

Gamifying EFL Classrooms: Unveiling Teacher Perspectives and Practices in a Digital Age

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Abstract

In recent years, gamification has gained prominence as a transformative approach to enhance student engagement and motivation in EFL classrooms. This study delves into the specific gamification techniques employed by EFL educators and explores their perceptions, obstacles, and proficiency in utilizing gamified methodologies. The research employs a descriptive approach, incorporating self-written reflections and focus group discussion interviews with EFL teachers. This methodology allows for a comprehensive examination of gamification practices in EFL instruction, offering valuable insights into both the theoretical framework and practical implementation. The results reveal that teachers perceive gamification as a means to transform learning activities into engaging games aligned with educational goals. Key themes include designing activities based on learning objectives, understanding student preferences, and employing various game elements like quizzes and collaborative activities. Despite the perceived benefits of gamification, the study identifies several challenges faced by EFL teachers. These include limited familiarity with gamification applications, inadequate access to technological resources, and time constraints for implementing gamified activities within the curriculum. The findings underscore the need for targeted teacher training programs providing adequate resources and fostering collaborative planning to optimize gamification's integration in EFL classrooms. In conclusion, this study sheds light on the evolving landscape of EFL teaching through the lens of gamification. By exploring the views, strategies, and challenges associated with gamified instruction, the research offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to leverage gamification as a catalyst for educational innovation and student engagement in the field of English language learning.

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Introduction

In twenty-first-century education, modern technology and games have significant roles in improving students' engagement and motivation (Kapp, 2012). Students nowadays prefer to use modern technology to help and guide their learning such as various mobile apps, games, and videos (Szymkowiak et al., 2021). The concept of gamification emerges as a transformative strategy that offers a dynamic bridge between game elements and the learning process. Deterding et al. (2011) define gamification as the strategy that implements game design elements in non-game contexts meaning the classroom. Another definition of gamification is the process of making activities more game-like (Werbach, 2014). In the classroom context, teachers use gamification as a strategy to create learning activities into games. Several game elements can be integrated into learning activities, such as competition, achievement, and collaboration (Plass et al., 2015).

In recent years, EFL teachers have embraced gamification as one of their strategies for motivating and engaging their students (Alyaz & Genc, 2016), while also presenting lessons that will assist students' long-term memory and provide them with real-world experience (Taufik et al., 2020). Previous studies have indicated that both teachers and students have positive attitudes toward gamification (Zou, 2020; Almusharraf, 2021). However, the successful implementation of gamification in education hinges upon critical factors such as how the teachers' views influence their practice in the integration of gamification in their classrooms. They must not only embrace innovation but also cultivate a deep understanding of the principles and practices. Nevertheless, the gamification study of teachers' perspectives and practices in EFL setting is still limited. Zhang & Hasim (2023) also emerged the significance of the teachers' practices in implementing gamification in the context of EFL classrooms needs to be identified to uncover the strategies, challenges, and insights that shape their pedagogical approach. To fill the gap, research about teachers' perspectives was conducted to identify whether they have sufficient knowledge and confidence in implementing gamification in classroom settings.

Methods

A descriptive approach was employed to portray, depict, and provide a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon (Yin, 2015). The study utilized self-written reflections and focus group discussion with five EFL teachers.

Participants were selected based on their experience teaching English and using gamified web-based applications. The data are analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative data analysis requires a systematic presentation of data organized into specified categories (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the data is displayed in various formats such as tables and presenting the most pertinent excerpts.

Results and Discussion

Several themes are reported about EFL teachers' views, specific gamification elements and strategies employed by EFL teachers, and challenges.

Table 1 provides valuable findings about the EFL teachers' perspectives on integrating gamification into their classrooms. The results articulate that the teachers have quite a comprehensive understanding of how to bring gamification into their learning activities. It involves transforming educational materials into engaging game formats. The practical application of this approach, advocating for the incorporation of game elements like quizzes and guessing games. Other participants aligned content design with specific learning objectives to ensure educational efficacy. Additionally, the teachers underscored the importance of understanding students' individual learning preferences as a prerequisite to successful gamification integration. This finding aligned with gamification aims to provide engaging activities with purposeful learning

Table 1. EFL Teachers' view on integrating gamification

Sub-themes	Excerpts	Codes
Design learning activities into game	P1 "...The integration of gamification is a complex process, teachers need to design the material in the form of games..."	design the material in the form of games
Design learning activities into game	P2 "...integrating gamification in the classroom is not just about using applications, it needs to design the contents based on learning objectives...."	design the contents
Identify students' needs before integrating gamification	P4 "...to integrate gamification in learning, I should know my students' preferences in learning first before designing the game..."	know my students' preferences
Design learning activities into game	P5 "...designing learning using game elements such as making quizzes, or guessing game...."	designing learning using game

Table 2. Gamification elements and strategies

Sub-themes	Excerpts	Codes
Gamification strategies	P4 “....some of the game activities I have done are collaborative learning such as JIGSAW, Role Play, Guessing, etc ...”	collaborative learning
Gamification elements	P2 “....the game element that I often use is answering various quizzes and getting points....”	answering various quizzes and getting points
Gamification elements	P1 “....games like word puzzles, language quizzes, or vocabulary bingo...”	word puzzles, language quizzes, or vocabulary bingo

objectives and maximize learning (Dichev & Dicheva, 2017). These insights collectively underscore the thoughtful planning and pedagogical insight required for integrating gamification effectively into EFL classrooms.

Table 2 highlights EFL teachers employ various gamification strategies to enrich the learning experience for students. Collaborative learning activities are frequently utilized alongside gamification integration. These strategies promote active participation, teamwork, and critical thinking among students (Mee et al., 2020). Contemporary educational theories emphasize the role of social interaction in language learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Collaborative games facilitated dynamic classroom environments foster communication skills and enhance language proficiency. The integration of various gamification elements such as quizzes, puzzles, and bingo reflected gamification fosters a fun and engaging learning environment. Integrating game elements into activities could enhance collaboration and problem-solving abilities among students (Lee et al., 2023).

EFL teachers encounter notable challenges in the utilization of gamification. The teachers struggled with unfamiliar gamification apps, reflecting a potential barrier in terms of technological proficiency and adaptability. Araújo and Carvalho (2022) also emphasized that using learning technologies in the classroom can be challenging. Moreover, the scarcity or inadequacy of facilities at schools emerges as another significant challenge. The teachers expressed concerns about the considerable time investment required for both using and creating content for gamified activities.

Conclusion

This research provides a detailed understanding of EFL teachers' perspectives, strategies, and challenges regarding gamification in the classroom. Teachers

demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of designing gamified learning activities and the importance of aligning these activities with learning objectives and student preferences. The use of collaborative learning strategies and various gamification elements highlights the potential of gamification to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. However, challenges related to technological proficiency, resource availability, and time investment were experienced among the participants. Professional development training and support in navigating the gamification platforms must be addressed to improve teachers' competency. Allocation of adequate resources and support, including access to suitable technological tools and educational apps, is suggested to facilitate seamless integration of gamification in classrooms.

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