

# The Role of Gamification in Enhancing English Language Proficiency Among Non-Native Speakers

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## ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**  
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This study explores the integration of gamification strategies in English language education to improve proficiency among non-native speakers. Through a mixed-methods approach involving 150 participants in a controlled experiment, we assess the effectiveness of gamified learning modules compared to traditional methods. Results indicate significant improvements in vocabulary retention and speaking skills, with participants reporting higher engagement levels. The findings suggest that gamification can bridge motivational gaps in language learning, offering practical implications for educators and curriculum developers. This research contributes to the evolving field of educational technology by providing empirical evidence on gamification's applicability in language acquisition contexts.

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## INTRODUCTION

English language education has evolved significantly with the advent of digital technologies, yet challenges persist in maintaining learner motivation and engagement, particularly for non-native speakers. Traditional methods often rely on rote memorization and repetitive drills, which can lead to disengagement. Gamification, the application of game-design elements in non-game contexts, presents a promising alternative by incorporating elements like points, badges, and leaderboards to foster intrinsic motivation.

This paper investigates the hypothesis that gamified English learning platforms can enhance proficiency more effectively than conventional approaches. Drawing from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), we argue that gamification addresses basic

psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby improving learning outcomes. In an era where digital natives dominate classrooms, understanding how to leverage technology for language learning is crucial. This study aims to fill a gap by examining gamification's impact on adult learners in diverse settings, potentially informing global educational policies.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to revolutionize language pedagogy. With English as a lingua franca in international communication, proficiency gaps among non-native speakers can hinder economic and social opportunities. By integrating gamification, educators can create more inclusive and effective learning environments. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration of the literature, methodology, and findings.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Extensive research supports the benefits of gamification in education. For instance, Hamari et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 24 studies, revealing that gamified interventions increase motivation and knowledge retention across various subjects. In language education specifically, studies like those by Reinhardt (2019) highlight how digital games facilitate immersive language practice, leading to improved fluency. Reinhardt's work emphasizes the role of narrative-driven games in contextualizing vocabulary and grammar, making abstract concepts more tangible.

However, gaps remain in understanding gamification's impact on diverse learner groups, such as those in low-resource settings. This study builds on prior work by focusing on non-native speakers and measuring long-term proficiency gains. Additional studies, such as those by Domínguez et al. (2013), demonstrate that gamified apps like Duolingo enhance user retention through adaptive challenges. Yet, critiques exist: some researchers argue that gamification may oversimplify complex language structures, potentially leading to superficial learning (Prensky, 2001).

Theoretical frameworks further underpin this review. Self-determination theory posits that gamification satisfies psychological needs, as evidenced in empirical studies on educational games (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Moreover, flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) explains how gamified tasks can induce optimal engagement states, reducing boredom in language drills. This literature review synthesizes these perspectives, highlighting the need for rigorous experimentation to validate gamification's efficacy in English education.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

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A quasi-experimental design was employed, with 150 adult learners (aged 18-35) divided into experimental (gamified modules) and control (traditional instruction) groups. The experimental group used a custom-developed app featuring interactive quests, quizzes, and virtual rewards, while the control group followed standard textbook-based lessons. Participants were recruited from community centers in urban and rural areas to ensure diversity, with informed consent obtained prior to the study.

Data collection included pre- and post-tests on vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills, alongside surveys measuring motivation (using the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory; Ryan, 1982). The tests were standardized, drawing from the TOEIC framework for reliability. Statistical analysis involved t-tests and ANOVA to compare group differences, with thematic analysis for qualitative feedback. To mitigate biases, randomization was used for group assignment, and instructors were blinded to the study's hypotheses.

Ethical considerations were paramount, with data anonymized and stored securely. The study's duration spanned 8 weeks, with weekly sessions of 2 hours each. This methodology ensures robust, generalizable findings, addressing potential confounding variables like prior language exposure through baseline assessments.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

Quantitative results showed significant improvements in the experimental group: vocabulary scores increased by 25% ( $t(148) = 4.12, p < 0.01$ ), compared to 10% in the control group. Speaking proficiency also rose notably, with gamified learners demonstrating greater confidence in real-world interactions. Grammar scores improved marginally (15% vs. 8%), suggesting gamification's strength in interactive skills over rule-based learning.

Qualitatively, participants in the gamified group reported higher enjoyment and perceived relevance, with comments like "The badges made me want to keep practicing." Thematic analysis revealed themes of autonomy and social connection, aligning with theoretical predictions. No adverse effects, such as increased anxiety, were observed, though some control group members expressed frustration with repetitive exercises.

Subgroup analyses indicated stronger effects among younger participants (18-25), possibly due to digital familiarity. Overall, these results provide compelling evidence for gamification's superiority in fostering sustained language development.

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## Discussion

These findings align with self-determination theory, as gamification fulfilled learners' need for competence through immediate feedback and relatedness via social leaderboards. Unlike traditional methods, which often feel punitive, gamified approaches transform learning into an enjoyable challenge. The 25% vocabulary gain underscores gamification's ability to enhance retention through spaced repetition and rewards.

Limitations include the study's short duration (8 weeks) and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should explore scalability in diverse cultural contexts, such as integrating gamification with cultural content to avoid ethnocentric biases. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess retention beyond the intervention period.

Implications for practice are profound: educators can adopt gamified tools like Kahoot or Quizlet to supplement curricula. Policymakers should invest in digital infrastructure to support such innovations, especially in developing regions where access to quality English education is limited.

## CONCLUSION

Gamification emerges as a transformative tool for English language education, enhancing proficiency and motivation among non-native speakers. Educators are encouraged to integrate game elements into curricula to create more engaging learning environments. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence on innovative pedagogical strategies, paving the way for future explorations in educational technology. By addressing motivational barriers, gamification not only improves outcomes but also democratizes access to effective language learning.

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