

RESEARCH ARTICLE 	Boosting English Language Acquisition through Gamification; among First Year LMD Students	
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Abstract		
<p>Over the last two decades, gamification has tremendously evolved and become popular in many fields such as: healthcare, marketing, and business in general and in EFL classrooms in particular. Technology developments; in fact, have paved the way for gamification to be employed as a powerful pedagogical tool; yielding a firm place in modern education. The main principle of gamification is the integration of game design elements into non-game contexts with the sake of creating an enjoying and entertaining environment for teaching English as a foreign language. Hence, this study endeavours to uncover the impact of gamification use in EFL classrooms on first year LMD students at Naama -Salhi Ahmed- university centre, English department. The core objective of this research paper is to explore the effect of gamified learning on students' English language acquisition in comparison to traditional education. It also aims to highlight which language skills can be enhanced via gamification as well as to unveil the most effective game applications. By means of a mixed methods approach, a structured questionnaire and an interview, the findings have testified for the significance of gamified learning at boosting students' engagement and motivation. The study has confirmed that traditional education is reliable; however, the integration of digital tools and game applications such as: Kahoot and Duolingo remains a crucial vehicle for transforming education from a passive into a more active flexible context. Gamification is; thus, a powerful way to enriching English language acquisition on the various language skills mainly: speaking and listening as well as enlarging word retention.</p>		
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Introduction

Acquiring and mastering a foreign language has become a significant issue for academic success. Traditional education; indeed, has focused on structured curricula, textbooks, and memorization and repetitive drills which make the classroom sometimes passive and boring. Yet, it has become necessary to look for clever methods in order to facilitate the acquisition of English as a foreign language. Accordingly, games and game-like activities have enormously helped to achieve a better acquisition and mastery of English within a very enthusiastic and relaxing context; reshaping learners from passive into active behaviours and from solely absorbing information into more engaged, interactive, and rewarding experience.

Gamification in education; thus, refers to the integration of features mostly implemented in games like: points, levels, rewards, leaderboards, challenges, and storylines. The significant core of gamified activities is not to turn learning into a game; however, to afford a vigorous way at boosting active engagement, and enhancing motivation within EFL classes. Gamified tools leverage profoundly learners' motivations at different language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The degree of gamification effectiveness may differ from one skill to another depending on the various types of games employed and gamified learning platforms such as: 'Kahoot' or 'Duolingo'. The current research; consequently, aims basically at investigating the effect of gamification integration

on first year LMD students' English language acquisition at distinct language skills. To achieve these ends, the following significant questions have been raised:

1. To what extent does gamified learning heighten students' English language acquisition in comparison to traditional instruction?
2. Which language skills can gamification best enhance?
3. Which game applications are more useful for appropriate EFL acquisition?

Literature Review

Gamification is considered as a valuable strategy to heighten educators' motivation, engagement, and learning. Al-Ghamdi (2019) defines gamification as "the application of game elements in non-game contexts to enhance user behavior". In this line of thought, Kapp (2012, p. 10) points out that "gamification is using game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate actions, promote learning, and solve problems". Similarly, Zainuddin *et al.* (2018, p. 76) reveal that "gamification is the use of game elements in non-game activities (e.g. points, badges, or leaderboards) to enhance people's interest and motivation through competition". These definitions substantiate on the idea that gamification does not refer only to adding game mechanisms or elements such as: badges or points to an activity; however, gamification goes beyond making something fun or enjoying. Real gamification; in fact, concentrates on the notion of how to designate motivation of a gameful design and in which way can this motivation be employed in real life issues.

Simply put, gamification can be defined as a technique that aims to enhance learners' motivation and engagement in non-gaming contexts in order to learn new skills. It is the use of game elements such as: points, badges, leaderboards...etc of Based on various studies such as that Dicheva *et al.* (2015) and Marcos *et al.* (2016), Cyprian (2021, 14-15) suggests that gamification has five main benefits which are

- ✚ Gamification can be applied to address different kinds of training (soft skills training, professional skills training, product training, ...)
- ✚ Gamification is not only covering the needs of the Cyber Generation but also diverse learner profiles who benefits from this approach
- ✚ Engaged learning experience and new/augmented reality contributes to a higher recall and retention
- ✚ A well-designed gamified course can affect and drive a change in the learner's behavior over time
- ✚ A well-designed gamified course puts the learners in relatable situations, which could be encountered in real-life.

Gamification; consequently, is a transformative vehicle that may change the method of teaching and learning any foreign language. Gamification has profoundly contributed at affecting the cognitive and psychomotor domain. It arouses the student's interests and learning motivation and helps in the construction of a new knowledge.

Methodology

Participants

The current study includes forty EFL learners from Naama university centre -Ahmed Salhi, Algeria. The participants were first year LMD students from the English department combining both genders: males and females who are selected on the basis of their interest and engagement in gaming activities both inside and outside the traditional academic contexts. The participants' age ranges from 17 years old to 30 years old; 77% of the participants' age was between 17 to 20 years old while 23% of the respondents' ages is from 21 to 30 years old.

Research Instruments

In the present study, a mixed methods approach is used for data collection. Two main research instruments have been used: a questionnaire and an interview addressed to first year LMD students at Naama university centre. The questionnaire contains both close-ended and open-ended questions in order to get both qualitative and quantitative data whereas the interview consists of only direct questions which are open-ended ones in order to offer a rich qualitative data. The interview is added for the sake of providing the participants the space where to express their ideas and experiences in the use of gaming platforms and their effects on their academic performance in a flexible manner.

Data Collection Results

Questionnaires Results

When the participants were asked about their proficiency level in the English language, 6% of the learners said that they had 'bad' level in the English level, 60% of them said 'intermediate' whereas 34% of the students said that they had 'good' proficiency level in the English language. In the second question, when the students asked if they had used gamified platforms or games to learn English, 89% of the students said 'Yes' whereas 11% said 'No'. Those who said 'Yes' were asked to cite which games platforms were used more. 13% stated that they used 'Kahoot', 68% used 'Duolingo', 7% 'Quizizz', 9% for 'Quizlet', 3% used other applications. Thus, the results can be shown in the following graph:



Figure 1. Game Platforms used

The students were asked to fix where they had used these games, 74% of the respondents answered that the used the gamified platforms via mobile applications, 18% declared that they use the platforms via website whereas the rest 8% employed them in the classroom. When the students were requested if they liked to receive lectures through traditional method or gamification, the answers showed the following findings:

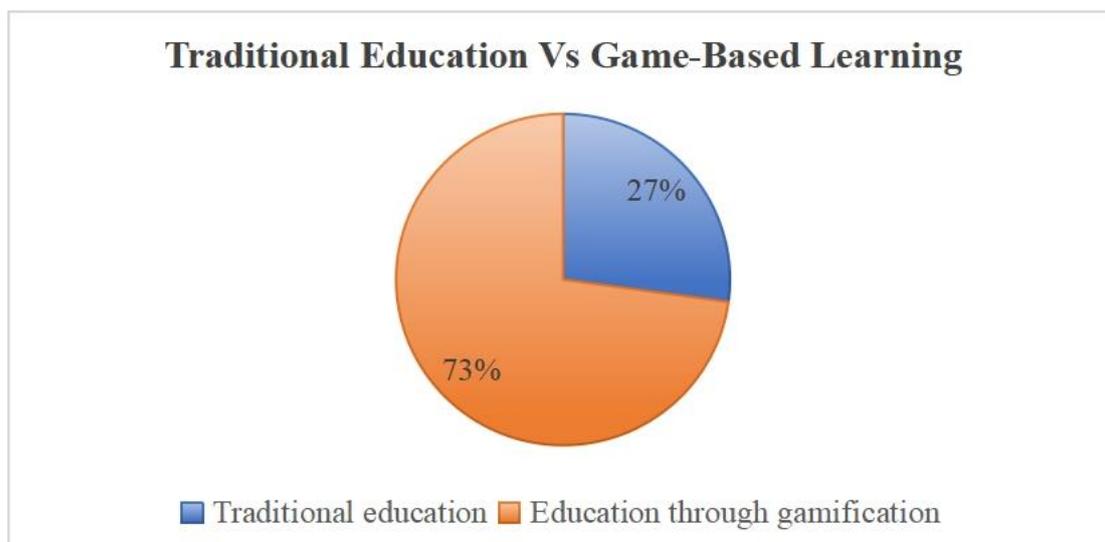


Figure 2. Learners’ Teaching Methods Preferences

The students were also asked about their feelings when receiving lectures via games such as Kahoot or Duolingo, the majority (96%) of the sampling replied ‘enjoying’ while only a few of them said ‘boring’. In addition to that, they were questioned whether if the games were useful or not in learning, 86,7% stated that gamification was useful in learning whereas only 13,3% said that gamification was not useful.

When the participants asked how can games help them in learning English, the following answers had been given:

- I think they can make learning English more enjoyable and help keep us motivated throughout the journey.
- Motivate me to learn more and know more about the game and the language
- Gamification can be a useful and fun way to improve vocabulary, practice reading and listening.
- Games help me at acquiring language unconsciously.
- Games can improve our English by making learning fun and interactive. They help us practice vocabulary, grammar, and listening skills in real situations. Also, playing with others encourages communication and builds confidence.
- I sometimes learn new vocabulary.
- Enjoying leads to a better motivation.

The table below summarizes the impact of gamification integration in EFL classrooms on students’ English language acquisition in which the respondents were given different statements and supposed to select from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Gamification makes the classroom atmosphere more lively	2.1%	5.9%	17.6%	58.8%	15.6%
Gamification makes the classroom atmosphere boring	18.8%	68.8%	6.3%	6.3%	0%

Gamification makes me happy in the classroom	5.9%	11.8%	11.8%	47.1%	23.5%
Gamification makes me more motivated in the classroom	0%	1.2%	15.8%	61%	22%
Gamification enhances my speaking level	0%	0%	17.6%	58.8%	23.5%
Gamification enhances my listening level	0%	0%	5.9%	70%	23.5%
Gamification enhances my reading level	0%	0%	29.4%	47.1%	23.5%
Gamification enhances my writing level	0%	11.8%	11.8%	64.7%	11.8%
Gamification increases my motivation to learn English	5.9%	0%	5.9%	58.8%	29.4%
Gamification decreases my anxiety and fear in the class	0%	0%	5.9%	64.7%	29.4%
Gamified activities help me learn and remember new English words	5.9%	0%	23.5%	70.6%	0%
I have improved my reading comprehension through gamified task	0%	0%	17.6%	58.8%	23.5%
I understand English grammar rules better when they are presented in games	5.9%	0%	47.1%	41.2%	5.9%
I have become more accurate in my writing after using games.	5.9%	0%	47.1%	41.2%	5.9%
Listening to English in games helps improve my comprehension and attention.	0%	0%	0%	94.1%	5.9%
I speak more fluently when English games include speaking tasks	0%	11.8%	5.9%	76.5%	5.9%
I enjoy learning English more through gamified methods than traditional teaching	0%	5.9%	11.8%	58.8%	23.5%
I find it easier to concentrate during gamified lessons than during traditional ones	0%	12.5%	25%	43.8%	18.8%
I prefer a mixture of gamified and traditional teaching methods to learn English.	10.5%	0%	0%	58.3	31.3%

Table1. The Impact of Gamification on EFL Learners' Acquisition

Interview Results

When the students were asked how can different games help to enhance their level in English, the next responses had been given:

- By acquiring new vocabulary and learning grammar rules in enjoyable way.
- Listening and speaking games make me stay focused to remember what had been said and use it later in the game.
- It is a good method to remember the lesson and enjoy when i see it
- Developing vocabulary
- They help me learn grammar rules and enrich my vocabulary
- Different games help enhance our English by improving our vocabulary, grammar, and listening skills in an engaging way. They also encourage us to think in English and communicate with others more confidently.
- They motivate us more to learn.
- Teachers can use games to enhance the learning of the four language skills, and this can include both digital and non-digital games
- The games can be personalized based on the student weak points in the language to strengthen them and enhancing his/her level
- It can give me new and fresh learning by improving vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, and speaking skills in a funny and interactive ways .
- Different games help enhancing our English level by turning learning into an enjoyable and active process.
- I used them but do not working with me they were boring.
- They give me new words and new use of them
- Games help you learn English by making it fun and engaging. They improve our vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening, and reading skills through interactive practice and real-life communication.
- They help me too much

Moreover, the respondents were asked to cite the different games that help to enhance their level in English

- Mostly Duoling
- Word games (e.g., Scrabble)
- Quiz games (e.g., Kahoot)
- Story or simulation games 4. Online multiplayer games
- Mobile apps (e.g., Duolingo)
- I used just dolingo
- Duolingo, English scholarship
- Duolingo ,Quizlet , Babadum....

- Provide practice for better understanding by using a range of new vocabulary, enhance speaking and listening skills.
- Several games can boost English learning. Duolingo helps with vocabulary and grammar, Scrabble improves spelling and word formation, Kahoot and Quizizz make grammar practice fun, and games like Minecraft or The Sims enhance speaking, listening, and reading through immersive experiences.

The next question was: In your opinion, which language skill has improved the most through gamified learning? The respondents suggested the answers below:

- Vocabulary and grammar.
- Listening and speaking English
- Vocabulary, listening and writing
- In my opinion, vocabulary is the skill that improves the most through gamified learning. This is because many games focus on word recognition, matching, and usage in context, which helps players learn and remember new words more effectively and in an enjoyable way.
- Vocabulary, because I learn many new words in the games
- Listening and speaking for most students use game apps (interactive notion)
- Speaking
- Speaking has the most room for the use of games,
- Speaking and listening because all the games i played use these two skills.
- Listening, through the range of pronunciation practices
- In my opinion, vocabulary has improved the most through gamified learning. Games often introduce new words repeatedly in engaging contexts, helping learners understand and remember them more easily. The visual and interactive elements also support better word retention.

When asking the students what are the main differences they notice between gamified and traditional English lessons, they highlighted the following answers:

- The flexibility of gamified lessons, unlike the rigid traditional ways
- The main difference is that gamified is interactive and fun awhile the traditional english lesson is boring, textbook-based grade exams ...
- Traditional method is boring and gamified is mo interested.
- Although gamified English lessons can be best suitable for certain language components, they lack real human engagement which I believe is essential in learning.
- Gamified lessons are more fun and interactive, which keeps students motivated. Games are fun, Traditional lessons are sometimes boring
- The main difference is motivation. Traditional methods tend to be more boring.
- Gamified is good for most people but the problem is the repeating thing or the AD PUB

- It is a breath of fresh air when teachers use games from time to time to lighten up the mood of the lectures, the motivation to learn.
- It would be better to mixing the two methods and this change will transform traditional kinda boring classes into a more enjoyable and lively classes.
- It is short and useful and makes me learn in any time.
- Enjoyment, engaging, more practice
- Gamified English lessons are more interactive, fun, and learner focused, often using rewards and challenges to boost motivation. In contrast, traditional lessons tend to be more textbook based and teacher centered, with less student engagement and fewer real life practice opportunities.
- The traditional English lessons are boring and bad way and the gamified are more enjoying.

Discussion

Data collected from both questionnaire and interviews indicated that games platforms are an essential part in learners' lives. All the findings confirmed the significant effect of gamification on EFL students' acquisition. Games can be integrated into the EFL classroom to uplift the mood and increase students' interest by making learning fun. Unlike tradition teaching methods which depend on textbooks and memorization, gamification breaks the boring, old-fashioned approach through adding game elements like points, rewards, and badges to traditional learning. The students are at an age when they are active and eager to learn. This is why, more relaxed and warmer atmosphere paves the learners to be more motivated and engaged. The students tend to employ various game applications. The mostly used ones are: *Kahoot* and *Duolingo* since repetition drills enhance profoundly word retention and improve their competence and significantly aid them in acquiring English. Therefore, it can be noticed that gamification is able to highly boost learners' vocabulary, listening as well as speaking skills since the repeated exposure to vocabulary and grammar in context encourages communication, and helps at building confidence through challenges, rewards, and real-time interaction.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study focused on exploring to what extent gamified learning can heighten students' English language acquisition in comparison to traditional instruction as well as uncovering which language skills can be best enhanced through gamification. The study proved that gamification is a powerful strategy to facilitate English language acquisition among first year LMD students. The main findings revealed that the most effective application games used were 'Kahoot' and 'Duolingo'. *Kahoot* enhances basically the listening skills and vocabulary acquisition; whereas, *Duolingo* boosts vocabulary and speaking skills. Gamification; indeed, heighten students' level acquisition of the English language. It encourages active participation in the classroom; conceiving a vary interactive and funny classes where the students feel more comfortable, motivated and enthusiastic. Gamification offers tailored experiences that foster language skills acquisition and boost students' confidence. Thus, it would be better to combine traditional instruction with modern digital tools and mobile applications in order to create a flexible, smooth, and enjoyable environment where learners could feel more engaged and motivated particularly through games elements such as: points and badges, leading to a more active interactional classrooms and tremendous instantaneous acquisition of the English language.

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