

Gamification in Developing English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Using game design ideas in learning, which is called gamification, is getting more popular because it can make students more interested and driven. This paper looks at how gamification can help people learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Teachers can make learning more fun and interactive by adding game features like points, badges, leader boards, and challenges to their lessons. This paper looks at studies about gamification in EFL, its possible advantages for Iraqi students, plus what makes it difficult to do gamification. It also looks at how gamification works through five theories: Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Flow Theory, Behavioral Learning Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, and Sociocultural Theory. The results suggest that gamification can help students remember words, understand grammar, feel confident speaking, and want to learn. But, to make it work, it needs to be planned well, consider cultural differences, and teachers need training.

Keywords : Gamification, EFL, English language learning, motivation, educational technology, theories

التلعيب في تطوير اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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المديرية العامة للتربية في محافظة بابل / الكلية التربوية المفتوحة/الفرع الدراسي في جبلة

يزداد استخدام أفكار تصميم الألعاب في التعلم، وهو ما يسمى بالتلعيب، شيوعاً لأنه يمكن أن يجعل الطلاب أكثر اهتماماً وحماساً. تبحث هذه الورقة البحثية في كيفية مساعدة التلعيب على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. يمكن للمعلمين جعل التعلم أكثر متعة وتفاعلية من خلال إضافة ميزات اللعبة مثل النقاط والشارات ولوحات المتصدرين والتحديات إلى دروسهم. تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية دراسات حول التلعيب في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، ومزاياها المحتملة للطلاب العراقيين، بالإضافة إلى ما يجعل من الصعب القيام بالتلعيب. كما تبحث في كيفية عمل التلعيب من خلال خمس نظريات: نظرية تقرير المصير، ونظرية التدفق، ونظرية التعلم السلوكي، ونظرية الحمل المعرفي، والنظرية الاجتماعية والثقافية. تشير النتائج إلى أن التلعيب يمكن أن يساعد الطلاب على تذكر الكلمات وفهم القواعد والشعور بالثقة في التحدث والرغبة في التعلم. ولكن لجعله فعالاً، يجب التخطيط له جيداً ومراعاة الاختلافات الثقافية، ويحتاج المعلمون إلى التدريب. الكلمات المفتاحية: التلعيب، الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، التحفيز، التكنولوجيا التعليمية، النظريات.

Introduction

Being good at English is becoming more important in Iraq for school, work, and talking to people around the world. But, regular teaching methods often don't get students interested, which makes them not want to learn and not get very good at it (Al-Jarf, 2020). Gamification may be a good answer. Gamification is defined as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011, p. 9). Studies have found that adding game features can make students continue working on language tasks 34% more (Zhao & Lai, 2022).

Gamification can help by using game-like features to make learning more interesting and help students remember better. This paper looks at how gamification can help Iraqi EFL learners learn English better by researching learning theories framework, analysis, and how it can be used in the field of application.

Theoretical Framework

Gamification is based on a few learning theories, including:

1. **Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** Deci and Ryan's (2000) study shows that gamification often uses rewards (points, badges) to get people started, but self-determination theory says that wanting to learn is better. Other studies about gamification show that:

- When students can choose what to do, they remember 28% better than when they have to do certain things (Reeve & Jang, 2006).
- Feedback must not be too hard or too easy to avoid making students upset (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).
- When things involve working together, it works better for cultures that value teamwork (Hofstede, 1986).

2. **Flow Theory** , According to Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, game features can help students really focus and enjoy learning, which can make them learn faster.

3. **Behavioral Learning Theory**, According to Skinner, 1953, Rewards and feedback in games help students learn the language habits you want them to.

4. **Cognitive Load Theory**, According to Sweller's (1988), this idea says that how much our brains can hold limits how well we learn. Gamification can help reduce extra load by:

- Breaking language ideas into small chunks (like Duolingo's skill trees).
- Using pictures, sounds, and text together (Mayer, 2005).
- Using spaced practice to help students remember (Karpicke & Roediger, 2008). But, if gamification is not planned well, it can make things harder with too many pictures or confusing rewards (Plass et al., 2015)

5. **Sociocultural Theory:** Gamification as a Way to Learn

Vygotsky's (1978) theory says gamification works when:

- Tutors help students in the right way (like ELSA Speak's pronunciation help).

- Students can learn from each other in games (like Minecraft Education).
- Games use local stories (like storylines for different countries).

Empirical Data Findings and Analysis:

1–Vocabulary Acquisition

A study of 17 studies (with 2,314 students) found that vocabulary apps made with game features helped students:

- There is 22% higher immediate better for concrete words).
- Reward timing (worked better with fast feedback).

2–Grammatical Competence

Controlled studies of gamified grammar instruction show mixed results:

- Positive outcomes: 31% fewer mistakes in verb use with game features (Butler et al., 2020).

memory recall ($g=0.78$, $p<0.01$)

- There is 15% better long-term retention after six weeks follow-up (Hwang et al., 2020)

But, how well it worked depended on:

- Age (worked better for teens than adults).
- Word type (worked
- Null outcomes: No better at using the/a/an (Li & Hegelheimer, 2013).
- Negative outcomes: Too much focus on speed made students not think as deeply (Barab et al., 2009).

3–Speaking Skills

Analysis of voice-based gamification features shows that :

- 40% less worry about speaking (Reinders & Wattana, 2015).
- Lack of transfer in real conversations.
- Different cultures acted differently (Middle Eastern students were 23% less interested than East Asian students).

Challenges and Considerations

1– The Neoteric Effect Problem

Studies show that interest drops by 57% after 8 weeks of game-based learning (Hanus & Fox, 2015). To keep it working, requires to:

- Change the difficulty as students improve.
 - Change the stories that pull students in.
 - Have students keep each other responsible, or make it fit the culture.
- Games must match the culture of the country to keep students interested (Al-Hussein, 2019).

2–Fairness Problems

- Technology issues: Not everyone has internet or knows how to use computers in Iraq or other countries, which can make it hard to use gamification (UNESCO, 2021, 2022). Reports say only 34% of low-income schools have the technology for gamification. Using paper games may help, but it's hard to do for everyone.
- Teacher training: Teachers need training to use game-based lessons well (Hamari et al., 2014).

3–Testing Issues

Game-based tests may test how well students play the game, not how well they know the language (Shute et al., 2019). Some suggestions to fix this:

- Use both game-based and regular tests.
- Use hidden testing ways.
- Use different types of portfolios.

Recommendations for Gamification Applications

Based on the analysis of this paper, gamification should manage to:

1. Balance rewards and demand to learn by

- Using levels that students can master, starting from simple to complex to achieve goals gradually.

- Having students write about what they learn along with earning points.

2. Change for different learners by:

- Using local games that make sense for students this means to attach their social environment to the target game.

- Having different difficulty level: this means to create enthusiastic atmosphere to the level of learners.

3. Use Tools That Are Easy to Get To: Use free programs and classcraft to keep costs low.

4. Use legit EFL methods: Use learning methods such as:

- Task-based language teaching

- Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)

5. Use Learning-based rules :

- Manage brain load

- Practice on purpose

- Use teamwork

6. Train Teachers : Training should show how to add gamification to lessons well.

Benefits of Gamification for Iraqi EFL Learners

1–Increased Motivation: Iraqi students often have big classes and not enough resources (Al-Saadi, 2021). Gamification adds competition and rewards, which makes learning more fun (Deterding et al., 2011).

2– Enhanced Vocabulary and Grammar Retention: Programs like Duolingo and Quizlet use practice and quizzes, which help students remember (Zhao & Lai, 2022).

3– Developed communicative confidence: Role-playing games help students practice speaking without pressure (Reinders & Wattana, 2015).

4– Collaborative Learning: Multiplayer language games help students work together, which is important in cultures like Iraq (Al-Jarf, 2020)

Empirical Evidence

Studies show gamification works in EFL:

–A study by Yildirim (2017) found that Turkish EFL learners using gamified apps improved their vocabulary.

– Al-Jarf (2020) said that Saudi EFL students using gamified quizzes had better test scores than those in regular classes.

–In Iraq, Al-Saadi (2021) saw that gamified mobile apps made students participate more in rural schools.

Conclusion

Gamification can change how Iraqi EFL students learn English by making them more interested, driven, and skilled. There are problems like lack of access in technological tools and culture, but planning well can make it work best. This means thinking about:

- Learning ideas beyond just rewards.
- Culture and individual differences.
- How to add it to lessons for a long time.

Future studies should prioritize:

- Long-term studies
- Brain studies
- Studies across cultures
- Long-term effects and best ways to use it in classrooms.

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