



CHAPTER 4

GAMIFICATION FOR ENGLISH TEACHING IN ONLINE SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT: Traditional teaching methods in Mexican classrooms have long provided structure but often limit student engagement and creativity. Recently, gamification has emerged as a promising strategy to enhance motivation, attention, and language skills throughout entire courses rather than isolated activities. This study focuses on improving speaking fluency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through gamification in virtual classrooms. However, improper implementation may cause student disengagement, compounded by limited teacher training in Mexico. Therefore, this research aims to develop effective gamification strategies tailored for EFL virtual education in Mexico, considering current educational challenges and the potential of gamification to transform learning experiences.

KEYWORDS: Traditional teaching, gamification, student engagement, motivation, EFL.

RESUMEN: Los métodos tradicionales de enseñanza en las aulas mexicanas han proporcionado durante mucho tiempo estructura, pero a menudo limitan la participación y creatividad de los estudiantes. Recientemente, la gamificación ha emergido como una estrategia prometedora para mejorar la motivación, la atención y las habilidades lingüísticas a lo largo de cursos completos en lugar de actividades aisladas. Este estudio se centra en mejorar la fluidez al hablar en inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) mediante la gamificación en aulas virtuales. Sin embargo, una

implementación inadecuada puede causar desinterés en los estudiantes, agravado por la limitada formación de los docentes en México. Por lo tanto, esta investigación tiene como objetivo desarrollar estrategias efectivas de gamificación adaptadas a la educación virtual de EFL en México, considerando los desafíos educativos actuales y el potencial de la gamificación para transformar las experiencias de aprendizaje.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Enseñanza tradicional, gamificación, participación estudiantil, motivación, EFL.

SETTING OF THE PROBLEM

The application of traditional teaching methods within classrooms in Mexico has been a key pillar to shape modern education. This method offers a clear structure and objectives that allows students to understand easily. However, nowadays, “may be inflexible and resistant to change, making it challenging to adapt to evolving educational trends, technological advancements, and diverse student populations” (NET, 2024). Moreover, it often relies on teacher-centered approaches which can limit students’ engagement and creativity, leading at the same time to a passive learning. Therefore, with the purpose of refining teaching methods, multiple strategies have come up in recent years, between those ‘gamification’.

This approach concentrates on game mechanics, and it is not limited to use it one activity but rather throughout the whole course. Additionally, according to Huseinović (as cited in Aldama-Juárez et al. 2024) “it motivates and involves students, increases their attention, and positively influences their behavior, thereby improving their language skills.” This will be our focus of improvement during the research, speaking skills, specifically, fluency abilities. Nevertheless, according to Peñalva et al. (2019), a wrong implementation of gamification could cause students to feel disconnected from the class. Considering that, “in Mexico, to become an English teacher, there are no strong regulations yet” (Millán Librado & Basurto Santos, 2020, p. 130), then it is possible that professors are not familiar with this new concept. For this reason, we are looking forward to providing the best manners to apply gamification within EFL virtual classrooms in Mexico.

CONTEXT

This research is carried out in Universidad de Guadalajara (UDG), which is one of the largest public universities in Mexico with 332.903 students (Numeralia UdG, 2024A). UDG has 17 university centers to offer Bachelor degree programs, Master programs and PhD programs. It also offers classes at a high school level. One of the centers is called Centro Universitario de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (CUCSH). This center has 10,406 students (Numeralia UdG, 2024A). The B.A. in English Language

Teaching as a Foreign Language (LIDILE in Spanish) is part of such center. 147 students are enrolled in the program learning how to teach (Numeralia UdG, 2024A). They are asked to get into groups of 4 people (micro-teaching groups) to teach basic English classes in 6 levels. Each microteaching group plans and performs class from 7 to 8 am or from 8 to 9 am Monday through Thursday. LIDILE students are exposed to a teaching program called Programa Abierto de Lenguas (PAL) during four semesters (third, fourth, fifth and sixth semesters in LIDILE). The last two semesters of the BA, they coordinate PAL by managing all the students; observing the micro-teaching groups and providing academic feedback. Teachers from LIDILE are also involved as observers to evaluate micro-teaching groups. Currently, 17 groups were formed in 2025(A). 7 groups of level 1, 2 groups of level 2, 3 groups of level 3, 3 groups of level 4, 2 groups of level 5, 2 groups of level 6. This research will be carried out in an online setting of level 6. Such group has four students, with an age range from 30 to 60.

JUSTIFICATION

In recent years, gamification has gained significant attention in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching due to its potential to enhance student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. As online education continues to expand, identifying effective strategies to improve speaking skills in virtual classrooms has become crucial. This research explores the effectiveness of the new trend 'gamification' in improving fluency among advanced EFL students in online settings. It addresses a key challenge in language learning: maintaining active participation and meaningful communication in digital environments.

This study is justified by the increasing reliance on online learning platforms, where students often struggle with confidence and fluency in speaking. Investigating how gamification can enhance speaking skills, specifically fluency, will benefit to the development of innovative teaching strategies that foster more interactive online learning experiences. Additionally, understanding the role of gamification in online EFL classrooms can provide valuable insights into its application by educators, ensuring that gamified activities are implemented effectively to achieve a positive impact on student learning. By identifying the most effective techniques and refining their use, this study aims to offer practical recommendations for teachers, institutions, and curriculum designers seeking to improve language proficiency through engaging and student-centered methodologies.

STATE OF ARTS

In recent years, the amount of people enrolling in virtual courses has increased, and with that English language teachers are seeking strategies to maintain motivation among their groups. Therefore, this research is expected to contribute relevant

information to the field, based on previous studies that have had similar objectives and studied the principle concepts of this paper. In addition to incorporating the best strategies for the proper use of gamification with the aim of strengthening speaking skills.

In 2023, Richard Woodman and Arduino Alexander Mangoni explored the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) into modern healthcare systems. The authors applied these methodologies to assess the predictive accuracy of ML in clinical decision-making. They **come to the conclusion** that while AI offers promising advancements in personalized healthcare and remote patient monitoring, challenges such as ethical considerations, data governance, and clinician and patient confidence must be addressed for successful implementation.

Researchers Kevin Mario Laura-De La Cruz, et al., (2023) published a study titled *Use of Gamification in English Learning in Higher Education: A Systematic Review* in the *Journal of Technology and Science Education*. This study analyzed 18 articles published between 2014 and March 2021 to assess the impact of digital gamification on English learning in higher education settings. The results indicated that gamification enhances the educational experience of university students learning English as a foreign language by fostering qualities such as motivation, enjoyment, and active participation. Additionally, the study found that learning objectives associated with gamification included linguistic content acquisition, increased engagement, and student satisfaction. The study ended with recommendations for designing digital gamification strategies in English learning, considering students' perspectives and academic achievements.

Ahmadpour et al. (2022) studied the impact of gaming techniques on students' oral abilities in EFL online classes using Action Research (AR). AR systematically examines social situations to address problems and enhance outcomes. The study involved intermediate students in two phases: identifying the problem and evaluating gaming techniques' effectiveness. The sentence-expanding game was the primary activity, and a final speaking task assessed progress. Results showed improvements in student engagement and speaking performance.

Researchers Eric Ndayishimiye, et al. (2024) conducted a study in five selected high schools in Kicukiro District, Rwanda, to investigate the effect of gamification on learners' English-speaking skills (Ndayishimiye et al., 2024). The research employed a mixed-method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative data collected from 336 participants out of a target population of 2,100 students. The study applied the Theory of Gamified Learning (Landers, 2014) and used a t-test to analyze the data. Additionally, guided interviews, the Gameful Experience Questionnaire (GAMEFULQUEST), and classroom observations were conducted. Results showed a significant improvement in students' English-speaking performance, with post-

test scores increasing by an average of 38.96 points compared to pre-test scores. The study concluded that gamification effectively enhances students' motivation and engagement, making learning more enjoyable. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended that the Rwandan Ministry of Education and the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) invest in gamified learning platforms and implement extensive teacher training programs to promote effective gamification in classrooms (Ndayishimiye et al., 2024).

Finally, researchers Aida Nurutdinova, et al. presented a study at the 2021 World Engineering Education Forum/Global Engineering Deans Council (WEEF/GEDC) conference, focusing on the use of gamification to enhance students' speech skills and proficiency. The study aimed to develop a methodology incorporating game design elements into language learning to improve vocabulary and grammar skills among students in non-language faculties. The researchers highlighted the importance of modernizing foreign language teaching methods in Russia, noting that traditional approaches often lead to decreased motivation and outdated practices. By integrating gamification, they sought to create engaging, practice-oriented activities utilizing digital technologies to foster better communication skills. The study revealed that applying gamification techniques can effectively enhance the quality and effectiveness of the educational process in language learning.

Some studies have been conducted on the impact of using gamification in English language teaching and learning for digital education. The great majority stands for the enriching advantages that this approach has brought to virtual classrooms and how it has been an essential tool for online classes. However, few researchers have explored the influence of this approach on the improvement of fluency abilities. Which leaves us with the task of providing more information on the matter to contribute to this specific field of education.

HYPOTHESIS

If gamification techniques and rules are used in advanced EFL classrooms in at least one activity during 2 classes, speaking abilities will be increased.

OBJECTIVES

General objective:

To determine how gamification can increase speaking abilities, specifically fluency, in advanced level students.

Specific objectives:

1. To understand the concept and the importance of the use of gamification.
2. To analyze the different procedures teachers, use to apply gamification.
3. To compare the effectiveness of the appropriate use of gamification in EFL classrooms.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is gamification in EFL? (ELT)

How can gamification be applied effectively in ELT to improve speaking?

What type of games can foster speaking at an Intermediate level of English learning?

WORDS OF THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study explores the impact of gamification on speaking skills in online settings. This approach has been defined by Gillis & Barney (2025) as a strategy that integrates entertaining and immersive gaming elements into nongame contexts to enhance engagement and motivate certain behaviors. In the context of education, this refers to a learning method that applies gaming elements in educational environments. In the article *What is gamification? 10 ways to use this technique in your classroom* by Torres, M. (2022), she suggests that gamification is not only a creative way to approach the design process of class material, but also a strategy to help students develop different competences such as self-management. Its effectiveness can be better understood by analyzing key concepts, such as fluency, engagement, motivation, which will allow instructors to acquire deeper insights into the impact of this approach.

The four macro language skills are fundamental for a successful communication and language acquisition in English Language Teaching (ELT). The first two are known as the receptive skills, 'listening' which "is a communication strategy that calls for the receiver to comprehend, interpret, and assess what is being said" (Moyo, Intja, & Frugintta, 2023). Moreover, 'reading' "is described as having the capacity to understand what is written down and properly interpret it" (Moyo, Intja, & Frugintta, 2023). On the other hand, 'speaking' and 'writing' are referred to as productive skills. The first one occurs when one communicates orally and the second is the action of conveying ideas through paper.

As Chin Yew KIEU explains "The term "foreign language" refers to a language that is non-native to the community of the person who is learning it or that is only used by a small group of people (usually migrants.).". On the other hand, the Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "English as taught to people whose main language is not English and who live in a country where English is not the official or main language".

According to the British council, speaking fluency refers to the flow and efficiency with which a speaker is able to produce coherent and meaningful utterances without having many pauses or hesitation. But, how can we assess our level of fluency? Well, the ICLS has a really interesting suggestion for this; for it, you have to ask yourself some simple questions. The first one is: Do you translate backwards and forwards in your head? If a person has the need to keep translating everything, they most certainly are not fluent in the target language. Another question suggested is, asking oneself how quickly does one speak and catch on what others are saying. Speed of reaction is very important to determine a person's fluency in the target language.

As Cery Jones published in *World of Better English* in Cambridge, fluency is seen as "In day-to-day speech we equate it with being able to communicate comfortably and easily in another language". Also, the British Council defines it as "Fluency in a language means speaking easily, reasonably quickly and without having to stop and pause a lot."

In the book *Digital Games and Gamification in Education* state that digital gamification "Uses game design and mechanics to improve instructional content. Increasing student engagement and learning effectiveness. Gamification in online teaching offers powerful tools to increase student engagement, make learning more fun, and achieve more effective learning outcomes". Si Na says that "is an educational method that incorporates game-like elements into the classroom to increase student engagement, promotes a learning environment with positive motivation, and benefits student performance."

The University of Minnesota defines active learning as any approach to instruction in which all students are asked to engage in the learning process. Meaning that, as long as the students are given the opportunity to participate and engage in their own learning, it is safe to say that the active learning approach is being used. There is a great variety of strategies to be applied in a learning environment which could be considered as active learning. Cambridge gives us a deeper look into the story of this approach, which comes from the constructivism theory. Said theory emphasises the fact that learners construct or build their own understanding, which helps students to become 'lifelong learners' due to the fact that it makes them autonomous in their learning process. This means that students that were in an active learning environment during their school years usually are better at continuing learning once they have left school.

The document 'STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE' defines engagement as the level of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion shown by students when they are learning or being taught, which can develop into the level of motivation that they must learn and progress in learning."

The Glossary of Education describes it as “refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education.”

In the article, The effects of motivation in Education mention motivation as “Powering people to achieve high levels of performance and overcoming barriers in order to change”. Motivation is the driver of guidance, control, and persistence in human behavior.”. Adding to that Incompassing Education defines motivation as “in education is the driving force behind a student’s desire to learn and grow. It is the intrinsic desire to do well and achieve success in the classroom. Motivation in education can come from a student’s own internal desire to learn and grow or it can come from external factors such as rewards, recognition, and encouragement from teachers and peers.”.

Cambridge says that online learning resources are “Cleverly designed digital resources can encourage participation. They can also open up communication between teacher and student. In turn, this can boost learner autonomy and motivation.” The British Council defines online learning resources as “things that teachers can access to help them do some aspect of their job better as part of the professional development process (either pre-service or in-service). This is important because the quality of teachers has been highlighted as the most important factor in determining the effectiveness of a school system”.

METHODOLOGY (EXPERIMENTAL)

This research will employ a mixed-methods approach to assess the effectiveness of gamification in improving speaking abilities among intermediate EFL students in online settings. The study will consist of two main phases: data collection through surveys and the implementation of gamified activities in a controlled setting.

1. Data Collection

Surveys for Teachers: A set of polls will be administered to EFL teachers who conduct online lessons to identify the gamification techniques they commonly use and their perceived effectiveness in enhancing students’ speaking abilities.

Selection of Techniques: Based on the survey results, the most frequently used and effective gamification techniques will be selected and refined for further application.

2. Implementation of Gamification in Online Classes

Participants: 3 Intermediate-level EFL students in an online learning environment.

Procedure: A selected group of students will participate in two Programa Abierto de Lenguas (PAL) sessions, where at least one gamified activity per session will be implemented.

Activities will be designed using the best-performing gamification techniques identified in the survey phase. These activities will focus on encouraging spontaneous speech, improving fluency, and increasing student engagement.

3. The evaluation of effectiveness will involve pre- and post-activity assessments to measure students' speaking improvements after the four PAL sessions accompanied with a rubric to grade the performance of the students during these tests. One key assessment will be a Picture Description task, where students describe an image in detail, focusing on vocabulary use, fluency, and grammatical accuracy. This task will be applied twice—once as a pre-test and again as a post-test—to track progress. Additionally, student feedback will be collected through surveys or short interviews to gauge their perceptions of the gamified activities and their impact on speaking skills. Finally, a comparison of results based on the final scores of the rubrics will determine which gamification techniques are most effective in enhancing students' speaking abilities. This approach ensures a combination of qualitative and quantitative insights into the role of gamification in online advanced EFL classrooms.

RESULTS

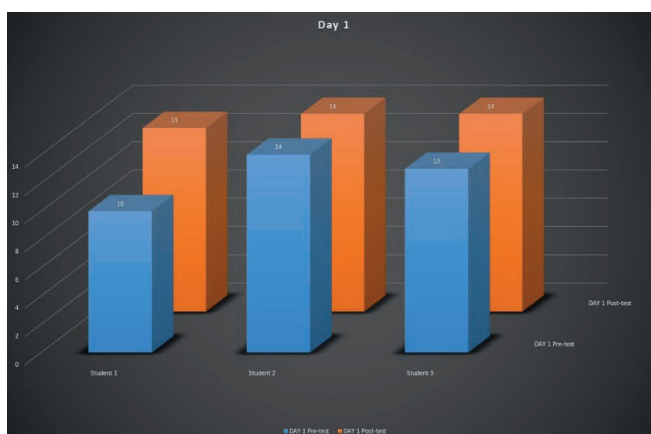
In order to evaluate the improvements, a rubric was designed to measure the changes on fluency before and after using gamification with the purpose of proving its effectiveness. It was designed based on established academic standards for fluency and adapted to specific context and proficiency level of the students involved. The rubric served not only to quantify performance during pre- and post-tests, but also to support qualitative observations of fluency development over time.

The rubric consisted of four key criteria:

1. Speech rate which focuses on the number of words said per minute, "it refers to the speed at which a person speaks." (Fiveable, 2024) It plays a crucial role in how messages are perceived because changes in how quickly someone speaks can affect how well the listener understands them; speaking too quickly might cause confusion, while speaking too slowly can make the listener lose interest.

2. Pauses and hesitation, these involved temporary interruptions in speech or action. However, they may differ in their implications, pauses can be natural breaks when speaking to produce emphasis or to allow the listener to process the information, while hesitations are a sign of nervousness, uncertainty, or difficulty in finding the correct word.
3. Self-correction and repetition, the first one is a process of recognizing mistakes or irregularities and making improvements without help from somebody else. It involves the step of recognizing what needs to get better and then acting to modify the situation. On the other hand, the second one, as its name says it, is about repeating the same word or phrase over and over again. Although sometimes may be used to gain time while thinking, an overuse might cause misunderstandings.
4. Coherence and connected speech, the first one focuses on the logical structure and organization of ideas, allowing the listener to follow the speaker's message and reasoning. Then, connected speech refers to how the speaker links words phonologically, it has to do with pronunciation and sound patterns, such as liaison or assimilation.

Each criterion was rated on a 4-point scale, where 4 means the speaker is fluent, 3 they are mostly fluent, 2 indicates some fluency issues and 1 implies a very limited fluency. The rubric was used for each pre-test and post-test of the two classes that were part of this research, grading each student individually. The fluency scores were then used to carry out a qualitative comparison with the help of graphics and percentages.



Graphic 1.

Student 1:

First score: 62.5%

Second score: 81.25%

Student 2:

First score: 87.5%

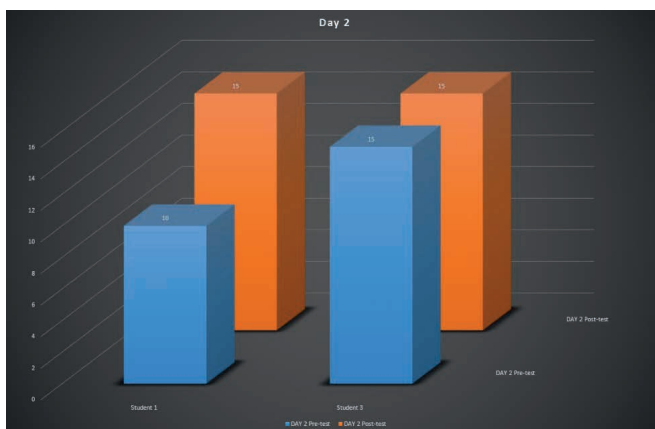
Second score: 87.5%

Student 3:

First score: 81.25%

Second score: 87.5%

As Graphic 1 shows, there was not a striking difference between the pre and post-test results of 2 out of the 3 students. Speaking about the students with little to no improvements, only one of them, student 3, showed a 6.25% increase in fluency; while student 2 stayed at the same level. However, the third student, who was the one with the most fluency issues, showed great progress scoring 18.75% higher after the treatment. Said increase in fluency led to a more balanced level among the 3 students compared to their performance before the treatment.



Graphic 2.

Student 1:

First score: 62.5%

Second score: 93.75%

Student 2:

First score: 93.75%

Second score: 93.75%

As we can see, there is a notable difference between the fluency of the first day and the second. Student number one, who presented more fluency problems, showed a 31.25% improvement. Even when the students with more proficiency in fluency did not show a big improvement, we noticed an increase in their engagement and talking time.

The results of the data analysis demonstrated that the students have improved their fluency in speaking after taking the classes using gamification. Moreover, their level of participation and speaking time significantly increased.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, traditional teaching methods are still the most common in Mexican classrooms, but they often limit students' and teachers' creativity and participation. To improve education, teachers need to try new tools and methods. Gamification is a good option because it uses games to make students more interested and active in class. In this research, we used gamification to help students improve their speaking skills. However, we believe it can also help with other skills if it is used correctly. After giving a pre-test, teaching two classes with gamification, and a post-test, the results showed the improvement we were expecting. Using gamification, students achieved a significant difference in their speaking fluency, coherence, and self-correction. Moreover, we noticed a change in our students' behavior, motivation, and engagement towards the class and activities presented.

These findings suggest that gamification can be a valuable resource in EFL classrooms in Mexico, especially when aiming to increase participation, speaking confidence, and engagement among the students. With proper planning and teacher preparation, this method could be expanded to support long-term improvements in language learning, while innovating in the classroom. Further research could explore its effects on writing, listening, and reading skills, as well as its impact over longer periods.

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