engagement.

INTRODUCCIÓN

The present case study is conducted in a ninth-grade class at a public secondary school, composed of approximately thirty students between the ages of fourteen and fifteen. Students demonstrate an A2 level, so this context shows a scenario of English classes, where teaching, technology, and motivation challenges the teacher's skills.

During language classes, student verbal engagement remains severely restricted because these particular trio of pupils persistently offer responses or take part actively in exercises.

The rest of the students are very quiet, this is because they are not interested about what they are learning and are afraid making mistakes.

Although they use their smartphones, spending time with them, teachers are focus on the use of traditional paper books. Therefore, the goal is to connect both elements, smart devices, apps and Technology they enjoy using, with English classes.

DESAROLLO

Defining Gamification

Gamification is widely understood as incorporating gaming strategies into everyday activities to boost interest, drive behavior, and encourage involvement (Deterding et al., 2011). Between gamification and other terms like serious games and game-based education is crucial. Although serious games aim for purposes beyond mere amusement—to educate primarily—they employ gamification by incorporating select gaming features within non-game contexts to improve engagement and achieve targeted results (Hamari et al., 2014).

In game design techniques, crucial components encompass points, rewards like badges, ranking systems through leaderboards, quests called challenges, stages referred to as levels, and storylines for context. This feature taps into people's innate desire for rivalry, accomplishment, and peer approval by making activities more captivating and satisfying (Sailer et al., 2017). Werbach and Hunter (2012) study, gamification harnesses both internal and external incentives via strategic planning for effectiveness.

Gamifying education turns conventional classrooms into dynamic, engaging spaces where students actively participate in collaborative efforts and feel empowered by their own achievements (Wulantari et al., 2023). In particular within educational settings focused on language acquisition, incorporating game elements can effectively tackle issues like diminished enthusiasm, stress, and detachment among learners.

Evolution

In the late 2000s, gamification began gaining recognition within academia and practice; it surged into prominence during the 2010s due to advancements in digital technology. At first, gamification began most often within marketing strategies for enhancing customer interaction through incentives like rewards schemes (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011). The widespread acceptance of this approach quickly motivated teachers to investigate how it could be applied within school settings and on digital educational tools.

As smartphones proliferate, digital platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn, coupled with online learning tools such as Coursera and Udemy, have transformed game design into versatile educational strategies applicable across various fields including business development and foreign languages. The proliferation of EdTech firms integrating game-based features in their offerings is significantly boosting this development.

Sailer et al. (2017) have conducted studies on this topic. In 2017, researchers developed framework models for gamification aimed at educational professionals and creators of digital content, suggesting these tools guide their systematic application of gaming mechanics relevant to instructional goals while advocating against mere surface-level incorporation rather than strategic integration.

Frameworks and Models

Various analytical models exist for evaluating and influencing game-based strategies development. An established paradigm in game design theory includes the MDA model introduced by Hunicke et al. (2004). This schema categorizes game elements as part of gamification strategy:

1. The mechanics encompass elements like point systems, badge achievements, level progression, and challenge initiatives within the gaming framework.
2. Interactions in games involve collaboration among players as they compete against each other or work together towards common goals throughout levels of advancement.
3. Evaluating aesthetics involves feelings of joy, displeasure, or contentment derived from playing games.

Gamification in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Gamification's introduction into ELT is motivated by the need to address typical challenges in language classrooms such as lack of student motivation, anxiety about speaking, and low participation rates (Wulantari et al., 2023). Digital natives, the majority of today's learners, respond well to interactive, game-like environments that provide instant feedback and social interaction.

Gamification in ELT can be as easy as giving points for right answers or having team games, or as complex as online platforms that change to fit the learner's level, have quests, and stories. According to research, using games can make learning new words, grammar, how to say them, and how to speak them more fun and interesting (Koç & Sütçü, 2023; Cheng et al., 2025). When we make language tasks seem like games or challenges, learners are more likely to keep trying even when things get hard and feel more proud of themselves.

Benefits of Gamification in Learning Contexts

Increased Motivation and Engagement

Gamification activates both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation mechanisms by rewarding effort and progress and by fulfilling psychological needs for competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sailer et al., 2017). This leads to increased learner participation and enjoyment.

Immediate Feedback and Self-Regulated Learning. By providing instant feedback, gamification supports metacognitive processes where learners monitor their own progress and adjust strategies accordingly. This promotes self-regulation and autonomy (Shen et al., 2024).

Contextualization and Real-World Relevance

Narratives and story-driven gamification can contextualize learning materials, making language practice more meaningful and applicable to real-life scenarios (Wulantari et al., 2023).

Balancing Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Gamification often relies on extrinsic features such as points, leaderboards, and badges. However, SDT warns of the overjustification effect—when extrinsic rewards undermine true intrinsic interest. A longitudinal review of gamification in secondary and higher education (2023) observed initial motivation spikes that diminished over time due to novelty fade and overreliance on external incentives.

In ELT settings, Shen, Lai & Wang (2024) demonstrated through moderated mediation analysis that gamification enhanced learning outcomes primarily through motivated engagement, with effects strongest among learners with higher digital literacy.

Dimensions of Engagement: Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive

Educational research identifies three facets of student engagement:

- a) Behavioral: persistence and effort
- b) Emotional: interest and enjoyment
- c) Cognitive: strategic thinking and deep processing

In a general education context, gamification significantly improved all three dimensions compared to traditional instruction. Designing narrative-driven tasks, adaptive difficulty, and clear progress indicators supports students' flow experiences. Luarn et al. (2023) highlighted that immersive features such as story-based tasks and mission-style challenges help sustain engagement by creating meaningful contexts and fostering flow. Similarly, Coelho et al. (2025) found that multi-element gamification interventions (combining points, badges, and narratives) produced significantly higher intrinsic motivation and engagement than single-element designs.

Motivation as a Mediator of ELT Outcomes

Evidence shows that motivation often mediates the link between gamification and learning outcomes. Shen et al. (2024) demonstrated that gamification enhanced language outcomes indirectly—first by boosting motivation, then through enhanced engagement—particularly in students with digital competence. Similarly, Ashfiah et al. (2025), reviewing 30 ELT studies, found that gamification reliably improved student engagement and enjoyment, with motivational gains typically preceding measurable proficiency gains

Motivation and Engagement: Theoretical Foundations

Luarn, Chen & Chiu (2023) conducted empirical research using regression analysis. They found that social, achievement, and immersion features in gamification positively influence students' intrinsic learning motivation—and that this effect is mediated by perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Challenges

To make gamification work well, you need to match it with what you want to teach and what your learners want to learn. The success of implementing a new curriculum depends on many things, such as the culture of the people, how much resources they have, and how prepared the teachers are. Gamification is a way of teaching English that makes learning more fun and interesting by using game features that match how people are motivated to learn. - The success of the program depends on how well it fits into the school's goals and helps students learn, not just get rewards. Gamification will become more important in language education for students who grew up with digital technology, as technology and learning methods change. Mogavi et al. (2022), in a qualitative case study of Duolingo users, described “gamification misuse”—users excessively focusing on streaks, points, or competition at the expense of meaningful learning—which diminished performance and well-being.

Technological Infrastructure and Access Challenges

Implementing gamification in English Language Teaching (ELT) requires sturdy technological infrastructure: sufficient device access, reliable internet connectivity, and compatible software

platforms. In Ecuador, systemic constraints in public schools and rural areas significantly limit the feasibility and equity of gamified learning strategies.

Device Availability and Equity

A 2017-18 analysis of Ecuador's educational system found that only 14.2% of schools met the Ministry of Education's benchmark of a 1:10 computer-to-student ratio, while just 45.4% of schools had internet access, and only 11.8% had educational software deployed—highlighting severe technological gaps, particularly in public and rural schools (Stefos et al., 2017) These disparities imply that even basic gamified tasks—such as accessing online quizzes or tracking progress—are often not possible in resource-limited settings.

Such inequity disproportionately impacts low-income, rural, and indigenous students, reinforcing a cycle of exclusion. Widespread "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) policies have emerged, but they risk deepening the divide as poorer students lack access to hardware, leading to inconsistent participation in digital learning (Rodriguez Hermenejildo et al., 2023).

Internet Connectivity Challenges

Reliable internet access remains a significant barrier in many regions. According to Freedom House (2023), approximately 25% of rural parishes in Ecuador still lacked connectivity in 2022, even as national urban coverage reached over 80% (Freedom House, 2023) Rural internet penetration trails urban areas markedly—with only the most populated provinces holding the majority of subscriptions (Freedom House, 2023) .

At the regional level, broader data from Latin America indicate that nearly 44% of rural residents have no access to high-speed internet, compared to 79% in urban settings (Nearshore Americas, 2023) These gaps restrict online gamification tools that depend on streaming, real time feedback, or collaborative platforms.

Connectivity outbreaks—such as unstable mobile data and frequent blackouts—compound these limitations. Many schools rely on community Wi-Fi centers or intermittent satellite

solutions (HISPASAT) in rural parishes, such as San Blas in Imbabura, where local networks serve dozens of students via homemade infrastructure (ITU WSIS Prizes, 2023)

Platform Compatibility and Technical Constraints

Even where devices and internet are available, compatibility issues hinder implementation. Many schools lack the necessary equipment and others have outdated devices. Rodriguez Hermenejildo et al. (2023) emphasize that while platforms like Quizizz can boost vocabulary retention and engagement, their usability is tightly bound to functional devices, reliable connectivity, and familiarity with both teacher and student digital environments (Rodriguez Hermenejildo et al., 2023)

Furthermore, inconsistencies in power supply and limited technical support exacerbate these problems. Although Ecuador invested in over 1,000 community Wi-Fi points and "Meeting Points", many rely on makeshift infrastructure and lack maintenance, resulting in poor performance (Freedom House, 2023)

Information Gaps in Gamification in ELT

Although gamification has gained considerable attention in English Language Teaching, important information gaps remain regarding its effectiveness in fostering motivation and engagement among secondary school learners. Existing studies often examine gamification as a general educational strategy rather than analysing its specific impact on language learning skills such as vocabulary acquisition, speaking confidence, or communicative competence.

Moreover, much of the research focuses on short-term experimental implementations, leaving a lack of longitudinal evidence on how sustained gamified instruction influences learners' motivational patterns over time. Sarsa (2014) says that gamification works differently depending on the situation, and we need more studies to see how it affects students of different ages, levels, and types of learning.

English Language Teaching (ELT) faces many challenges in getting students interested, involved, and active in learning the language. Gamification is a way of using games and game elements to make ELT more fun and engaging for students.

Theory and Classroom Practice in ELT

Despite strong theoretical support for gamification as a learner-centred and motivating approach in English teaching, a clear contradiction exists between theory and classroom practice. Some models of theory say that learners are more motivated when they have a clear goal, a task that is interesting and relevant, and a choice of how to do it. But in reality, many ELT teachers use gamification, which means adding game elements like points, badges, or leaderboards, without thinking about how they can help learners learn better. When students use language in the wrong way, it can make them lose sight of why they are learning it and make them care more about getting prizes than being able to talk well.

Deterding et al. (2011) Gamification is not effective for learning when games are used without thinking about what learners want, what they need to learn, and how they learn best. This often happens in bad EFL gamification projects.

Needs for Improvement in Gamified ELT

The effective integration of gamification in English Language Teaching requires significant improvements at both pedagogical and institutional levels. Teachers need targeted professional development that focuses on designing gamified activities aligned with linguistic objectives, assessment criteria, and students' proficiency levels. Additionally, gamification should be embedded within a broader communicative and task-based framework rather than used as an isolated motivational tool. Buckley and Doyle (2016) emphasise that meaningful gamification depends on instructional design quality, learner autonomy, and reflective practice. Therefore, improving teacher training, curricular integration, and contextual adaptation is essential to maximise the motivational and engagement benefits of gamification in secondary EFL education.

Elements and Pedagogical Design

Gamified ELT uses game features like points, badges, leaderboards, and stories to motivate learners and help them achieve their goals. These things are not just for looks but can make you want to learn more, help you learn by yourself, and make you more interested in what you are learning. They do this by making sure the content is relevant and useful and by giving you

feedback that helps you improve. Below, I expand on how each element contributes to motivation, and how they can be effectively embedded in pedagogical design.

Points and Scoring Systems: Measuring Progress and Sustaining Motivation

Points systems reward learners quantitatively for completing tasks, contributing to their sense of competence and progress. In language learning contexts—like completing vocabulary sets, grammar drills, or pronunciation exercises—earning points provides immediate feedback that reinforces effort and improvement.

Velázquez-García et al. (2024) showed that using points to reward students in higher education made them more interested and motivated by showing them what they had to do and helping them set their own goals. - When learners could see how far they had come and what they still needed to do, they felt more motivated to learn. To teach well, points should be related to important language goals. For example, giving five points for using ten new words in the right way in a sentence helps people learn new words better. You can also rank points by how hard they are: Easy tasks give you less points, harder ones, advanced most—promoting progression Teachers should make systems that give rewards quickly and also have long-term goals - like showing how much progress you've made each week or how high you've reached in a level - to keep you interested. Periodic resets or leveling up can avoid repetition fatigue and maintain novelty.

Badges and Achievements

Badges function as symbolic rewards signifying accomplishments or milestones. Badges are different from points because they can show off to others and make people feel good about themselves. They also make people want to do more things (Anderson et al., 2013). Badges can make learners stick with their learning and try different things (Morschheuser, Werder, & Hamari, 2017).

Badges made learners stick with their tasks and try different things when they wanted to collect something. Badges can show how well you know grammar, how fast you can speak, or how well you work with others in ELT.

Effective badge design requires:

Combine methods and elements, do not focus in only two or three. Ensure usability and practicality to foster teacher buy-in and student acceptance

Respect the diversity and background of your learners, and do not use features that may make them feel inferior or discouraged.

- a) Clear alignment with curricular goals (e.g. completing a book unit)
- b) A combination of badges that are easy to earn and badges that are hard to earn. c) Public display (e.g. on classroom walls or LMS profiles) to enhance peer recognition.

Badges should help students learn language, not take away from it. A badge should show that you learned something new, not just did the same thing over and over. - Adding badges to mini-assignments (like making a sentence with new words) makes them more useful for teaching.

Leaderboards and Interactive Competition

Leaderboards show how well people are doing compared to others, which can motivate them to compete and compare themselves to others. When done well, they make people want to work harder by showing how they compare to others.

Narratives, Quests, and Story Elements: Immersion and Meaning

Narrative structures and mission-like tasks situate language learning in meaningful contexts. Story-driven quests (e.g. “Solve clues using English vocabulary to ‘travel’ from Quito to Galápagos”)

Effective design includes:

- a) A coherent storyline tying successive quest-like tasks (reading, listening, speaking)
- Ensure usability and practicality to foster teacher buy-in and student acceptance
- b) Goals embedded in narrative progression (e.g. unlock X character, gain “Explorer” badge)
- c) Reflection opportunities: “How did completing quest improve your language use?”

Narrative gamification syncs with communicative language learning methods by promoting context-based, problem-solving activities while aligning with pedagogical frameworks.

Synergistic Pedagogical Design: Integrating Elements Wisely

Each gamification element has motivational potential, but synergy between them yields stronger pedagogical results:

- Points + Badges + Narrative quests create layered motivation—immediate feedback, long-term recognition, and immersive engagement.
- Leaderboards can be used to encourage players to work together on group quests. • Leaderboards can be a useful tool to promote teamwork and cooperation among players.
- Reflection prompts associated with badges/points (journals, peer discussion) deepen learning and metacognitive awareness.

Gamification should match the goals and methods of SLA and communication. Tasks should involve using language, talking, and making sense—not just pressing buttons. - An example of this is when students have to send emails in English to find a clue and work together. - They use real English for this task and they are motivated to do it. Professional development is essential: teachers need instruction on designing gamified sequences that match language learning outcomes, pacing, and assessment periods.

PROPUESTA

"THE QUEST FOR FLUENCY"

A Gamified Framework for Enhancing Engagement in the A2 EFL Classroom

The proposed solution is a systemic pedagogical intervention that replaces traditional rote learning with a narrative-driven, gamified framework. Instead of viewing the English class as a series of disconnected grammar units, the curriculum is restructured as a "journey" or "quest" where students are the protagonists.

1.2.1 Structural Components of the Solution

1.2.1.1 The Narrative (Storytelling)

The 9th-grade syllabus will be framed as "The Global Citizen Quest." Students are not "students"; they are "Explorers."

2 **The Mission:** To unlock different "Continents" (units) by mastering specific language skills (e.g., The Past Tense is the "Time Travel" level).

3 **The Purpose:** It gives grammar a purpose in the story.

Game Mechanics (The Rules)

1. **Experience Points (XP) instead of Grades:** Every participation, homework, and correct answer earns XP. This shifts the focus from "avoiding failure" to "accumulating success."

2. **Badges and Achievements:** Instead of just a grade on a paper, students earn digital or physical stickers (e.g., "The Orator" badge for speaking for 1 minute without stopping). This rewards specific behaviors, such as overcoming the fear of speaking.

3. **Leaderboards (Group-Based):** To avoid "peer ridicule," competition should be team-based (Guilds). Teams support their members to gain points, turning the social pressure of the 14-15 age group into a collaborative advantage.

Bridging the Technological Disconnect

Since the students are mobile-active, we will implement a "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) Hybrid Model:

QR Code Quests: Place QR codes around the classroom or school. Scanning them reveals a "Secret Mission" (a grammar puzzle or a listening task).

Platform Integration: Using Digital "Hubs"

Instead of a textbook, we use apps where gamification is already built-in. This solves the "Technological Disconnect."

- **Duolingo for Schools:** The Use: You create a "Virtual Classroom." o **The Exercise:** Assign a "100 XP Challenge" per week. Students can choose any topic (Food, Travel, Family) to reach the goal.

- o **Gamification element: The Streak.** Students compete to see who can keep their learning streak alive for the longest (e.g., 7 days in a row).

- Quizizz or Kahoot:
 - o **The Use:** For vocabulary and grammar reviews.
 - o **The Exercise:** A "Friday Battle" where students use their phones to answer questions.
 - o **Gamification element: The Leaderboard.** Students see their names move up in real-time. To help with "anxiety," you can allow them to use **Nicknames** (Avatars) so they aren't embarrassed if they lose.

- Busuu (Community Feature):
 - o **The Use:** For writing and speaking practice.
 - o **The Exercise:** Students write a small post in English. Other learners around the world "correct" them.
 - o **Gamification :** Student feels corrections like rewards, not as grades

Practical Classroom Exercises (The Action)

Here are three clear, simple examples of gamified exercises for your 9th-grade students:

1.2.1.2 Exercise 1: "The QR Code Scavenger Hunt"

Goal: Practice Prepositions of Place (A2 level).

Gamification: Timed Mission. - To win a badge, the first team to find and write the answers in English for all 10 items is the winner.

Why it works: It gets them moving and off their chairs, solving the "Boredom" problem.

Exercise 2: "Two Truths and One Lie (The Detective Game)"

Goal: Practice the Past Simple tense ("I went," "I saw").

Write four sentences about what you did eat yesterday, among them are lies

Gamification: students guess what is the lie.

The game is fun because it makes you pretend to be someone else and try to figure out who is lying. - Paraphrasing helps with "Anxiety" because you don't worry about grammar, you just try to find the lie.

Exercise 3: "The Vocabulary Auction"

Goal: Review vocabulary from the unit.

Activity: The teacher write sentences. Some are ok; some have mistakes.

Gamification: Resource Management. Each team has \$1,000 (virtual money). They have to choose the right sentences. The team that gets the most right answers is the winner.

This method helps people learn grammar by making it more challenging and important, but also enjoyable and safe.

CONCLUSIONES

Gamification helps ninth-grade students overcome their fear of speaking in class by making them feel more comfortable and confident. The way we learn changes when we use experience points and "heart" systems instead of grades. We stop worrying about failing and start getting points for trying hard and not giving up.

Gamification makes people more involved and interested in learning by using fun and interactive elements. Studies show that gamification works better than the usual way of teaching, which is to show, do, and repeat (PPP). Students learn English better when they play games that tell stories and work together in groups (Guilds). They become more interested and focused when they face challenges that are not too easy or too hard for their English skills. This is called "flow."

RECOMENDACIONES

When teachers use games in the classroom, they should make sure that the game points and badges are related to the language skills they want students to learn, like new words or speaking well. Gamification is not enough to motivate language learners. It should be part of a bigger plan that helps them communicate and learn tasks

To make gamification last, we need to train teachers and help them use digital tools. Teachers need special training to help them teach better. Training should focus on the technical operation of platforms and the strategic design of gamified sequences that match the CEFR proficiency levels of the students.

Gamification should focus on group tasks instead of individual rankings in places like Ecuador, where technology is limited and people value cooperation. Additionally, "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) policies should be put in place with support for students who do not have

access to expensive technology to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity in the EFL classroom.

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