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The Use of Gamification to Reinforce Motivation and Self-Confidence in EFL  
Learners

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# The Use of Gamification to Reinforce Motivation and Self-Confidence in EFL Learners

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## Abstract

This paper explores the influence and role of gamification in fostering learners' motivation and self-confidence when learning English as a foreign language. It also analyzes how diverse gamification techniques such as competitive tasks, rewards, points, and levels can increase students' engagement, interest, and self-confidence. The article also goes over recent studies to critically examine the implementation of gamified learning tools and game features embedded in various teaching strategies with the purpose of understanding and confirming the impact of gamification on student engagement, peer relationships, and language performance. The findings show that gamification that is properly implemented including students' preferences and needs can improve their experience significantly and lead to meaningful and long-term learning.

**Keywords:** affective filter, anxiety, gamification, language acquisition, motivation, self-confidence.

## Resumen

Este escrito explora la influencia y el papel de la gamificación en el fomento de la motivación y autoconfianza de los estudiantes al aprender Inglés como lengua extranjera. También analiza cómo las diversas técnicas de gamificación tales como tareas competitivas, recompensas, puntos y niveles pueden aumentar el compromiso, el interés y la autoconfianza. El artículo también revisa estudios recientes para examinar críticamente la implementación de herramientas de aprendizaje gamificadas y características de juegos incorporadas en varias estrategias de enseñanza, con el propósito de comprender y confirmar el impacto de la gamificación en el compromiso de los estudiantes, las relaciones entre pares y el rendimiento lingüístico. Los hallazgos muestran que la gamificación, cuando se implementa adecuadamente incluyendo las preferencias y necesidades de los estudiantes, puede mejorar significativamente su experiencia y conducir a un aprendizaje destacado y a largo plazo.

**Palabras clave:** adquisición del idioma, ansiedad, autoconfianza, filtro afectivo, gamificación, motivación,.

## **Introduction**

In an English classroom, there are always students that struggle to be actively involved and engaged in language learning to understand the teacher's instructions and explanations, and even to pass the course. The most common issues that I experienced when learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are the lack of motivation and self-confidence as well as the presence of anxiety. In the same way, I have seen the same patterns in students when I have had the chances to teach; these aspects tend to hinder language acquisition.

Therefore, the use of gamification has emerged as a good alternative to work on the most frequent weaknesses present in the English classroom. This paper concerns an analysis of the role of gamification in English as a Foreign Language. The main purpose is to describe how gamification may boost students' levels of motivation and self-confidence through the use of such techniques as leaderboards, prizes, rewards, competitive tasks, among others.

The implementation of gamified elements has proven to be beneficial to foster students' engagement, motivation, peers' relationships, self-confidence, participation, and therefore, language performance and learning outcomes. One example of this is the work of Göksün and Gürsoy (2019), who investigated how Kahoot and Quizizz can influence learners' engagement and success in class. Their findings showed that the application Quizizz fostered learners' encouragement since they felt as if they were playing a challenging game that made them gain more wisdom in a captivating way. However, Kahoot was more productive because it facilitated participation and competition, and it was more attractive for learners due to the various features it has. Moreover, this tool raised their curiosity and encounters with peers.

Another example is from Gil (2022), who said that the use of an online video game called *Clash Royale*, which was adapted to the teaching context, was very effective to lower students' anxiety when speaking and participating in class. Also, their motivation and self-confidence was reinforced because they paid more attention, participated, and volunteered in activities more often.

Indeed, the use of gamification techniques through online applications such as Kahoot and Quizziz can maximize students' learning since they are powerful tools that can raise students' interest, curiosity, and desire to participate and learn in a more interactive and engaging way. For instance, the study of Jimenez-Sanchez and Gargallo-Camarillas (2020) found that using Quizziz in class is very useful to improve students' engagement as they played because they felt the need to get all the right answers in the activities which also fostered a competitive environment. Timing was also a booster for engagement and commitment because they kept struggling to be the one who spent the least time completing assignments to win.

### **English Teaching and Learning**

The study of a foreign language such as English is a complex process that is strongly influenced by many external and internal factors, such as the learning environment, the educator, the first language, the learner's commitment, attitude, motivation, among many others. Successful language learning depends greatly on the teaching methods selected. Traditional teaching methods that follow the belief in replication, rote learning, and simulation of language learning patterns when people acquire their first language are expected to work when learning a second language (Jimenez-Sanchez & Gargallo-Camarillas, 2020). These techniques are still present in some English classrooms where educators do not commit themselves to improving their praxis and teaching strategies to maximize students' experience with the trendiest and most engaging tactics based on their likes, preferences, learning styles, contexts, and needs.

The new generations have had technology and information at hand, which means they have preferred learning methods that go beyond books and worksheets. Contemporary learners only acquire content that seems interesting, fun and meaningful to them. For this reason, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language must be a transformative experience in which educators constantly study learners' needs in depth to reinvent their praxis by implementing new methodologies and approaches that are centered in students and how they can best acquire the language.

The development of the Internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) offers a wide range of multimedia channels that can be used with the objective of promoting an engaging and interesting learning experience (Jimenez-Sanchez & Gargallo-Camarillas, 2020). Therefore, teachers have more resources available than ever to keep learners motivated, interested, and focused on the English class. Any competent teaching philosophy the educator follows requires its emphasis on students. Instructors must always have in mind that the most essential aspect when planning and implementing a lesson plan is the students' needs and goals (Gil, 2022). Effective learning takes place when teachers fulfill students' needs by implementing activities that encourage them to actively speak, participate, think outside the box, question, and seek their own answers to build critical knowledge. As Gil (2022) said, facilitators are able to improve their praxis if they receive constant training on how to come up with a curriculum including gamification elements and trendy resources that are relevant to students and fit their needs.

However, traditional teaching methods do not meet these needs because they usually focus on one specific language skill only. For instance, the Audiolingual

Method gave more emphasis to reiteration and mental storage of conversations for learners to acquire the language by following a routine; and the Grammar-Translation Method was proposed just to work on reading and writing skills giving all the importance to grammar structures and vocabulary words through rote learning (Renau, 2016). I was taught with these approaches, and I remember that neither my peers nor myself were able to hold an interaction spontaneously. That is why other ways of teaching English emerged and gained popularity with the purpose of promoting language learning through real-life scenarios and valuable communication where learners reach a goal through a specific assignment that fits their needs while meaningfully using the language. These strategies refer to the Task-Based Language Learning approach and the Content-Based Approach (Jimenez-Sanchez & Gargallo-Camarillas, 2020). The use of communicative approaches that align with students' likes, interests, learning styles and needs is a good path to reaching competent language proficiency and enriching learning experiences.

## **Gamification**

This term refers to the application of game features and components in settings that are not directly related to games. Redjeki and Muhajir (2021) said that gamification has the power to inspire learners and drive them towards reaching their language learning objectives by promoting a creative and engaging learning experience. In the same way, gamification relies on global connectivity, technology and the trendy teaching means that include games in education. These elements provide learners with the tools to have efficient interaction in the target language and encourage them to learn while having fun. According to Redjeki and Muhajir (2021),

the most recent pedagogical trends and approaches emphasize the use of creative teaching tactics to reach active learning. For this reason, gamification has gained relevance, and it has been very required in the educational field. It is a proposal to raise students' motivation, engagement, desire to learn, and participation for them to develop an active role in language learning.

In this regard, a very popular and engaging gamified learning tool is Duolingo, which adopts a more self-directed methodology. This online application has a variety of features that seem interesting for users, for example, audio-visual elements, levels, points, streaks, daily goals, challenges, rewards, instant feedback, correction, among many others.

In addition, the study of Redjeki and Muhajir (2021) reveals how the implementation of Duolingo has been extremely helpful in enhancing English grammar comprehension among students, and it has been a fun experience for learners while interacting within the app features and content that fits their proficiency levels. They also expressed that the application is simple to use, flexible, and accessible, which means they can use it by themselves and have more autonomy when practicing the language wherever they are. Applications such as this one are good for reinforcing the content studied in class in a more dynamic and interactive way, and there are plenty of options for teachers to vary the learners' experience as well as make it meaningful.

Among the most common and remarkable game features, there are points that are related to grades and students' advancement; rewards that usually refer to prizes and achievements; and characters or virtual identities, which is a good way to personalize learners' experience and increase engagement and dedication (Strmecki

et al., 2015). All these simple elements provide great benefits to the language learning environment and enhance the students' encounters.

### **Self-Made Materials**

The use of self-made materials refers to teaching resources adapted or designed by the educator to support the teaching process and reach the lesson's objectives. The use of resources created by the teacher offers a personalized and more contextualized learning experience for students (Fitria, 2022). The lack of teacher-created materials is common. Fitria (2022) said that some challenges facilitators face when creating their own teaching resources are that it requires a great deal of work, effort, dedication, and time, which may be why instructors do not apply self-made material in class.

Nevertheless, there are many online applications or sites that can be adopted and adjusted to meet a specific population's goals, needs, and contexts. In the study of Strmecki et al. (2015), *Moodle* was used to adapt a gamified learning class for an experimental group and a non-gamified learning class for a control group. The gamified version incorporated levels, progress bars, avatars, badges, and visual aids that caught students' attention, while the non-gamified one only had forums and lectures. Their findings showed that students using the gamified version of Moodle had greater learning outcomes.

At the same time, there is a great example of an online application that was co-designed and well-adapted by Gil (2022) to his learning context and population. It is fundamental to highlight that he used a questionnaire to determine the video game students preferred, and he took advantage of the components from this game called *Clash Royale* to adjust them to an English as a second language learning version of

the game. Some of the elements taken and adapted from the video game were gems that represented points, arenas represented learning units, tournaments referred to tests, and battles represented activities and games.

The design and application of gamified learning tools might be a more common practice for tutors if they had all the knowledge and resources available to innovate in the English class. For this reason, it is necessary for them to receive instruction and training of quality to be able to take advantage of all the gamification techniques and elements to promote more authentic and customized learning encounters and maximize language acquisition (Gil, 2022). As can be seen, teacher-made materials are boosters in their praxis and can bring many benefits to pupils' language acquisition.

### **Affective Filter**

The affective filter is a hypothesis that shows how emotional elements have a relevant influence on successful language acquisition. These emotional aspects refer to motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Language proficiency is developed as long as there is high motivation, high self-confidence, and low anxiety levels. Otherwise, the affective filter will hinder this process, and students will not be able to understand or internalize content. For this reason, teachers' goals go beyond providing accessible and clear information, as well as spaces for students to produce their own knowledge. Furthermore, educators are expected to promote a safe environment where learners do not feel nervous or afraid to speak, where they believe in themselves, and where they feel highly inspired, interested, and stimulated to take an active role in English learning (Krashen, 1982).

This is one of the theories I believe in the most because I experienced it myself in high school. I used to feel and learn better in the lessons of conversational English rather than academic English because one of the facilitators always implemented activities and games that were fun and interesting. She also encouraged me to participate and never allowed anyone to laugh at others.

Moreover, gamification can contribute to leveling the affective filter that helps scholars succeed. When creating and/or implementing a framework that includes game elements into the English class, students' psychological and mind-related state is impacted. Some examples of gamified features that can influence their emotional field are rating methods, goals accomplished, corrections, suitable assessment and animated visuals (Strmecki et al., 2015). These aspects are useful to keep participants engaged and interested while giving the chance to interact more dynamically to avoid panic and fear when joining the class activities.

According to the study of Vallejo (2018), the confidence and thoughts pupils have about themselves as well as the sense of belonging to a social group is enhanced with the use of group-work activities in which every student is given an active role and they participate equally. The interviews showed that hesitant students were able to feel more secure among their peers, their negative feelings of nervousness and/or panic eventually disappeared which motivated them to speak in front of others without being afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at because they were surrounded by an environment that conveyed confidence. The teachers' role in encouraging a learning environment full of motivational and engaging activities, as well as promoting respect among peers is essential for scholars to get good learning outcomes.

## **Motivation**

Motivation is the inner means through which people act to reach a goal (Jimenez-Sanchez & Gargallo-Camarillas, 2020). This refers to the fact that motivation is what makes people work to get something. Motivation is highly shaped by students' self-esteem and self-confidence. In other words, when students have high expectations of themselves and their abilities, when they believe in themselves, their performance and outcomes significantly grow. However, if this is not the case and students have negative thoughts about themselves, motivation will be low, and language learning will be affected negatively as well (Wilches, 2021). A person who is motivated is more likely to acquire the language more easily.

Pupils' participation, commitment, interest and motivation toward learning can be enhanced when they are provided with pedagogical activities and tasks aligned with their proficiency level which are easy to understand and they gradually increase the difficulty level so it becomes challenging and interesting to them (Gil, 2022). If the activities implemented are always easy and simple, students get bored, so there must be a balance between tasks and their knowledge where the assignments are slightly above their language level and they become more complex over time. The above proposal is supported by Krashen's Input Hypothesis that explains how a language is learned. According to Krashen (1982), language acquisition occurs when we are able to understand and internalize information and content that is a little bit more advanced than our current proficiency level. We use more than our linguistic skill to understand input. In fact, we rely on resources such as general knowledge we already have about the world and contextual clues to interpret and acquire language.

The absence of motivation is a common aspect that hinders language learning, but one way to work on it and reinforce it in the English class is by performing learning activities that include attractive learning trends and modern digital tools (Jimenez-Sanchez & Gargallo-Camarillas, 2020). This is usually a challenge for educators because many of them prefer to stick to the pedagogical strategies they are demanded to follow, or the ones they have already tried and have given them good results. However, every group and individual is different and one cannot expect those methods to keep working with every learner. Therefore, instructors should explore participants' preferences to bring varied and dynamic assignments that fit their needs and motivate them. Vallejo (2018) said that an engaging and entertaining class is the inspiration for learners to never miss a lesson and participate freely and spontaneously. Indeed, professionals have the great responsibility of enhancing students' motivation so they can learn effectively.

### **Extrinsic Motivation**

This type of motivation comes from the outside world either from people or factors which make an individual have a reason to perform an activity. Bicen and Kocakoyun (2018) said that some external elements that can motivate learners are recognition, compliments, success, incentives, presents, awards, among many others. These are examples of methods professionals can use to engage pupils in English learning and they can combine them with gamified activities to increase motivation even further. According to Buendía and Ortega-Martín (2018), motivation can be detected in someone through the way they act. Teachers are a great source of motivation through their performance, what they do, and what they do not do in

the class. The decisions they make and actions they take to manage the classroom setting have an impact on students' motivation. Therefore, if an educator enjoys what they do, they will be able to promote motivation among their students with external factors such as the classroom activities, competition, grading and assessment, rewards, the relationship with peers, among many others.

It is interesting to see that in the study of Buendía and Ortega-Martín (2018), the aspects that engage participants the most relate to extrinsic sources of motivation. For instance, 45% of participants found that achieving success after a lot of hard work is one of the most motivating factors. Likewise, 36% got really interested and involved in the English class when they had the chance to get a prize or recognition for their performance. Studies such as this one are highly valuable for instructors to be aware of how they can contribute to promoting learners' motivation and how they are impacted by the classroom environment.

### **Intrinsic Motivation**

Intrinsic motivation is when a person does something or completes a task because they want to get satisfaction, they have the desire to do it, and they enjoy it (Jimenez-Sanchez & Gargallo-Camarillas, 2020). In other words, it is the willingness and commitment a person shows toward a goal they want to reach. Bicen and Kocakoyun (2018) said that motivation comes from within themselves and they do not need anything from the outside world to find a reason to act and reach a goal. This is more helpful than extrinsic motivation since people do not need other things to be able to find the spark that drives them to getting a good proficiency level. In Karagöl's study (2008), he confirmed that students' innate motivation to learn English

is way more crucial in fostering successful language acquisition than fulfilling academic obligations, especially for young pupils who are not studying the language for a specific purpose such as having a good employment status.

Teachers are able to enhance students' intrinsic motivation by promoting a learning environment where pupils show off their imagination and artistic abilities, where they may develop a sense of belonging among peers and where instructors provide prompt and precise assessment with encouraging comments that let students know how they are doing (Gil, 2022). All this can be achieved and enhanced with the use of gamification and dynamic learning activities that give them the chance to design something through digital tools, interact and learn from others by technological means which also show their progress and their performance to encourage them to keep the good work.

### **Self-Confidence**

Self-esteem is closely linked to self-confidence. Self-esteem is a subjective evaluation of one's own worth and value which is revealed through the perspectives and opinions an individual holds about themselves. It reflects the confidence one has in their abilities, their impact on the world around them, and their accomplishments (Karagöl, 2008). Self-confidence is also seen as an emotional factor that plays a vital role in the achievement of language learning. Individuals who possess a strong belief, high levels of confidence in their abilities, and a positive perspective about themselves are more likely to reach better learning outcomes (Krashen, 1982). Furthermore, it is part of the affective state that impacts language learning and that is why gamification is proposed to enhance students' confidence through dynamic and

engaging learning activities that lower their anxiety and negative feelings and make them enjoy language acquisition.

One example shown in Karsudianto's work (2020) is mingling games which is a gamified activity that is used to build confidence when speaking by encouraging learners to move around the classroom, get to know others, and have conversations with their peers to gather required information to complete a task. The assigned task was the game called "Find someone Who" and basically they were given some questions they had to ask their classmates by mingling around and interacting with others. The game elements that can be included in this type of activities are competition, timing, and rewards. I have used this activity and it is a great initiative to encourage students to speak more and feel less nervous than doing it through a presentation in front of the class. As Wilches (2021) said, when educators use gamified activities, they create an entertaining and supportive atmosphere that helps students pay more attention, feel more confident, believe more in their abilities, and view themselves more positively.

## **Anxiety**

Anxiety is the nervousness or fear that learners feel when they have to use a second language they are still acquiring and they feel their linguistic capabilities are not enough (Pizarro & Josephy, 2010). This aspect is one of the most important affective aspects in language learning and one of the most common that impacts students' acquisition negatively. According to Krashen (1982), a state of mind with little or no level of anxiety seems to facilitate the process of learning a new language no matter if it is personal stress levels or general tension due to the classroom

setting. He also said that one of the scenarios that triggers anxiety the most is having students participate orally in the class when they do not feel ready or when they have not developed competent linguistic skills through meaningful input so they can produce thoughts and ideas freely. I totally agree with this because I have seen it in classmates and students who are usually shy and never participate in class, so when they are asked to do so, they get really nervous, make a lot of mistakes, and have a bad performance.

Therefore, educators are also expected to work on lowering learners' anxiety, nervousness and fear of taking an active role in the English classroom so that they are able to learn. If students experience interesting and appealing interactions with peers in class through games without noticing and judging their own mistakes and encounters when speaking English, anxiety will be overcome and language acquisition will take place (Wilches, 2021). The key aspect to beat anxiety is to provide learners with activities they can truly enjoy, so they do not feel the fear of doing something wrong and being laughed at or getting a bad grade.

Learners' anxiety disappears when they are exposed to gamified learning environments that captivate their attention and stimulate their desire to be actively involved in the class through interactive activities (Gil, 2022). There is a wide range of games and interactive tools which may be used to fight this feeling and raise students' interest and engagement in English learning. Gil (2022) also reported that the gamified learning tool he adapted from a video game called Clash Royale, brought great outcomes for students and decreased their negative feelings such as stress, nervousness, and fear up to 59%. This study proves how beneficial gamified tools can be in language learning especially to help reduce affective factors that may hinder this process. In Wilches' study (2021), the psychological field is also impacted

by the use of gamification and flipped learning which is when students review the didactic material before the class activities take place and this encourages a more independent learning. These two methods are useful to fight the anxiety and fear learners experience when participating in oral activities with people who know more than them and may judge them.

In addition, one way to reach good results when implementing game-like activities is by considering students' likes, preferences and proficiency levels. According to Wilches (2021), knowing your students is a must when using gamification in the English class. You should engage in conversations with students to find out what their likes and preferences are. Likewise, you should also notate their reactions to different activities and interactions and always consider what works as well as what does not work, which will allow you to customize your teaching methods more effectively to get better results. Subsequently, students who do not feel anxious in the English class tend to show more willingness and commitment to engage in learning activities. Learners perform activities and complete assignments more frequently and effectively when they are exposed to a learning atmosphere that encourages confidence, cooperative work and good social bonds with peers (Vallejo, 2018). Clearly, the classroom environment and relationships with others encourage pupils to be productive and fulfill academic obligations accordingly.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the process of learning English as a Foreign Language is affected by many external factors that teachers can handle by taking advantage of all the benefits gamification offers. Gamification has proved to be a powerful tool to

raise students' interest and engagement in learning another language while allowing them to work not only on their linguistic skills, but also on personal and affective aspects to enhance language acquisition such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety levels. Gamification provides game features that make the learning experience funnier such as points, levels, rewards, challenges, avatars, audiovisual elements, among many others. In addition, self-made materials that include game features are even better because they allow educators to tailor teaching methods to fit learners' needs and achieve meaningful learning.

Furthermore, gamification has the potential to manage affective factors that often hinder language learning. The affective filter is a very popular theory that shows the importance of dealing with emotional aspects such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence. By implementing game-like activities and using modern tools, teachers can develop a more dynamic and interactive learning experience that appeals to contemporary learners.

Likewise, various studies have shown how effective gamification is in encouraging students to learn, facilitating participation, and increasing curiosity, which is possible with the use of online applications like Kahoot and Quizziz. Also, there is a great example of a popular video game called Clash Royale that was adapted to an educational setting and demonstrated positive results when lowering participants' anxiety in speaking activities. At the same time, it was effective to improve motivation and self confidence.

It is fundamental to highlight that the promotion of a supportive and engaging learning environment with the combination of gamification that focuses on students' interests, learning styles, and needs is necessary for them to successfully acquire English.

In conclusion, gamification continues to be an extraordinary approach that enhances pupils' engagement, motivation, self-confidence, participation, language performance, and overall learning outcomes. Further practice in English as a Foreign Language teaching should implement gamified techniques that complement other activities with diverse approaches and always taking into account students' preferences and needs.

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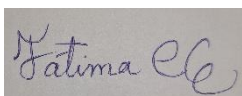
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## DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, Fátima Coronado Gómez, cédula de identidad 504400300, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de las responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado “**The Use of Gamification to Reinforce Motivation and Self-confidence in EFL Learners**”, para optar por el grado de Maestría en Educación con énfasis en el Aprendizaje del Inglés.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fatima CG".

Heredia, a los 26 días del mes de agosto del año 2024.

## Refrendo

Los abajo firmantes avalamos el Trabajo de Graduación de la estudiante Fátima Coronado Gómez, cédula 504400300, que lleva como título **The Use of Gamification to Reinforce Motivation and Self-Confidence in EFL Learners**, dado que cumple con las disposiciones vigentes y la calidad académica requerida por el posgrado.

JUAN PABLO ZÚÑIGA VARGAS (FIRMA)  
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Juan Pablo Zúñiga Vargas  
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Firmado por RITA MARIA ARGUEDAS VÍQUEZ (FIRMA)  
PERSONA FÍSICA, CPF-01-0734-0085  
Fecha declarada: 06/10/2024 05:22 PM  
Razón: Ref Fátima Coronado  
Lugar: Maestría Contacto: Dayana

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M. Ed Rita Arguedas Víquez  
Coordinadora  
Maestría en Educación