



Original article

The Effectiveness of Using a Gamification Strategy in Developing English language Skills for EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Using educational games to educate and learn English greatly advances the objective of language acquisition through social interaction and peer learning, particularly vital due to the increasing population of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This study examines the effects of game use on young children's English proficiency to work on the presentation of sixth-grade EFL students in English class at Mostaqbal primary School in Baghdad/Iraq, focusing on aspects such as anxiety from peer pressure, vocabulary learning, and motivation. Prior research confirms the value of games in language teaching, essential for child development. The study involved fifty sixth-grade EFL students, employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Results indicated improved student enthusiasm, increased vocabulary acquisition, and reduced anxiety during gaming in class. The primary aim was to explore the relationship between English competency and game usage. Incorporating games in the classroom not only alleviates stress but also enhances student engagement and enjoyment in learning. The educational implications of gaming elements for improving English proficiency and learner attitudes are thoroughly discussed.

Keywords: Motivation; vocabulary acquisition; anxiety; games

فاعلية استخدام استراتيجيات التلعيب في تطوير اللغة الانكليزية للطلاب الاجانب

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المُستخلص

ان استخدام الألعاب التعليمية لتعليم اللغة الانكليزية وتعلمها يعزز بشكل كبير هدف اكتساب اللغة من خلال التفاعل الاجتماعي والتعلم من الأقران، وهو أمرٌ بالغ الأهمية نظرًا لتزايد أعداد متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تتناول هذه الدراسة تأثير استخدام الألعاب على إتقان الأطفال الصغار للغة الإنجليزية وذلك من خلال العمل على عرض طلاب الصف السادس في فصل اللغة الانكليزية بمدرسة المستقبل الابتدائية في بغداد /العراق ، مع التركيز على جوانب مثل القلق الناتج عن ضغط الأقران، واكتساب المفردات، والدافعية. وتؤكد الدراسات السابقة أهمية الألعاب في تعليم اللغة، ودورها الأساسي في نمو الطفل. شملت الدراسة خمسين طالبًا من طلاب الصف السادس في برنامج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، باستخدام منهجيات كمية ونوعية. أشارت النتائج إلى تحسن حماس الطلاب، وزيادة اكتساب المفردات، وانخفاض القلق أثناء اللعب في الفصل. كان الهدف الرئيسي هو استكشاف العلاقة بين إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية واستخدام الألعاب. إن دمج الألعاب في الفصل الدراسي لا يُخفف التوتر فحسب، بل يُعزز أيضًا مشاركة الطلاب ومتعتهم في التعلم. وتناقش الدراسة بالتفصيل الآثار التعليمية لعناصر الألعاب في تحسين إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية ومواقف المتعلمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحفيز، اكتساب المفردات، قلق، ألعاب

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Language is a means of communication that is used to communicate knowledge or experiences, to express sentiments, emotions, and ideas, and to question or inform other people about particular things. Since language facilitates linguistic communication, which is a fundamental social necessity, language is unquestionably very important (Al-Bahrani & Al-Rubaye 2017). Additionally, in the modern world, learning a new foreign language offers a person great opportunities (Bamberg 1997). Speaking English fluently increases your chances of landing a decent career in your home country and even in multinational corporations abroad (Aichhorn & Puck 2017). In the modern world, English is now used in numerous domains, including science, aviation, technology, diplomacy, tourism, and many more. Since English is currently the language of many social media platforms, learning it is important for socializing and entertainment in addition to the workplace (Ikramovich 2025).

According to (Ersöz 2000), (Kim & Ross 2006) and (Nga et al., 2003), the use of games in EFL classes adds valuable and relevant settings for language use, encourages students to participate and work together, can both dispute and reduce anxiety, creates opportunities for language practice, and helps students continue their efforts to learn the foreign language because the emphasis is on the message rather than the structure.

Games can be used to help students modify their motivation for studying or to get their attention after a challenging test or during demanding lessons (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby 2006).

Games are described as "an organized activity that usually has the following properties: a particular task or objective, a set of rules, competition between players, and communication between players by spoken or written language" (p. 89) in The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied

Linguistics (Yorkey, 1979), The purpose of language games is not to pass the time or foster a relationship between students and teachers. Games are "an activity with rules, a goal, and an element of fun," according to (Hadfield 1984). According to Deng (2006), Evaldsson (2009) also showed that "games are a different kind of activity". They have strict guidelines that must be adhered to and are extremely regimented. Additionally, as cited from Deng, 2006 "a game is a competitive activity involving skills, chance, or endurance on the part of two or more persons who play according to a set of rules, usually for their own amusement or for spectators".

This study focuses on games that are played in classrooms, even though there are many various types of games that can be employed in a contemporary EFL learning environment, such as computer or online games. According to our definition, these games must involve rules, competition, relaxation, and learning. One of the main goals of employing games in the classroom is to provide a less stressful environment for students to learn English.

Additionally, since having fun satisfies a natural human tendency toward attentiveness, it is easier to keep kids' attention when they are playing games (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015). Furthermore, it can help youngsters acquire vocabulary in a more natural way than they would ordinarily through play (Angelova & Lekova, 1995; Deng, 2006). Games and game-like activities have long been used in English classes to engage and "wake up" disinterested pupils, according to (Kuo 2008). But because of the anxiety that many game-playing scenarios induce, some academics (Chuang, 2007; Wu, 2002; Zeng, 2005) disagree with the efficacy of game-based learning.

However, despite the extensive literature on the general benefits of games in EFL contexts, there remains a notable research gap regarding the structured implementation of 'Gamification' as a consistent strategy rather than an occasional activity. Furthermore, most existing studies have focused on adult learners, leaving a void in understanding how such strategies impact the motivation and anxiety levels of EFL children specifically. Additionally, the existing contradiction in academic circles—where some scholars (e.g., Wu, 2002; Zeng, 2005) argue that competitive elements may induce anxiety—necessitates further investigation. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of a systematic gamification strategy in a real-world classroom setting for young learners.

1.2. Problem Statement

Despite the global importance of English proficiency, many EFL young learners continue to struggle with traditional, rote-learning methods that often lead to disengagement and high levels of "language anxiety." In many local classrooms, the learning process is perceived by students as a rigid and stressful task rather than an interactive experience. This reality creates a significant pedagogical challenge: how to maintain student motivation while reducing the psychological barriers to language acquisition.

The core of the problem lies in the gap between the students' natural inclination towards interactive play and the formal structure of English lessons. While many classrooms occasionally use games as a "break" from studying, there is a lack of a structured Gamification Strategy that integrates these elements into the core learning process. Furthermore, students often report feelings of "peer pressure anxiety" during traditional assessments or speaking tasks, which hinders their performance.

Previous studies have offered conflicting views on whether competition in games helps or hurts the learning process. Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate this problem from the students' perspective. This study addresses the lack of empirical evidence regarding how a systematic gamification strategy can transform the students' learning experience from a source of anxiety into a motivating, vocabulary-rich environment. By focusing on the students' actual engagement and performance, this research seeks to determine if gamification is a truly effective solution for the recurring issues of low motivation and classroom-related stress.

1.3 Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

- a. To investigate the impact of gamification strategies on EFL students' motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and the reduction of language-related anxiety.
- b. To examine the relationship between the use of gamification in English learning and the students' overall academic performance.
- c. To determine whether the effectiveness of gamification differs significantly based on the students' English proficiency levels.
- d. To explore students' perceptions and attitudes toward the role of gamification in enhancing their English language skills.

1.4. Importance of the Study

This study's findings will help English language instructors focus more on games and devote a significant amount of time to exercises. Games are a valuable tool for effectively learning the English language, according to previous research and other educational publications. The study's conclusions could be used as a guide to help teachers effectively teach English to their pupils and maintain their motivation and interest in lifelong learning.

1.5. Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the following questions:

1. How does the gamification strategy affect the development of English proficiency in terms of motivation, vocabulary learning, and anxiety reduction ?
2. Is there a statistically significant correlation between students' engagement in gamified activities and their overall academic performance in English?
3. Does the impact of using gamification strategies differ significantly among students with varying English skill levels (low, intermediate, and high)?
4. What are the students' perceptions regarding how gamification can improve their English language skills?

2. Literature Review

(Hong & Liu 2003) seeks to highlight the benefits of using games to help young people learn English. The researcher emphasized the need of selecting playing methods and including them into the lesson's explanation plan. In particular, teachers should consider how different games will help students in different ways, as well as which games to employ, when to use them, and how to connect them to the curriculum, textbook, or program. The goal of (Ibrahim & Hmaid 2017) is to acknowledge the benefits of adopting language games in Jordan's elementary schools when teaching English as a foreign language. Teaching English as a foreign language through language games is advantageous,

according to one study outcome. Students can create positive interactions with the new language by playing language games. The study proposed that curriculum designers add sufficient language games into the curriculum in light of these findings. The study also looks at how games affect vocabulary learning in English as a foreign or second language. According to a study by (Derakhshan & Khatir (2015), games can also assist teachers in creating real-world situations where language is relevant and helpful. The researcher demonstrates how effective the game is at fostering interactions with kids when used as a teaching tool for English in elementary school classes. This is due to the fact that toys serve a variety of purposes in a child's growth, including aiding in learning, assisting in the acquisition of subjects that are taught year after year, and indirectly fostering the development of necessary skills. (Qizi 2022) seeks to understand the significance and efficacy of games when implemented in English as a second language.

The researcher comes to the conclusion that games should be used in foreign language instruction since they give English language learners a favorable environment where they are more motivated and appreciate learning, which will certainly lead to outstanding academic accomplishment. Additionally, a number of studies have demonstrated the value of games in vocabulary learning since they help students learn words more effectively, interact with others, communicate more effectively, and become more motivated.

2.1. Games' connection to Krashen's views on language acquisition

In the subject of foreign language learning, Stephen Krashen has left a lasting and significant legacy. One of the earliest attempts to develop a cogent theoretical explanation of foreign language acquisition was his "Input Hypothesis." Krashen maintained that language acquisition occurs when a student understands the language. Even though several aspects of his methodology have been widely criticized, the concept has persisted and gives teachers a clear mandate to give students lots of chances to understand the target language. According to (Fatoni et al., 2024) the importance of motivation and identity in learning, Krashen's model is both challenged and enhanced through the use of a case study of an English language student. Teachers can motivate and energize students' studies and help them envision a life in which a foreign language is essential by drawing on role models from the local community or larger culture, which is a significant source of learner motivation (Bailey & Fahad 2021). The authors suggest broadening Krashen's perspective to encompass a variety of multimedia and technologies, building on his notion that language instructors and programs should develop strong reading programs for a sustained engagement with foreign language print resources. But for such a program to be successful, teachers must mediate the social identities and motives of their students for long-term foreign language acquisition. **Krashen say** "To make sure that language acquirers pay attention to the input, it should be interesting. But interest may be not enough for optimal language acquisition. It may be the case that input needs to be not just interesting but compelling." Krashen (1982). However, such a program can only succeed if teachers mediate their learners' social identities and motivations for sustained foreign language learning.

2.2. Learning through Playing

Play is a child's natural way of learning, according to Roth (2001). The essential parts of children's intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development are play—constructive play—from infancy.

Children's intelligence, such as their knowledge and comprehension of the world around them, is proven to increase when they are exposed to a learning environment that fosters constructive play. Play thus aids in preparing kids for their academic learning at every stage of the academic journey, including when they start school.

But the most widespread misunderstanding about education is that it should be intensive, serious, and undoubtedly solemn (Kim& Ross 2006). It is thought that a person is not truly learning if they are having fun or are around laughter and humor in their learning environment. However, one must acknowledge that learning and having fun can still coexist in spite of this fact. When it comes to children's learning environments, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between learning and play. However, one must acknowledge that learning and having fun can still coexist in spite of this fact. When it comes to children's learning environments, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between learning and play. Unquestionably, youngsters like playing, and more significantly, their play reflects the things that are significant in their life. In conclusion, it is acknowledged that play helps youngsters become ready for their hopefully fulfilling adult lives.

2.3. Games (Definition and Characteristics)

Regardless of grade level, games inevitably become a part of learners' daily routines. Throughout the day, the students are exposed to games on their cellphones, laptops, the internet, and even at home. However, their classroom is one of the locations where they would not frequently have the opportunity to play games. While some educators have chosen to incorporate games into their teaching methods or demonstrations, the majority of them do not share this view. In particular, educators who have incorporated games into their lesson plans may not make the most of them (Marzano& Pickering 2010). It is best to spend a significant amount of time reviewing the many definitions of games and their initial qualities in order to determine whether or not they are associated with language acquisition.

Harfield (2010) defined a game as an activity that has a goal, rules, and a fun component. With assurance, he said: Games should not be seen as a fun pastime for Friday afternoons or the end of the term, but rather as an essential component of the language curriculum. At one end of the spectrum, they can be used as a memory aid and repetition drill; at the other end, they can be utilized as an opportunity to use the language freely and as a tool to achieve a goal rather than an end in itself. They can be employed at any point in the development from controlled to free practice. Teachers might use them as a diagnostic tool to identify problem areas and implement the necessary corrective measures.

2.4 Teachers and Game Selection

In reality, the only thing any student wants to do is play games for enjoyment. Teachers, not students, are expected to offer strong and convincing arguments before introducing games into class (Hong, 2003). Khan, as cited in (Hong 2002), asserts that educators should carefully consider various factors when deciding which games to use in the classroom. These factors include the language focus, the curriculum, the textbook, and the program, as well as the type of games that will have the greatest impact on students.

This fact can be explained more precisely by the fact that teachers would take the time to consider which skills or subskills they would like to see improved by games, how well the learners (children)

are currently doing in those particular skills, where the games are expected to take them, and even what didactic and methodological goals would be best suited for the language learning games. To put it another way, teachers would try to determine whether a game will introduce, consolidate, automatize, make more flexible, systemize, reactivate, or interlink specific abilities before incorporating it into their lesson plan. Finally, the instructors would assess if the intended language learning games do, in fact, aim to achieve both a language and a game goal (Sambanis, Skaperdas & Wohlforth, 2015).

2.5. Using games to teach English as a foreign language

Games have the potential to be very helpful when used appropriately in the particular context of teaching and learning EFL. Competitive games, for instance, provide students with an organic opportunity to collaborate and communicate with one another, facilitating the acquisition of the foreign language in the same manner as their mother tongue. Information processing will be quicker and more effective because of the clear encouragement and interaction that these games offer. Additionally, because of the natural drive to succeed, educational games often motivate students learning a foreign language to engage in any activity. Students' stress levels will drop, increasing their desire to learn (Abdalbaqi 2024). Additionally, employing educational games in EFL courses help teach students how to utilize the language effectively rather than just rehearsing it in a classroom context. There is no denying that true communication happens when individuals engage with each other in authentic settings. Consequently, educators could utilize games to create a calm atmosphere that can boost focus and lower stress and anxiety levels (Petraglia 2009).

2.6. Conditions of learning by games

1. The age, physical, and mental development of the child should all be taken into consideration when choosing these games.
2. Simplicity, ease, and clarity should be prioritized over difficulty and intelligibility in video games.
- 3 There should be a connection between these games and the surrounding educational setting.
- 4 There are no safety hazards for kids when playing these games.
- 5 The game ought to be fun and thrilling.
- 6 Through logical and obvious procedures, these activities should assist the youngster with observing, reflecting, balancing, and obtaining and accessing facts.
- 7 The game should be appropriate for the kids' skills, backgrounds, and preferences.
8. Students should have a choice in the game.
9. Most significantly, how closely the game relates to the specific learning goals or results of the instructor. (Gee 2008).

3. Methodology

A methodical strategy was taken in order to perform an extensive literature analysis on the function of gamification in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL).

3.1. The following steps were part of the research method:

1. Texts That Matter: We searched high and low through academic databases like Google Scholar and ERIC as well as periodicals that cover topics like gamification, language teaching, and education.

Use of the terms "gamification," "English language teaching," "language learning," "motivation," and "engagement" helped narrow the search for relevant information.

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to screen the identified literature. Only books, research projects, conference papers, and peer-reviewed publications released in the last ten years were included. Studies on the application of gamification in EFL and its effects on motivation, engagement, and language learning outcomes were the main focus.

3. Information Retrieval: Key points and pertinent information were extracted from the gathered literature and organized according to different subjects. These sections covered topics such as gamification's concept and key components, how gamification can motivate and engage language learners, the pros and cons of gamification in English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms, best practices for gamification implementation, real-world examples, empirical data, and potential future directions.

4. Data Analysis: To find recurrent themes, patterns, and trends in the literature, the retrieved data was subjected to a critical analysis. To find commonalities, discrepancies, and agreement amongst the investigations, a comparative analysis was carried out.

5. Synthesis and Writing: To create a logical story, the results of the literature analysis were combined and arranged. After that, the literature review was composed by combining pertinent data, ideas, and proof from the chosen sources.

6. Study and Iteration: To guarantee correctness, coherence, and clarity, the literature study was carefully examined and updated. Peer and subject matter expert feedback was sought in order to improve the review's caliber and rigor. The literature review on the function of gamification in EFL sought to offer a thorough and current grasp of the subject by using this research methodology. It summarized pertinent research results, found themes and patterns, and offered a fair assessment of the advantages, difficulties, and best practices of gamification in language instruction.

In this study, a pragmatic parallel mixed-methods research design was used. The impacts of employing games in teaching EFL learners in primary school were investigated through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and document collection. Correlational designs were employed for the surveys in order to examine the relationship between the variables of children's English competence and game use. Peer pressure anxiety, vocabulary acquisition in both classroom and cram settings, and student motivation were the determinants of English learning experiences through games. Additionally, interviews were conducted to find out how students felt about using games to learn English. The method's instrumentation, data collecting, and analysis techniques are further explained in the sections that follow.

3.2. Subjects

The research included fifty sixth-graders (23 males and 27 females) from a primary school who were taking English as a Foreign Language class. The results of the demographic survey showed that every single participant had some kind of experience with learning English through gaming. All participants had experience with "matching games," "guessing games," and "arranging games" from either school or cram sessions, according to the results. The school instructors' final scores for each

topic for the entire semester were collected to test the students' English competency. The respondents were categorized into three levels: low, moderate, and high, according to the results. The scores ranged from 65 to 99.54 points, with an average of 86.82. Table 1 gives a detailed breakdown of the subjects' distribution. Using a t-test, we looked deeper into whether or not we appropriately classified the high- and low-achieving groups, and we found that there was a substantial difference. Thus, there are an adequate number of subjects in each category. Furthermore, a pilot test was administered for the vocabulary education element prior to the commencement of the study to guarantee that none of the participants had prior knowledge of the chosen words.

Table 1

Three Categories of Classification

Level	N	Rate	score	Mean	SD
H	14	27%	93.22 – 99.53	96.04	1.83
I	22	46%	82 – 93.16	87.60	3.08
L	14	27%	65 – 81.65	76.34	5.22

Note: N=50, H=High, I=Intermediate, L=Low

3.3. Instruments

Two tools were employed in this investigation. One was a survey that drew on the work of Wu (2002), Zeng (2005), Zheng (2008), and Kuo (2008) while developing its format. There were twenty multiple-choice questions designed to elicit responses regarding the impact of gaming on participants' motivation, language acquisition, and anxiety levels caused by peer competition. The vocabulary acquisition element had five items, the motivation section had five, and the anxiety section had four. Together, they made up the fourteen questions. The survey utilized a 5-point rating system, where 1 signifies "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree." The data were analyzed using SPSS statistical editor with questionnaire item in order to attest to its validity and reliability. The results indicated that each question item differed significantly, so all of the items were kept. Furthermore, reliability results revealed that the Cronbach's alpha (α) for vocabulary learning, motivation, and anxiety from peer pressure were, respectively, .81, .61, and .83. The second tool, a semi-structured interview, was used to investigate participants' perceptions regarding the impact of games on English language learning as well as their past and present experiences.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Using multiple stages of sampling, 50 sixth-grade EFL elementary students from Al- Mostaqbal primary School in Baghdad/Iraq, were chosen to complete the questionnaire for this study. First, classrooms in the elementary school were chosen at random using cluster sampling. Next, a sample of 50 students from two classrooms was chosen using random sampling. In order to gain access to the participants, a consent form outlining the study's objectives, respondents' rights, and the interview procedure was provided.

50 participants were asked to complete a standardized questionnaire at the start of the study in order to get their individual viewpoints. Two weeks before to the main study, five participants from the 50 selected students completed a pilot test of the questionnaire to make necessary modifications. The

mean scores and standard deviations were calculated using descriptive statistics as part of the quantitative data analysis procedure. Items 10 and 12 were converted backwards during calculation because they were written as reversed questions.

The measure of correlation (γ) was calculated using bivariate correlation (zero-order) analysis to examine the association between each variable and students' English competence. A strong or weak positive association is shown by the correlations' size and direction, which vary from -1.00 to +1.00. Additionally, the relationship between learning English through games and student accomplishments was examined by analyzing the final scores that students received from their teachers.

To determine if there were significant differences in the effects of learning with games among students with different levels of English proficiency, we utilized a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with students' English proficiency levels as the independent variable and students' self-reports of motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety from peer pressure as the dependent variables. That way, we could examine the effects of game-based learning more closely and see how they varied across students' English ability levels. The semi-structured interview was then conducted using deliberate random sampling. Fifteen out of fifty students were selected at random for additional, in-depth data analysis in this study. The purpose of the questions was to find out about the participants' perspectives about the impact of games on English language learning as well as their past and current experiences. In addition, more follow-up questions were posed to create a more comprehensive picture. In terms of qualitative data collection, interviews were conducted using tape recording, and complete transcription was utilized for additional content analysis in order to develop a grounded theory.

4. Results

This study looked at the impact of games on English language acquisition. The following presents four key conclusions based on the participants' perceptions. *Research question 1: How does the gamification strategy affect the development of English proficiency in terms of motivation, vocabulary learning, and anxiety reduction?* The three-part questionnaire was created to assess students' opinions on whether or not playing games throughout their English language learning process enhanced their motivation, vocabulary, and capacity to handle social pressure. According to the findings, games help kids learn English ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.15$), particularly when they become more motivated ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.12$), acquire more vocabulary ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.20$), and experience less anxiety from peer pressure ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.43$). *Research question 2: Is there a statistically significant correlation between students' engagement in gamified activities and their overall academic performance in English?*

Students' motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety caused by peers were studied in relation to their English competency through the use of a correlation analysis while they learnt English. Despite having moderate magnitudes, the connections between students' self-reported English ability and their enhanced motivation ($\gamma=.67$, $p =.000$) and vocabulary acquisition ($\gamma=.46$, $p =.001$) are clearly

demonstrated in Table 2. On the other hand, students' assessments of how games affect anxiety caused by peers and their level of English proficiency are strongly inversely related ($\gamma = -.62$, $p = .001$).

Table 2

Examining the Relationship Between Students' English Proficiency and the Use of Games for English Language Acquisition

	Pearson Correlation (γ)	Adjusted R Square (γ^2)	F	Sig.
Motivation	.67	44%	38.52	.000*
Vocabulary Acquisition	.46	20%	12.93	.001*
Anxiety from Peer Pressure	-.62	37%	29.66	.000*

Note: * $p < .05$

To examine the distribution of students' English proficiency and their opinions of the impact of games, a scatter plot was also used. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate the favorable linear connections between improved student motivation and vocabulary acquisition and improved student performance. The findings show that while learning through games, kids with higher scores are more motivated and acquire vocabulary more effectively. However, there seems to be a substantial inverse association between students' competence and their anxiety from peers when it comes to the peer pressure anxiety element (Figure 3). The results clearly demonstrate that when playing games to learn English, students with lower grades experience more anxiety from their peers.

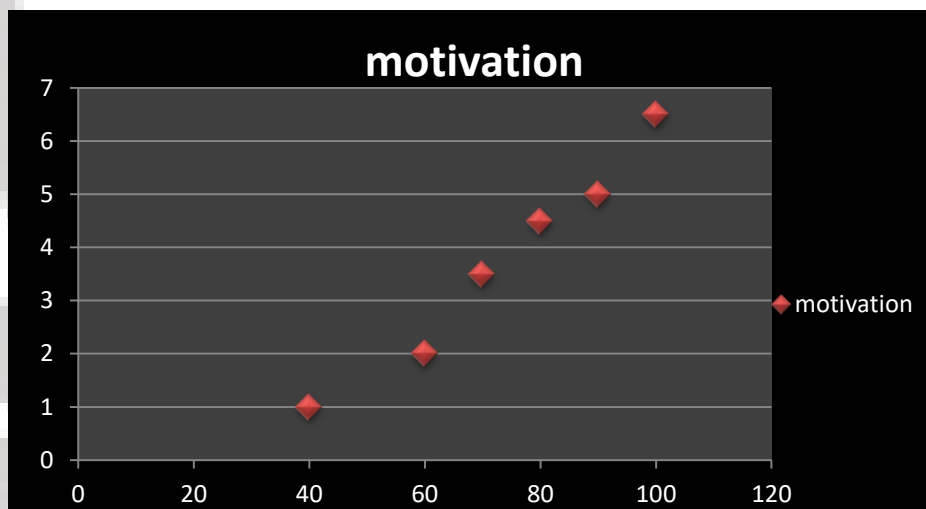


Figure 1 scatter plot of the relation among students (English proficiency and their motivations)

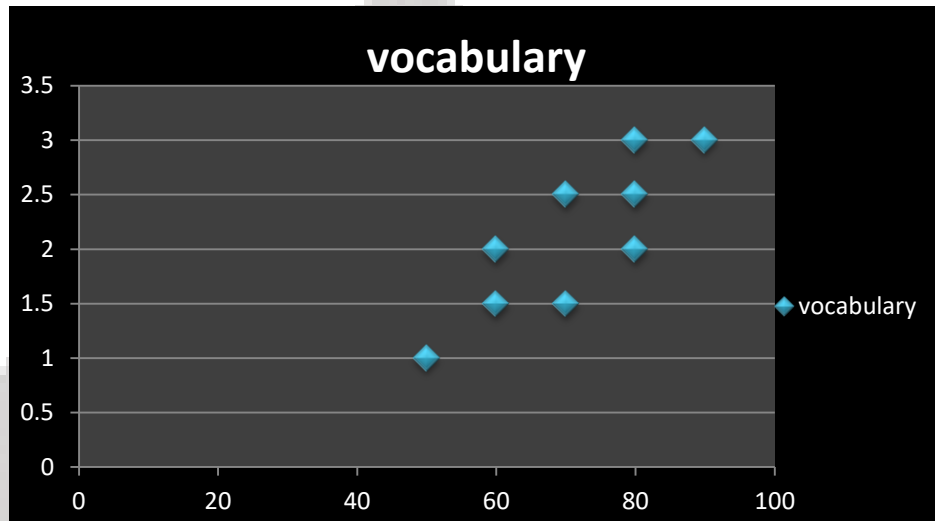


Figure 2 Scatter plot of the relation among students (English proficiency and their vocabulary)

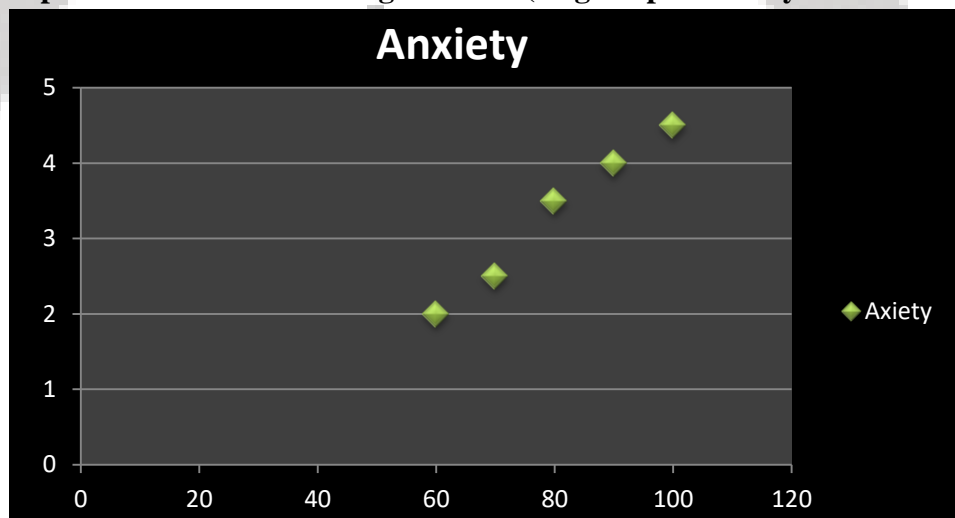


Figure 3 scatter plot of the relation among students (English proficiency and anxiety from peer pressure)

Research question 3: Does the impact of using gamification strategies differ significantly among students with varying English skill levels (low, intermediate, and high)? To further study the effects of games on students demonstrating varied degrees of skill, we used students' self-reports regarding the influence of learning with games. To test for statistical significance, we used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the three levels (high, moderate, and low). The criteria of motivation, language acquisition, and fear about peer pressure were all considered in this context. Table 3 shows that there were significant differences between the three influence factors and the different proficiency levels at the .05 level [$F(2, 47) = 7.928, p = .001$], [$F(2, 47) = 8.875, p = .001$], and [$F(2, 47) = 11.653, p = .000$]. To delve deeper into the consequences of using games with students demonstrating varied degrees of competency, we examined students' self-reports evaluating the influence of learning with games. To test for statistical significance, we used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the three levels (high, moderate, and low). The criteria of motivation, language acquisition, and fear about peer pressure were all considered in this context. Table 3 shows that there were significant differences between the three influence factors and the different

proficiency levels at the .05 level [$F(2, 47) = 7.928, p = .001$], [$F(2, 47) = 8.875, p = .001$], and [$F(2, 47) = 11.653, p = .000$].

One-way ANOVA Analysis between Proficiency Levels and Game Learning

Table 3

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Motivation					
Between groups	7.09	2	3.55	7.93	.001*
Within groups	21.02	47	.45		
Total	28.12	49			
Vocabulary Acquisition					
Between groups	5.30	2	2.65	8.88	.001*
Within groups	14.02	47	.30		
Total	19.32	49			
Anxiety from peer pressure					
Between groups	8.80	2	4.40	11.65	.000*
Within groups	17.75	47	.38		
Total	26.55	49			

Note: * $p < .05$

Research question 4: What are the students' perceptions regarding how gamification can improve their English language skills?

Eleven semi-structured interview questions were utilized to get the subjects' opinions about how playing games while learning English affected their performance. Regarding the ways in which games might help students become more motivated and confident when studying English, the majority of students concurred that games can help them feel more motivated and confident. Thirteen out of fifteen participants attested to the fact that games can boost their confidence and motivation when used in English instruction. "Playing games while learning English always can raise my interests," for instance, stated participant #3. Instead of waiting for a call, I prefer to play games.

It's the ideal method for learning [a new language], in my opinion. I particularly enjoy it when I win the game because my classmates support me and give me a sense of accomplishment. Additionally, participant #6 said, "If the teacher doesn't let us participate in class activities, sometimes I feel really bored." All I feel is drowsiness. Furthermore, I believe that playing games is a useful method of determining whether or not we comprehend the material. When I win the game, I feel like I've accomplished something fantastic.

Additionally, participant #5 stated that "I am frequently reprimanded because I am unable to focus on one thing for longer than ten minutes. However, because playing games is enjoyable, I can truly concentrate on learning English. Therefore, the findings show that using games can improve students' focus and help them learn English. Regarding the role that games play in encouraging children to learn new words, most participants concur that games can aid in vocabulary acquisition. According

to nine out of fifteen participants, games can help students learn new words in English. For instance, participant #1 stated that "each member is forced to speak and remember the English vocabularies that the teacher taught in order to win the games." Learning vocabulary is made simple in this approach. Furthermore, participant #7 stated that playing various games makes it simpler for her to memorize vocabulary. I don't need any push to learn or use such words. I'll lose it sooner or later if the teacher just wants me to commit spelling and phonics to memory. Additionally, participant #11 stated, "...and the matching game can help me acquire vocabularies because the vocabulary becomes real to me at the time I match the picture and the word. When I touch something or take action, I learn things more quickly. Therefore, I believe that playing games is beneficial". As a result, the results reveal that using games does help kids learn new words.

Regarding how students' anxiety from peer pressure may be exacerbated by games while studying English, the majority of participants disagree that playing games makes them feel more anxious. Twelve out of fifteen respondents disagreed with the claim that utilizing games to teach English can make them more anxious due to peer pressure; rather, they believe that playing games helps them feel less anxious while learning the language. For example, according to participant #8, "playing games is fun." I enjoy playing games, and since I don't really care what other people think of me, I don't think that utilizing games to learn English makes me more anxious due to peer pressure. "The teacher always tells us that 'failure is the mother of success,' so we just try harder to win next time," added participant #10.

This idea encourages us to work together more. My teammates and I support one another in order to lessen our fear when we are called individually. In addition, participant #14 said, "I dislike answering questions one-on-one. I enjoy being with other people. My teammates will assist me if I don't know the answer, and in some ways, I learn more from them than from the instructor. Consequently, the results demonstrate that the use of games in English instruction does not raise students' anxiety levels due to peer pressure.

5. Discussion

The results confirm that gamification significantly boosts students' motivation and vocabulary acquisition. By creating an interactive environment, games help learners move beyond rote-memorization to a deeper, more enjoyable understanding of language, supporting the findings of Kuo (2008).

A Pearson Correlation analysis showed a strong positive link between engagement in games and academic performance. Essentially, as students' anxiety decreased, their English proficiency scores increased. This proves that reducing "peer-pressure anxiety" through play directly leads to better grades.

Using One-Way ANOVA, the study found that while all students benefited, they did so differently. High-achievers felt the most motivation, whereas low-achievers showed the most significant progress in vocabulary learning through play compared to traditional methods. However, lower-level students still exhibited some shyness, indicating they need more time to adapt.

Contrary to Wu (2002) and Zeng (2005), this study found that games reduce rather than increase peer-induced anxiety. Students perceived games as a "social bridge" that encouraged peer-tutoring and teamwork, transforming the classroom into a supportive environment.

6. Conclusion

This research set out to investigate the impact of gamification on young EFL learners' English proficiency, focusing on motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety reduction. The findings provide compelling evidence that games are not merely recreational tools but effective pedagogical strategies that foster a positive learning environment. By transforming the classroom into an interactive space, gamification successfully bridges the gap between students' natural inclination toward play and their academic language objectives.

The study concludes that a significant positive correlation exists between student engagement in gamified activities and their linguistic performance. While the majority of students experienced a boost in confidence and a reduction in peer-induced anxiety, the research also highlighted the critical role of the teacher in managing game pacing and clarifying linguistic nuances. The feedback from participants suggests that for gamification to be truly effective, it must be inclusive, offering a balance between competitive and cooperative elements to accommodate different learner personalities.

It is important to acknowledge that the scope of this study was limited by a modest sample size and a short implementation period. Consequently, these results should be interpreted as an initial exploration of gamification's potential rather than a final generalization. These constraints underscore the need for cautious application of the findings in broader or more diverse educational contexts.

To build upon the insights gained from this study and address its inherent limitations, several avenues for future research are recommended. Primarily, there is a clear need for longitudinal designs that track students over a longer academic period to assess the long-term sustainability of motivation and vocabulary retention through gamification. Furthermore, future studies should incorporate comparative methodologies, utilizing control groups to isolate the specific effects of game-based instruction against traditional, non-game-based methods, thereby providing more precise data on academic performance. Additionally, exploring the balance between different game genres, specifically comparing cooperative play with competitive elements, would offer deeper insights into how to further minimize language anxiety across diverse student proficiency levels.

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