



**Enhancing English Language Competence in EFL Learners through Gamification
Strategies**

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AFFIDAVIT

I, Julián Mateo Londoño Mazo, hereby declare that this master's thesis has not been previously presented as a degree requirement, either in the same style or with variations, in this or any other university (Article 92 Advanced Education Student Code, Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julian Londoño". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Julián Mateo Londoño Mazo

Acceptance note

Signature of the Jury

Signature of the Jury

City and date (day, month, year)

To my Mom and Godmother

Once again, thank you for your unwavering love and guidance in every step of my life.

Love you both deeply.

Abstract

This research explores the impact of gamification strategies on enhancing English language competence among EFL learners. Traditional teaching methods often struggle to maintain student engagement and foster effective language acquisition. This study explores whether integrating gamification elements into the educational framework can offer a viable solution. The research involved implementing game mechanics such as challenges, rewards and interactive activities in a fourth-grade classroom, followed by an analysis of student engagement, motivation, and language skill improvement.

The findings indicate that gamification significantly boosts student engagement, with a majority of students reporting increased interest and enjoyment in their English lessons. The study also reveals that gamification simplifies complex language concepts, making them more accessible and understandable. Additionally, students demonstrated improved vocabulary acquisition, grammatical understanding, and writing skills, driven by the interactive and rewarding nature of gamified activities. Qualitative feedback highlights the importance of a compelling narrative and enthusiastic delivery by the teacher in maintaining students' interest. Positive emotional responses, such as happiness and excitement, were prevalent, indicating that gamification creates a supportive and stimulating learning environment.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study acknowledges limitations, including its short duration and specific educational setting. Future research should consider long-term studies across diverse contexts to validate these findings further. The pedagogical implications suggest that educators can enhance their teaching practices by incorporating gamification, leading to more dynamic and effective language experiences. This research underscores the transformative potential of gamification in education, offering practical applications for improving student engagement and language competence in EFL settings.

Keywords: Gamification, EFL, Language competence, Student Engagement, Educational Strategies.

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Introduction

In recent years, learning and teaching methods for foreign languages have witnessed a paradigm shift from conventional pedagogical methods towards more interactive and innovative approaches (Fang & Ren 2018; Galloway & Rose 2018). Colombia has faced evolving challenges in its language education, Trujillo (2022) emphasizes the necessity of a thorough analysis and understanding of English language teaching and learning. These improvements should aim for greater precision and adopt a more humanistic and linguistic approach that directly responds to the actual needs of students. The significance of English as a foreign language in Colombia has seen marked increase over recent decades. This trend has been supported since the General Law of Education in 1994 followed by National Bilingualism Plan (2004-2019), the Bilingualism Law in 2013, and National English Program (2015-2025), with subsequent governmental efforts to bolster English Language Education (Gómez, 2017; González, 2010; Mora et al., 2019; Usma, 2009 as cited in Bastidas, 2022). The concept of gamification has gained recognition for its ability to make learning more engaging and effective (Briceño, 2022; Figueroa, 2015; Gee, 2003, 2008; Mora, 2016; Mora et al., 2020).

Studies in the Colombian context have analyzed, how students engage with languages during a gamification gameplay (Corredor and Gaydos, 2014), as well as the potential for gamification in English Language Teaching (ELT) and Teaching English to speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Vargas-Macías et al., 2020).

Liu et al. (2021), affirm that video games offer opportunities for foreign language outputs, for that reason, EFL should use the video game characteristics to improve the process and the result when the main aim is to learn. Corredor and Gaydos (2014); Deterding et al. (2011) and Figueroa (2015), add that this is due to the interaction and social support given by the game itself where players are immersed and exposed to another language and they feel the necessity which becomes in an opportunity to use the point language in the interaction with other players, in addition, sounds, images, and actions to which they may be exposed, may contribute to increasing the experience.

Although the use of gamification in the classroom could be a good and innovative method to improve the learning process (Mora et al., 2020), it is crucial not to leave aside the teacher's role, during this academic process, because behind games and enjoyment, there is an academic process to provide the students the aims of each game as well the strategies, and tools to thus open the way

for students to enjoy the process and learn while they are playing in the same time while they are learning. Another part of this investigation process would be to identify how motivation, engagement, and enjoyment would help the English learning process as a foreign language, recognizing the gamification into this language learning process as an engaging, academic way to teach and learn English.

Educators may face difficulties in adopting gamification strategies due to a lack of familiarity with gaming methodologies or the technical aspects of implementing it in their practice. However, through dedicated research and technological support, teachers can overcome these difficulties, creating enriched learning environments that leverage the pedagogical power of gamification (Bai et al., 2012; Eltahir et al., 2021; Li, 2021; Talan et al., 2020 as cited in Demirbilek et al., 2022).

Through a combination of empirical evidence and theoretical analysis, this study will contribute to the broader understanding of gamification's role in language education and offer recommendations for its practical application in teaching EFL. Moreover, proposes that the strategic application of gamification in EFL teaching can redefine the traditional language learning landscape. By applying the inherent motivational and immersive qualities of games, educators can offer students a unique and effective pathway to language acquisition, marked by enhanced engagement, communicative competence and a deeper understanding of language in context.

Chapter 1

1. Problem formulation and general objective

In the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, traditional teaching methods often face challenges in maintaining student engagement and fostering effective language acquisition. Gamification, the application of game-design elements in non-game contexts, presents a potential solution to these challenges. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific impact of gamification strategies on language competence among EFL learners. Addressing this gap in research is crucial for developing more effective and engaging teaching methodologies.

1.1. Research question

How may gamification strategies enhance the English Language Competence in a group of fourth-grade EFL learners?

1.2. Objectives

1.2.1. General objective

The main objective of this study is to explore the impact of implementing gamification in enhancing language competence in a group of fourth-grade students of English as a Foreign Language.

1.2.2. Specific objectives

- To assess the impact of gamification on the development of Language competence among fourth-grade EFL learners.
- To analyze the effectiveness of the gamification narrative in enhancing student engagement and understanding in English language learning sessions.
- To evaluate the level of engagement among fourth-grade EFL learners before and after the implementation of gamification strategies in the classroom.

Chapter 2

2. Literature review

2.1. Investigative background

In recent years, the intersection between gamification and foreign language learning and teaching has emerged as a captivating area of study, drawing attention from researchers and educators alike. Various studies have delved into the potential of incorporating game elements and mechanics into language environments, aiming to enhance engagement, motivation, and ultimately, proficiency in acquiring a second language. These investigations span diverse methodologies, exploring the impact of gamified approaches on different age groups, proficiency levels, and learning contexts. Researches has been interested in the effect of gamification on cognitive process, linguistic development, and learner motivation, seeking to uncover how game-based strategies can effectively complement traditional language teaching methods.

About, Hashim et al. (2019), conducted a study focused on Improving ESL Learners' Grammar with Gamified-Learning, aim the effectiveness of using gamification to improve English Second Language learners' grammar. This study underscores the complex challenges associated with vocabulary acquisition in a foreign language. Traditionally viewed as a daunting and time-consuming task, vocabulary learning through traditional methods can often disengage students, leading to ineffective learning outcomes. However, the introduction of gamification has been shown to alter this landscape dramatically. By embedding educational context within a game-based framework, learners experience an immersed environment where learning objectives are intertwined with gameplay, leading to increased motivation and enjoyment. Yunus, affirms that Gamification not only makes the learning process more enjoyable but also enhances retention rates and linguistic confidence. The study demonstrated that such an approach leads to a noticeable improvement in grammar and vocabulary. Primarily due to the heightened interest and participation of the learners.

Another study by Barros-Lorenzo (2016), about gamification in the Foreign Language Classroom: Spanish as a Foreign Language, explains and shows the results of a study in Portugal that applied Gamification in Spanish as a Foreign Language Context. His findings are particularly insightful, highlighting that gamification not only simplifies the learning of difficult grammatical structures and vocabulary but also actively engages students in the learning process. Lorenzo noted

that gamification fosters a positive learning environment, where students are more inclined to participate, communicate, and collaborate with peers, thereby building a sense of community and self-identity linked to their language proficiency.

Azzouz and Gutiérrez-Colón (2020), explored the broader effects of Gamification on students' motivation and learning achievement in Foreign Language Acquisition within higher education. The purpose of research was to study the effects that gamification may have on students when learning a second language, especially in students' motivation and learning. The results were predominantly positive, the majority of the students confirmed and demonstrated clear learning outcomes. However, this study analyzed the different research done about gamification and they discovered that approximately 70% is quantitative research. It criticized the quantitative results and it is suggested to increase qualitative research in the field to capture the nuanced experiences and perceptions of learning engaged with gamified learning.

For its part, Figueroa (2015), delved into using Gamification to Enhance Second Language Learning. The author claims that the main objective of gamification is to increase participation and motivate students and teachers in language contexts to use game elements such as points, leaderboards and immediate feedback. He emphasized that the true essence of gamification goes beyond mere point-scoring and leaderboards. Effective gamification requires a deep integration of game mechanics that are pedagogically sound and aligned with language learning objectives. Moreover, if this continues the teacher will be able to create a more attractive learning experience environment for students. Figueroa (2015) discusses some confusions and constant questions that teachers have when exploring the gamification contexts, for example, the use of technology to apply gamification, he affirms that is not necessary to use technology to have a very good gamified environment but having the correct elements and use it properly. Finally, he shared some perspectives that teachers may take into account when planning a class seeking student benefits: behavioristic learning, self-determination, interests and emotions.

On the other hand, Garland (2015), studied the implications of gamification for Second Language Education, Christopher meta-analysis pointed out that while gamification has potential, its applications need to be thoughtfully considered. The results suggest that feedback is extremely important when applying gamification because correcting mistakes quickly, avoid the learners get frustrated by a lack of progress. Moreover, the author highlights that gamification is not only adding leaderboards and badges to an existing course because it is not necessarily an effective

method but it can cause a contradictory effect, however, when a student gets constant motivation while giving immediate feedback and helping them in the process could be more effective.

Building on the structural aspects of gamification, Sailer and Homner (2019), Argued that gamification is not replacing instruction but improving it, to achieve this, the whole gamification process should generate changes in students' behaviors and attitudes in order to improve learning. This theory said that gamification works correctly because it causes positive effects on cognitive and motivational outcomes. Finally, the researchers suggest that the creation of gamification environments allows learners to work collaboratively by working together in teams while competing with other teams this will improve markedly the students' performance and skills.

Shatz (2015), in the article *"Using Gamification and Gaming in Order to Promote Risk Taking in the Language Learning Process"*, emphasizes the gamification concept in relation with "freedom to fail" and how this concept encourages the learners to feel comfortable to take risks, understanding risks as the participation processes in which students are exposed to a language and they are able to produce something regardless the mistakes they can have. This can be viewed as favorable according to modern pedagogy. Shatz (2015) suggested that video games with and without educational purposes are an important instrument to generate learning and promote risk-taking in players, especially in language learners where they are exposed to communication environments in which they may use the four communicative competencies: listening, reading, speaking and writing.

Lastly, Molina-García et al. (2021), carried out a study of Gamification as a didactic strategy for learning the English language. They outlined the definition of gamification as a didactical strategy and they highlight the necessity of language teachers to think and develop new strategies in the actual technological and globalized context. They used the Gamification theory defined by Werbach and Hunter (2012) in which three key theories are presented: 1 - Dynamics as restrictions, emotions, progress and relation with the game itself. 2 - Mechanics as challenges, competence, cooperation, feedback, resources and awards. 3 - The gamification components as avatars, collections, points, leaderboards and levels. Molina-García et al. (2021), affirm that these elements, when combined, offer a comprehensive framework for educators to enhance language teaching, ensuring that learners are not only engaged but also deeply invested in their language learning journey.

2.2. Conceptual framework

To continue with the development of this literature review, the following lines explain the conceptual references associated with the key aspects of the topic addressed in this thesis, that is, reference is made to gamification, gamification and language education, learning and gamification, communicative language competence and gamification and communicative language competence.

2.2.1. *Gamification*

Gamification a concept encompassing game mechanisms in non-game contexts, emerges as a tool for transformative learning. It is not merely about crafting a game but using game principles to facilitate learning and development, integrating player feedback into the process (Kapp, 2012). It is about using the intrinsic motivational elements present in games to drive engagement, participation, and ultimately, learning outcomes (Folmar, 2015; Vesa & Harviainen, 2019). This concept is rooted in the idea that traditional learning methods can be transformed into engaging experiences by drawing from the strategies that make games so captivating. Moreover, integrating game-like mechanics in a way that enhances the learning process, encouraging exploration, experimentation, and active-problem solving (Kapp, 2012).

In educational environments, the fundamental premise of gamification lies in reshaping the learning experience, it aims to create an atmosphere that is not only conducive to learning but also enjoyable and motivating. By incorporating elements such as challenges, rewards, and interactive feedback mechanisms, educators aim to inspire students to actively participate in their learning journey (Folmar, 2015; Gee, 2003, 2008). “Many variations of these definitions exist, but their focus remains the same: using game-like elements to make nongame tasks more interesting” (Landers et al., 2018 as cited in Vesa & Harviainen, 2019, p. 128). Gamification offers an avenue to foster a more engaging and positive learning environment by redirecting students’ focus towards more contrastive learning attitudes (Zepeda-Hernández et al., 2016).

According to Gallego et al. (2014), gamification extends beyond gaming elements; it incorporates various game-related strategies, dynamics, and mechanics to convey messages, alter behaviors, and deliver content in an enjoyable, motivational, and engaging manner. It is a method that allows educators to adapt to the evolving needs and interests of students. By tapping into elements that resonate with students, such as competition, collaboration, and achievement, gamification becomes a conduit for enhanced learning experiences.

Lastly, Werbach and Hunter (2012) in their book “*For the Win*”, outline the Game Element Pyramid, a framework designed to help understand the components of gamification and how they can be applied in non-game contexts, including business, education, and beyond. This pyramid serves as a guide for structuring game elements within gamified systems to maximize engagement, motivation and desired outcomes. The pyramid is divided into three main layers, each building upon the one below it, illustrating how different elements contribute to a comprehensive gamified experience. From the base to the top, these layers are: Dynamics, Mechanics, and Component.

- **Dynamics.** Dynamics are the big-picture aspects of a gamified system. They are foundational concepts that drive the underlying behaviors within the game but are not directly manipulated by the designer or players. Dynamics include elements like constraints, emotions, narrative, progression, and relationships. It helps to shape the overall experience in a way that is felt rather than explicitly recognized by users (Werbach & Hunter, 2012).

- **Mechanics.** Mechanics are the processes that drive the action forward and facilitate player engagement. They are rules and structures that govern the operation of the gamified system. Common mechanics include challenges, competition, cooperation, feedback, resource acquisition, rewards, transactions, and win states. Mechanics are tools that designers use to create the desired dynamics, influencing how players interact with the game and each other (Werbach & Hunter, 2012).

- **Components.** At the top of the pyramid are Components, which are the specific elements players interact with directly. These include achievements, avatars, badges, boos fights, collections, content unlocking, leaderboards, levels, points, quests, social graphs, teams, and virtual goods; they are the visible parts of the gamification design that players can see, touch, and use. They serve as the manifestations of the game’s mechanics and dynamics, providing immediate context and goals for the player (Werbach & Hunter, 2012).

2.2.2. *Gamification and language education*

Gamification, an innovative concept integrating mechanics into non-game contexts, has revolutionized education by transforming the learning experience (Folmar, 2015; Kapp, 2012; Mora, 2016; Vesa & Harviainen, 2019). Simultaneously, communicative language competence, encapsulating multifaceted abilities essential for effective communication, forms the foundation of language mastery (Council of Europe & Council for Cultural Co-operation, Education, 2001).

The intersection of these realms represents a pioneering approach to language education, where the integration of gamified elements promises to not only enhance linguistic skills but also deepen cultural understanding and practical language application.

As evidenced by recent literature, the infusion of gamification into language learning environments holds the potential to significantly impact engagement, motivation, and proficiency across diverse learner demographics and contexts, making a paradigm shift in traditional teaching methodologies (Corredor & Gaydos, 2014; Vargas-Macías et al., 2020).

2.2.3. Learning and Gamification

The transformative power of gamification lies in its ability to make learning a more personal and intimate experience. By adapting the educational context to an interactive gaming mechanism, educators can foster deeper connections between students and the material they are learning. This not only helps with retention but also cultivates a positive attitude towards learning itself (Zepeda-Hernández et al, 2016). Furthermore, the integration of gamification elements is not limited to the classroom, but extends to digital platforms, online learning environments, and various technological tools used for education. Through these means, gamification becomes a versatile approach that adapts to diverse learning styles and preferences (Contreras & Eguia, 2017).

Educational gamification also introduces external motivating factors into learning, while enhancing emotional performance through a creativity-based framework (Buckley & Doyle, 2016). Ultimately, it transforms learning into an engaging adventure rather than a mere obligation and is not solely about making learning fun but about creating meaningful and impactful experiences that resonate with students, making education a journey they voluntarily undertake and actively participate in. It is a catalyst for transforming the conventional paradigm of education into a dynamic and interactive process that inspires and motivates students.

Likewise, students' comprehensive learning is strengthened by gamification, to the extent that it enhances the acquisition and development of various crucial skills for their training process and preparation for real-life situations, such as problem-solving, collaboration, and communication (Mieles et al., 2024; Pozo et al., 2020). In addition to this, learning and gamification have a close relationship in the educational field, because the elements and mechanics of gamified game design contribute to the creation of learning environments that have the potential to create interactive, fun, competitive and engaging learning experiences that encourage students' exploration and

experimentation, as well as their active participation in the construction of their own knowledge and in their own learning and their motivation in applying said knowledge in a meaningful way, so that their learning process is not only collaborative, fun and communicative with their peers, but also achieves a deeper understanding of the curricular contents (Mieles et al., 2024).

In terms of learning English as a Second Language (ESL), gamification produces positive effects on the learning of vocabulary in this language, causing the process to move from a traditional methodology based on memorization and dictation of words to a method based on the use of multimedia tools and based on the game, becoming a predominant trend in the transformation of the cognitive structure of students and their language. Along with this, gamification also enhances concentration and perseverance in students' learning, as it increases their motivation, inspiration and awakens their imagination in learning vocabulary and grammar rules; which, in turn, improves positive interactions between teachers and students (Wen, 2023).

Even from the literature, it is identified that the integrated incorporation between gamified methods such as flipped classrooms and traditional language games such as word puzzles and word adventure games, among others; promote the acquisition and development of vocabulary and the learning of English as a second language (Wen, 2023). Especially, innovative and mixed learning practices that integrate gamification and flipped classrooms enhance the learning of a second language, such as English, through the increase in relationships and closeness between teachers and students, within the collaborative and cooperative learning activities derived from the integration between both educational methods, added to obtaining new perspectives to address problems from different points of view (Pozo et al., 2020).

2.2.4. *Communicative language competence*

Language competence is the key that unlocks the doors to effective communication. As defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe & Council for Cultural Co-operation, Education, 2001), language competences embody the skills that enable people to function and interact in the complex areas of linguistic expression. They form the basis on which communication, understanding and interaction are built, and provide learners with the tools necessary to navigate diverse linguistic landscapes (Basturkmen & Elder, 2004). Language competence also includes “not only linguistic knowledge, but also prior knowledge relevant to the communicative context in which learners need to operate” (Douglas, 2013, p. 371).

Communicative competence is the cornerstone of effective language use. Defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe & Council for Cultural Co-operation, Education, 2001), it encompasses the skills that enable an individual to function linguistically in a variety of contexts. This multifaceted competence is a fusion of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components. Each of these facets encapsulates knowledge and “skills and genres appropriate to the specific activities that learners need to carry out” (Johns, 2013 cited in Khany & Tarlani-Aliabadi, 2016, p. 72).

The concept of communicative competence, as advocated by Hymes in 1972, resonates significantly in Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP). In LSP pedagogy, the emphasis is on equipping language learners with the ability to communicate effectively in specific contexts, such as professional, academic or work settings. This approach recognizes that language learning goes beyond mere linguistic knowledge and requires a deeper understanding of contextual demands and prior knowledge relevant to specific communicative situations (Whyte, 2019).

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) delves into the demands that different academic or work environments place on communicative skills (Basturkmen & Elder, 2004). It underlines the importance of teaching language, skills, and genres relevant to the activities required of learners within an English-speaking context. The interconnection between LSP, ESP, and the notion of communicative competence highlights the importance of context and communicative goals. It underlines the need for language learners to not only possess linguistic competence, but also to understand and navigate the complexities of sociocultural norms and pragmatic language use within specific domains.

In addition to the above, communicative linguistic competence is a capacity that favors the participation of students in sociolinguistic discussions and conversations, specific sociocultural interactions and focuses mainly on the idea that a speaker and a listener apply knowledge of the language in real performance, which is a relevant aspect in language learning and teaching, because it is one of the main objectives in ELT (English Language Teaching) (Peláez-Sánchez & Velásquez-Durán, 2023).

In general terms, the acquisition of the set of skills related to communicative linguistic competence in learning and knowledge of the English language, allows students to reach each of the six levels of measurement of the English language proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), namely: A1 (beginning), A2 (elementary), B1

(intermediate), B2 (upper-intermediate), C1 (advanced), C2 (mastery). In addition to these levels of mastery, it is proposed that communicative linguistic competence of the English language is achieved through the internalization of various knowledge, from memorizing phrases to formulate thoughts accurately, emphasize, differentiate and eliminate ambiguities (general range) to the ability to copy, spell and use the design and punctuation in this language (spelling control), through the articulation of thoughts with grammatical forms (grammatical precision) and the decoding of the speaker's messages, including the control of sounds, prosodic characteristics, etc. (phonological control), among other abilities (Kurakan et al., 2020).

In essence, communicative competence is an amalgam of linguistic mastery, pragmatic finesse, and sociocultural assets indispensable for effective communication in diverse contexts and purposes, a capacity that also reveals considerable challenges for its acquisition, development, and strengthening in students, related to learning methods, curriculum design, learning environment, or factors associated with the students themselves (Wen, 2023).

2.2.5. Gamification and Communicative Language competence

According to Kamariddinovna's (2024) contributions, communicative competence in language refers to a group of knowledge and skills that not only covers the grammatical aspects of the language, but also its social, pragmatic and contextual dimensions. In the learning and teaching of a foreign language, this competence should be interpreted as the ability to engage in interpersonal and intercultural communication in the target language with native speakers, respecting established standards; taking into account that its essential purpose is to provide students with the knowledge, skills and capacities necessary to adopt the ethnocultural norms of the language's country of origin and to effectively use the foreign language in situations that involve intercultural understanding and realization.

For the acquisition and development of communicative competence in language, Kamariddinovna (2024), states that it is relevant that the educational strategies and processes in this regard integrate the formation of the following essential skills: Reading and understanding simple and authentic texts; speaking briefly about oneself and the environment, expressing opinions and giving assessments; verbal communication in common situations and the ability to write and transmit basic information.

Communicative competence in a foreign language represents a specific level of mastery of linguistic, oral and sociocultural knowledge, skills and abilities, which allows students to adapt their verbal behavior depending on the communicative situation, including everyday, educational, scientific, business, political and socio-political contexts (Kamariddinovna, 2024).

Now, from theory and specialized literature, it has been found that current educational communities have a wide and diversified catalog of technological tools, methodologies and resources that are used by teachers and students to promote motivation and enhance the learning of the language as a second language, among which is gamification.

In this regard, research by Han (2015) and Leaning (2015), provides empirical support for the application of gamification in language learning contexts. Han's (2015) study on the use of gamification in an art course revealed increased student motivation and engagement. Leaning's (2015) research on media theory showed increased interest among students, even if no direct improvement in grades was evident. These contributions offered valuable insights into how gamification can be employed to create more engaging and motivating learning environments. This is particularly relevant in the context of foreign language acquisition, where maintaining student motivation and interest can significantly impact learning outcomes.

From this perspective, Wen (2023), explains that gamification strategies and activities that promote reading in English accelerate the development of communicative competence in the language, because it activates reading comprehension, this being an essential competence, both to enhance the learning of the English language as a second language, but also to improve the academic performance, in general, of students and to face the new educational challenges that they experience in their daily lives and as they advance with their educational process. Without a doubt, gamification has become one of the innovative pedagogical approaches that teachers constantly seek, because traditional methods do not seem to be as attractive as before and students often find them boring or ineffective.

Su and Cheng (2014) demonstrated the flexibility and effectiveness of gamification in a science classroom, highlighting that the benefits of gamification are not limited to short-term interventions, but can also be integrated into longer courses to maintain motivation and engagement. Their work suggests that gamification can be adapted to various instructional lengths, making it a versatile tool in language teaching.

The application of gamification principles in educational settings extends beyond traditional subject areas and into the realm of language proficiency. Just as gamification enhances learning experiences in various fields, its integration into language teaching presents an innovative approach to bolstering language proficiency. By utilizing game-like mechanisms, interactive feedback, and immersive experiences in an English classroom, educators can cultivate a more engaging and effective environment for English acquisition and mastery. Incorporating gamified elements holds promise for fostering not only language skills, but also deeper cultural understanding and practical application of languages, offering a dynamic path to elevating language proficiency (Pozo et al., 2020).

Chapter 3

3. Methodology

3.1. Research paradigm

The research employed in this thesis is rooted in a qualitative paradigm. The choice of qualitative research is based on its ability to uncover the underlying motives, opinions and motivations that guide human behavior and decision-making processes (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Qualitative research is particularly effective for exploring trends in thought and opinion, providing insights into problems, or helping to define hypotheses for further research (Merriam, 2009). It typically gathers data through narrative forms, interviews, or observations, which can then be analyzed using methods such as thematic analysis. This approach is distinct in that it does not seek objective, numerically quantifiable results but instead focuses on understanding phenomena in their natural, contextual setting, often with a smaller, more targeted sample size that encourages open and honest feedback from participants (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016).

Within the qualitative research paradigm, various methods can be applied, including observation, ethnography, focus groups and case studies. For this thesis, the case study method has been selected as it offers a comprehensive way to investigate complex issues in real-life contexts (Yin, 2017). Nohria (2021), underscores the value of case studies in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, making learning more engaging and practical for students. This sentiment is echoed by Aschenbrenner (2023) and Zotov et al. (2021), which includes studies by Shih and Huan (2017), Lapoule and Lynh (2018) Herta (2019) and Avtamonova (2020) as cited in Zotov et al. (2021), further attests to the effectiveness of case studies in preparing students for the real world. By simulating real-world challenges, case studies equip students with practical problem-solving skills and a competitive edge in their future careers.

3.2. Context

This thesis project explores the impact of gamification strategies in classroom settings to enhance the learning of English as a foreign language among students at the “Colegio Benedictino de Santa María”. Located in Envigado, Antioquia, Colombia. This private educational institution is distinguished by its diverse community and religious orientation, following the principles of Saint Benedict. Recognized as a bilingual school by the Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN)

in 2022, the school employs a staff of 130 teachers, with 70% accredited with a C1 level of English proficiency. Catering to a student population of approximately 1.500, ranging from Pre-Kindergarten to 11th grade, the school benefits from its high social community stratum, which frequently enables international travel and exposure to the English language, underscoring its global significance and relevance.

The school's commitment to excellence, is evident in its comprehensive curriculum, which integrates modern educational methodologies with traditional Benedictine. Innovative methodologies and educational trends are always welcomed at the school. The academic curriculum emphasizes the development of key life competencies and the ability to connect learning with 21st- century challenges. This includes emotional management, communication and active listening, problem-solving, planning and time management, flexible thinking, decision-making, mathematical and computational thinking, and the practice of both the mother tongue and the foreign language. In this dynamic educational environment, gamification is applied and examined to demonstrate its potential benefits in education. This thesis underscores the school's dedication to fostering a love of learning, collaborative work, curiosity, creativity, spirituality, and the well-being of both individuals and the community.

3.3. Participants

This project specifically targets fourth-grade students, aged between 9 and 10 years old, whose English proficiency levels average around A2. These students represent a critical developmental stage where cognitive and linguistic abilities rapidly expand, making them ideal candidates for innovative educational approaches. At this stage, students are generally familiar with a huge English vocabulary and grammar, since they are learning English since pre-garden. Gamification can build on this foundation by introducing more complex language concepts in a way that is both accessible and exciting.

The fourth-grade students at Colegio Benedictino de Santa María are characterized by a diverse range of learning styles and interests. This diversity requires an approach that can cater to different preferences and strengths, and gamification is seen as particularly well suited to meet these needs. The ultimate goal is to enhance the English Language Competence of these students, preparing them for future academic success and providing them with the skills needed to navigate and increasingly globalized world.

3.4. Instruments of data collection

In this study, it is employed a comprehensive data collection strategy, using participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups to achieve an in-depth understanding of how gamification strategies influence English Language Competence in EFL learners. Each selected instrument is uniquely suited to reveal diverse aspects of the educational experience, enabling a deep analysis of the effects of gamification. Below, each of the techniques and instruments for collecting information applied in the development of this research project is explained.

3.4.1. *Participatory observation*

Choosing participatory observation as a research instrument is informed by its effectiveness in providing deep insights into the behavior and interactions of participants, this instrument allows the researcher not only to observe, but to participate in the activities of the studied group (Abarca et al., 2013). Participatory observation is particularly pertinent to this study, aiming to shed light on the real-time engagement of EFL learners with gamification strategies. It provides a direct snapshot of the immediate impacts on learning behaviors and classroom interaction, which are central to understanding the effectiveness of gamification in language acquisition. Further, the act of observation in research entails a deliberate focus on selected aspects of reality, capturing crucial elements that elucidate the specific situation's dynamics (Bonilla-Castro & Rodríguez-Sehk, 2013).

3.4.2. *Semi-structured Interview*

After each learning session, the researcher will collect students' reflections and thoughts using the semi-structured interview as a primary method to complement observations to know and analyze the students' perceptions, as Flick (2012) suggests, interviews and narratives provide access to accounts of practices rather than the practices themselves and the semi-structured interviews offer a strategic advantage by enabling an in-depth exploration of students' perspectives, experiences and reflections on the gamification practices.

3.4.3. Focus group

At the end of the gamification strategy intervention period, I will select 5 students to participate in a focus group. During this session, I will introduce discussion topics related to their learning experiences.

The focus group is a key instrument to delve into the experiences and perceptions of learners- According to Abarca et al. (2013), a focus group is defined as an interview conducted by a moderator with a small group of people on a pre-established topic. This setup encourages open discussion among participants, allowing for a diverse range of insights and perspectives on the subject. Following the perspective of Martínez-Miguel (2012 as cited in Hamui-Sutton & Varela-Ruiz, 2013), the focus group emphasized capturing the plurality and variety of attitudes, experiences, and beliefs of the participants within a relatively short timeframe.

3.5. Selection of Focus group participants

The focus group consisted of six students who participated in the gamified activities. This selection includes students who earned the highest number of tokens as well as those who did not earn as many, including students who became emotional during some sessions. It was important to include both boys and girls to ensure a balanced representation of experiences and perspectives across genders. This diverse selection was aimed at capturing a wide range of experiences regarding gamification strategies (Table 1).

Table 1

Data from students participating in the focus groups

Gender	Age 9	Age 10	Total
Girls	2	1	3
Boys	3	0	3
Total	5	1	6

Note. Own elaboration

By including both high achievers and those who faced challenges, and ensuring a balance between boys and girls, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of gamification on students with varying levels of success and engagement in the activities.

3.6. Securing Consent

First, a meeting was arranged with the academic coordinator and principal of the school to present the objectives of the current study. After a detailed presentation of the research project, both authorities approved the research to be conducted with fourth-grade students. The proposal highlighted that the gamification strategies aimed to enhance the communicative language competence of the students. Additionally, the project was designed to create profound, contextualized, and challenging Foreign Language processes within the classroom setting.

Following this, parents were informed about the research procedures, including how data would be collected and used, and reassured that all measures would be taken to protect their children's identities and privacy. Their informed consent was sought to allow their children to participate in the study. The parents' understanding and cooperation were considered crucial for a successful implementation of the research, as their support would help create a positive and collaborative atmosphere conducive to the study's objectives.

3.7. Session's design and execution

For the design of these sessions, there are taken the principles of the Game elements presented by Werbach and Hunter (2012) in *"For the Win"*, effectively integrating gamification into the learning experience. Each session is carefully crafted to incorporate various game elements, such as game dynamics (narrative, progression, emotion), game mechanics (challenges, feedback, rewards), and game components (points and badges, leaderboards, avatars and roles), particularly in the context of teaching English as a foreign language to fourth-grade students. It is crucial to clarify that the research was conducted over a period of 10 weeks. Although the group has two English sessions per week, one session is dedicated to preparing the students for English exams, taking practice tests, and preparing for national and international assessments.

3.8. Gamified Rewards: Points, tokens, and the final mission

The implementation of these gamification strategies involved a unique, reward system through tangible and engaging incentives. This system included earning points and tokens, which could be exchanged for parts of a robot. The final goal was for students to collect these parts over time, ultimately assembling a robot at the end of the project.

3.8.1. *Earning points and tokens*

Throughout the duration of the project, students could earn points and tokens by completing various tasks, participating actively in class, and demonstrating improvements in their English language skills. The system was designed to ensure that every student had multiple opportunities to earn rewards, catering to different strengths and learning styles.

3.8.2. *Accumulating robot parts*

Each win token or piece in point accumulation corresponded to a specific part of a robot. The parts varied in size and complexity, encouraging students to aim for higher achievements to obtain the more significant pieces.

3.8.3. *Building the Final Robot*

At the end of the project, students would be able to support and participate in the construction of a huge robot. This final assembly is not just a symbolic reward but also a practical demonstration of their efforts and achievements throughout the project.

3.9. Session's Agendas

At Colegio Benedictino de Santa María, it is standard practice for teachers to write the agenda on the board at the beginning of each class, detailing all the activities planned for the session. Typically, this agenda includes the names of the activities to be covered. However, for the purposes of this thesis project, it was deemed crucial to gamify the classroom agenda to make it more engaging and appealing from the outset. This approach aims to capture students' interest right at the beginning of the class, setting a positive tone for the learning experience.

The gamified agenda includes not only the names of the activities but also incorporates essential gamification elements, such as progress bars, point systems, rewards time, and visual icons that represent different tasks. This transformation aligns with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Which aims to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn and emphasizes providing multiple means of engagement, representation and expression to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners (Sánchez, 2022). The agenda served as a daily roadmap, guiding students through various gamified activities design.

3.10. Implementation: Session's description

3.10.1. Session 1: Introduction to the gamified classroom.

- Game Elements: Roles, IDs, Point System, Narrative.
- Purpose: Establish the gamified environment by assigning roles and IDs, introducing the point system, and setting the stage with an initial narrative. This foundational session immerses students in their new identities and outlines the mechanics of the gamification framework, providing a clear understanding of the journey ahead.
- Agenda:
 - Greetings
 - My new ID
 - Robots
 - Points and tokens
 - Cover and points
 - Winners
- Session description: When the students joined the classroom, they immediately noticed their seats were marked with IDs like “Player #1”, and “Player #2” instead of their usual names (Figure 1). They started asking, “Teacher, why are our seats marked like this?” and “Teacher, what is going on?” then, I asked everyone to take their seats quietly so I could explain the day’s unique setup. After the greeting and class organization, I told them that they had been assigned players IDs which would be they currently IDs for the next classes.

Figure 1

Identification of students as players of the gamified activity



Note. This figure shows the identification of each student, as a participant in the proposed sessions. Own elaboration.

I started explaining that the class would be like living inside a video game where they are the players. I introduced the narrative about robots, tying it back to our term's focus on conditionals, as robots are often programmed using conditional statements. I outlined the challenges they would face, most of them activities related to the Zero Conditional and technological vocabulary but in a “gaming way”. They would earn points by winning these challenges, with additional points and tokens awarded for good work, participation, and contributions during the lessons.

During this class, the students were tasked with designing a front with narrative of our second term. At the end of the session, I promised to select the top three designs, awarding those students an additional five points they could use to boost a future grade. At the conclusion, I choose the three best covers. Unfortunately, one student was very upset for not winning, as she had put a lot of effort into her cover design. I spoke with her to reassure her that there would be more challenges and opportunities ahead and I was confident that she would have a chance to shine in the future.

3.10.2. Session 2: Engaging with challenges and feedback

- Game Elements: Challenge start, resource acquisition, rewards presentation, peer and teacher feedback.
- Purpose: Dive into the first set of challenges, emphasizing resource acquisition (gathering information and skills necessary for presentation) and the importance of rewards.
- Agenda:
 - Greetings
 - Group creation
 - Research activity
 - Short presentation
 - Points
- Session description: After the initial greetings and class organization, I introduced the first challenge: a shot research project on how robots are programmed using conditional statements. To facilitate this challenge, it was necessary to form groups. I organized a fun group creation activity using their players' IDs. Each player was instructed to find a partner who share at least one number with their ID. For example, player number 7 would need to find player number 17. One of the students asked if they could name their team with a name related to the robots, that was an amazing idea and all teams named their groups with something related to robotics, for example: “Roboben”, “Robot masters”.

For the challenge, each group was provided with a computer to create a digital presentation. They needed to gather information about robots, specifically how they are related to conditional statements. Additionally, they were tasked with researching zero conditional, writing about its usage, and providing three examples to illustrate it.

I brought LEGO pieces as a reward. I announced that the three groups with the best presentation would receive a LEGO piece for the robot creation. When I made the announcement all of them seemed happy and challenged.

However, due to time constraints, the students were unable to complete their presentations during the session. Therefore, we agreed that the presentation would be continued in the next class, where we would review their work and select the winners. This arrangement keeps anticipation high and they seemed motivated for the next session.

3.10.3. Session 3: *Applying grammar in contexts*

- Game Elements: Challenge, Narrative, awards.
- Purpose: Presentations, reinforce language skills through thematic learning.
- Class 3: Conditional Zero and robots
- Agenda:
 - Greetings
 - Groups' leaderboard
 - Groups' presentations
 - Zero Conditional explanation
 - Zero Conditional examples
 - Students Challenge
 - Awards and points

After greeting the students and starting the class, they kindly asked for some additional time to finish the presentation they could not complete in the previous session. I allow them to use the first 15 minutes of class. Meanwhile, I took the opportunity to write the names of all teams on the board.

After the 15 minutes, the students were ready to present. There were eight teams, each having a maximum of five minutes to present. The first team went up, and when they finished, they were surprised. I told them that the names on the board meant that the other teams would score their presentation from 1 to 10 and the three teams with the highest scores would win robot pieces. As the teams presented, each team assigned a score, which was noted to the right of their name. In the end, all points were summed up to determine the winners. The top three positions on the leaderboard were as follows:

- Team “Robomania”: 61 points
- Team “Robocops”: 60 points
- Team “Robot Masters”: 56 points

The winners were awarded the robot pieces, and they were thrilled with their achievement. However, this time there was noticeable sadness among the teams that did not win, as the prize

was something tangible that everyone wanted. I reassured those students by telling them that there would be more opportunities to win more pieces soon.

At this point, I realized that due to time constraints, I would not be able to cover the planned agenda for the class as there were only 10 minutes left. Therefore, the explanation and example sections would be moved to the next class. We used the remaining time to explore the other LEGO pieces that came in the kit (the ones they could win), and I showed them how they could assemble a robot using these pieces.

3.10.4. Session 4: Expanding Language Skills through interactive play

- Game Elements: Vocabulary, phrases, Tournament.
- Purpose: Focus on broadening vocabulary and understanding phrases related to the theme, doing a videogame tournament. This session tries to encourage active participation and engagement.
- Agenda:
 - Greeting
 - Getting ready
 - Tournament
 - Awards

I greeted my students and then wrote the agenda on the board. The section of “Tournament” called their attention and they started to ask questions but I told them that later we are going to talk about it because the class needed to finish the planned activities. I began by explaining the zero conditional. Although the students already had some understanding of the topic from their peer’s presentations, it was important for me to reinforce it with an explanation.

Next, I wrote some examples on the board, and we reviewed them together. After this, I asked who would like to write some examples on the board, and five students raised their hands and came forward. They wrote some sentences, and we reviewed all of them, organizing the corrections for some errors. However, I rewarded the students who came up with one small robot piece each. As I handed out the pieces, many other students expressed their desire to participate, I told them they had missed the opportunity.

At this moment, the tournament section was next, I just said that we needed to form teams of six people. They got up, formed their team very quickly, and then I explained the tournament rules. Over the previous sessions, we learned new vocabulary about robots and technology. The first challenge was that the two teams that wrote the most words related to conditionals, robots and technology in three minutes, would advance to the grand finale. The winners of the grand final would earn a big price.

I gave three markers to each team and set up a three-minute timer on the classroom's television. After a countdown, the students began writing. Initially, it was easy as they wrote words like robots, conditionals, coding, steps, move forwards, turn right, turn left, if, touch, wall. This was due we had done a lot of examples with robots walking with those instructions. Soon they started running out of ideas, I reminded them that they could include any technology-related words they knew. This wakes up them to write words like cell-phone, computer, mouse, and keyboard. The winning teams were those that wrote 14 and 11 words.

For the grand finale, I had the students sit down to explain the new changes for the final: they needed to make as many sentences as possible using zero conditional within the same three-minute limit. The timer started, and the competitiveness and effort of each team member were evident. In the end, the winning team created five sentences. They celebrated, and each member of the winning team received two robot's pieces each.

3.10.5. Session 5: Reflection, final feedback and recognition.

- Game Elements: Final challenge, rewards, endgame.
- Purpose: Provide a final challenge, marking the culmination of their efforts. This session gives the students a chance to reflect on their journey, understand their growth, and receive recognition for their accomplishments, showing a sense of competition and achievement.

- Agenda:
 - Greeting
 - Final challenge
 - Robot creation
 - End game and results

- Session description: In this class, students were tasked with completing the final challenge. I introduced it by saying that we had reached our last challenge, the most important of all, which was the creation of the grand robot. This activity was called “Robot creation” and each student had the opportunity to contribute to the robot’s construction. First, I informed the students that those who had earned tokens should save them until they completed the final challenge. The final challenge was as follows:

- On a sheet of paper or on the board, each student had to write their name and compose a sentence using the zero conditional. I would check the sentence, and if it was correct, the student would receive two pieces to put on the grand robot.

- The ultimate goal was for each student to create five correct sentences using zero conditional. Once completed, the student would have five ready sentences, which would be used for necessary evaluation terms at the institution.

- The students started the challenge and were very enthusiastic: most chose to write their sentences on the board. The board space was not enough for everyone, some of them had to write on paper. There was a group of 11 students who finished their five sentences very quickly, so they sat down and formed two groups with their tokens to start building their robot (Figure 2). I told these students that their grade was 5.0

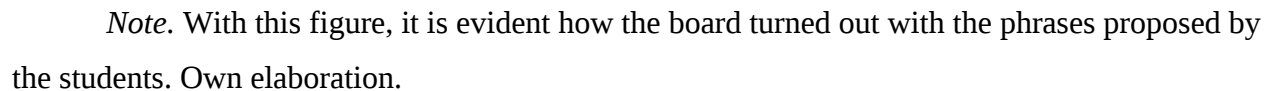
Figure 2

Students building their robot during the gamification activity



Note. In this figure, you can see some students using Lego pieces to make their own robot. Own elaboration.

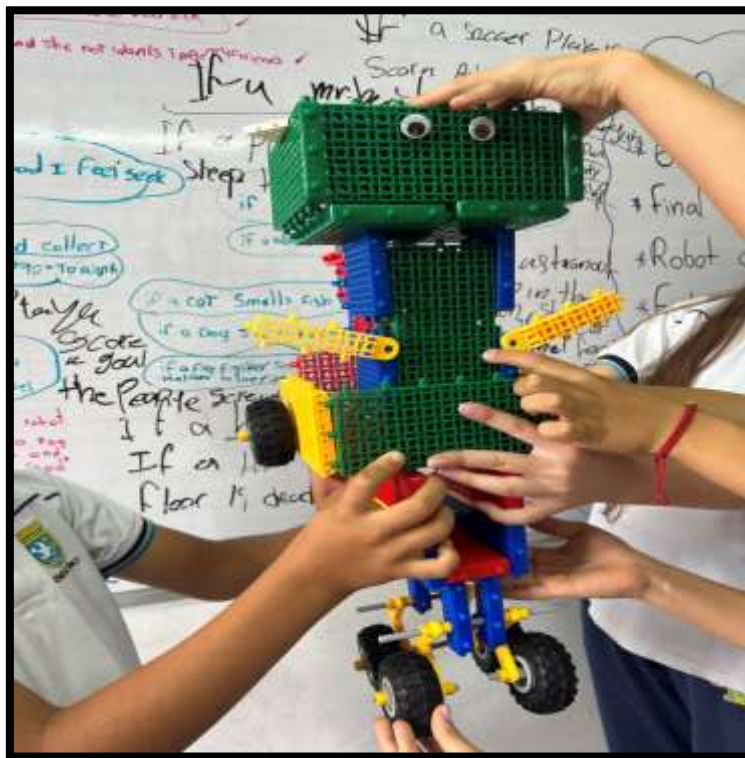
The other part of the group was making some mistakes in constructing sentences. They were eager to create the phrases, but in their haste, they were making them incorrectly. I help them a little with some clues about the Zero conditional. After that, eight students managed to make the five sentences with my help, so I told them that their grade was 4.0. By this stage, the board was full (Figure 3), and the remaining students had to finish their sentences on paper.



Finally, there were five students left who had a lot of difficulty. One of them had special needs, So I sat with him separately, we did it together, and he managed to make the sentences. His grade was 3.5. The other four students needed much more of my help, but they were getting very desperate as they had 2 or 3 sentences ready but were running out of ideas to create the others. I discovered they were trying to peek, so I reminded them that they could not look at the board. After some minutes, one of them was crying I talked to him to calm down but then I realized that none of them would be able to complete the challenge, I talked to them and they expressed their desire to use the robot pieces they had earned so far to contribute to the creation of the robot. These students did not win the challenge, but they still participated in the robot creation. Figure 4 shows one of the robots created by the students, who were very excited about their results.

Figure 4

A robot created during the activity



Note. In this figure, one of the robots built by the students with Lego pieces is evident. Own elaboration.

At the end of the class, I told them that we had completed the mission, which was an endgame. Later, we discussed how they felt about the activities, the narrative, and the strategies used, throughout the process of implementing this proposal.

3.11. Data analysis and interpretation procedures

In this study, a comprehensive data analysis and interpretation procedure was employed to evaluate the impact of gamification on EFL learners. This involved both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a thorough understanding of the changes in students' perceptions, engagement, and learning process.

Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention surveys, measuring changes in students' perceptions of their English class experience and engagement levels. Additionally, qualitative data were gathered through class description analysis, focus group discussions, and

individual interviews with students, providing rich, descriptive insights into their experiences and perceptions of the gamified learning activities.

The qualitative data were thematically analyzed using color coding to identify recurring themes and patterns. Through this process, specific categories were discovered that directly addressed the research questions and the general problem of enhancing English language competence through gamification. During the analysis, emergent categories were identified, offering deeper insights into the nuanced impacts of gamification on students.

The data analysis yielded in the following categories:

1. Gamification elements may improve the students' English learning experience.
2. A Gamification narrative may enhance students' engagement in language tasks.
3. Gamification may increase the use of language skills in EFL learners
4. Emerging Category: Gamification may increase students' motivation towards language tasks

Chapter 4

4. Findings

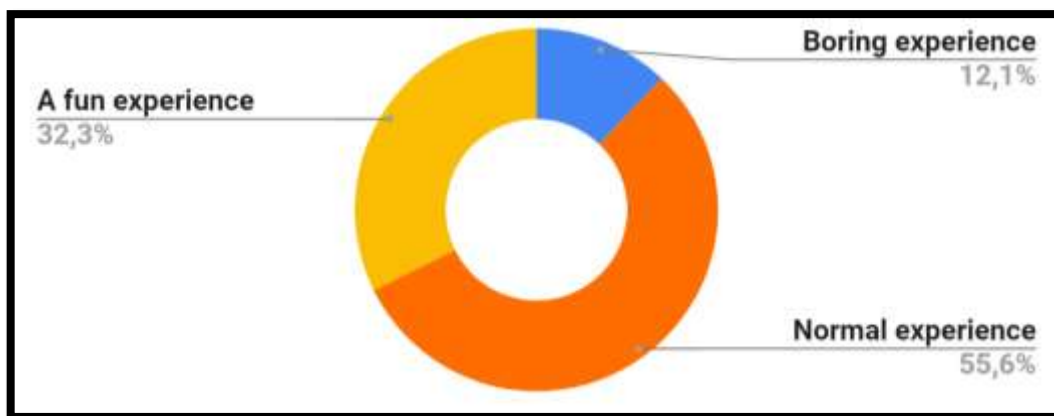
This chapter presents the findings from applying gamification strategies to enhance English language competence among EFL learners. This research addresses the challenges posed by traditional teaching methods in maintaining student engagement and fostering effective foreign language acquisition. The hypothesis, informed by existing literature, suggests that integrating gamification elements into the educational English framework can offer a potential solution. Through a detailed analysis of the collected data, this study seeks to validate the hypothesis that gamification fosters enhance language competence in EFL learners. Furthermore, it explores the broader implications of these findings for the future of language education.

4.1. Initial perceptions of English class

At the beginning of the project, a preliminary analysis was conducted to understand how students perceived their experience in English class. They were given three response options: a boring experience, a normal experience, and a fun experience. These initial questions provided a basis for comparing their perceptions at the end of the gamified sessions. The results obtained from this analysis are reported below in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Initial perception of students regarding the experience in the English class



Note. This Figure shows the percentage results obtained with the students, according to their experience in English class. Own elaboration.

These initial findings indicate that more than half of the students (55.6%) found the class to be a normal experience, with a significant portion (32,3%) finding it fun and a smaller group (12,1%) finding it boring (Figure 5). The baseline data suggests that there is substantial room for improvement and gamification could have a positive impact on students.

The following sections of this study will explore the effectiveness of gamified learning in achieving this objective, by comparing student perceptions after the gamified session with the initial baseline data presented here.

4.2. Category 1: Gamification elements may enhance the student's English learning experience.

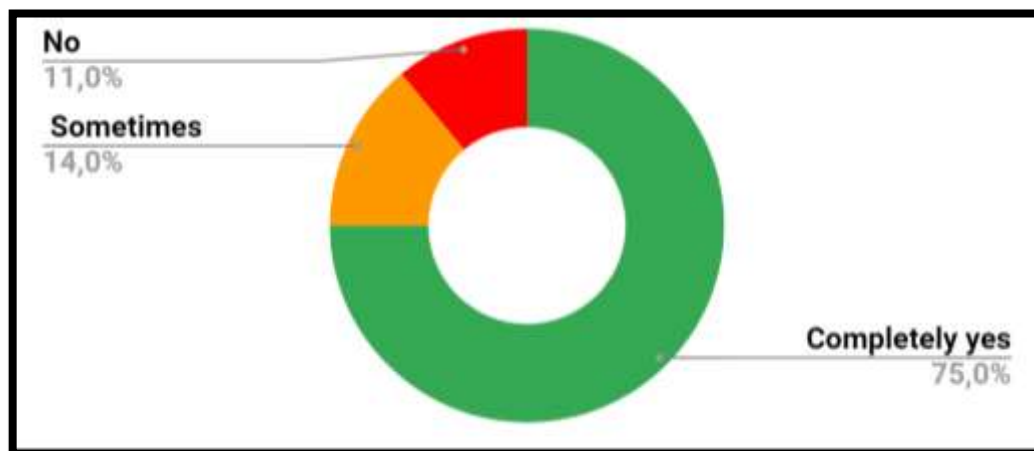
This category explores the potential of gamification elements to significantly improve the student English learning experience. Integrating game mechanics like challenges, rewards, and interactive feedback can make learning more engaging and rewarding. This, in turn, can lead to improve the learning experience and guarantee better language acquisition.

4.2.1. The power of play.

The data collected supports the positive impact of gamification on the student experience. As illustrated in Figure 6, a significant majority of students (75%) felt that game mechanics and components significantly improved their learning experience. An additional 14% found these elements somewhat helpful. Only a small minority (11%) did not find them beneficial. This positive response highlights the potential of incorporating game mechanics into the learning environment.

Figure 6

The use of a leaderboard, points system, and tokens improves the experience of learning English



Note. This Figure illustrates the percentage results based on student opinions regarding the game mechanics used in this proposal. Own elaboration.

Student quotes further reinforce the positive impact of gamification. Student 2 stated, “This activity with the conditionals was great because when you made sentences and received rewards to build the robot, you wanted to make many sentences” (Focus group, 2024). This exemplifies how the interactive and rewarding nature of gamified activities not only makes learning fun but also encourages active participation and practice, both of which are essential for language acquisition.

By incorporating these game elements, gamification creates a more dynamic and engaging learning environment. Students are no longer passive recipients of information; they become active participants, motivated to learn and improve their skills.

4.2.2. A catalyst for improvement.

The findings of this category strongly support the potential of gamification to enhance student engagement and improve the overall English learning experience. The data presented, including the positive student perceptions (75% reporting significantly improved experience) and the qualitative feedback highlighting the motivating nature of rewards and challenges, underscoring the effectiveness of gamified elements.

Gamification fosters a dynamic and interactive environment, motivating students to become active participants in their own learning journey. This category establishes a strong foundation for the following sections, which delve deeper into the specific effects of gamified learning on student engagement, motivation, and language skills.

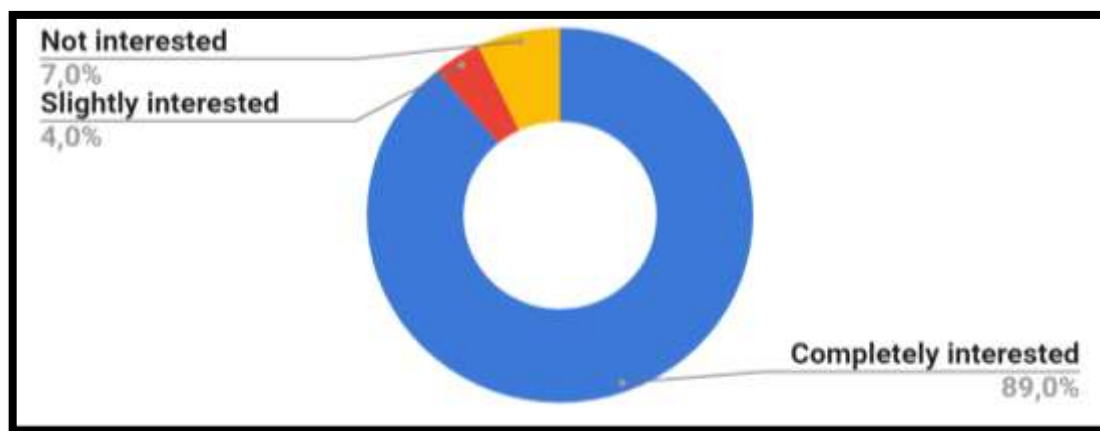
4.3. Category 2: A Gamification narrative may enhance students' engagement in language tasks.

This category explores the potential of gamified narratives to significantly enhance student engagement in English language tasks. This increased engagement is multifaceted, encompassing emotional involvement, cognitive interest, and active participation in learning activities. A well-crafted narrative, particularly one that aligns with student interests and the curriculum, plays a crucial role in transforming the learning experience into a more positive engaging one.

To delve deeper into the impact of narrative within gamified EFL learning, student interviews were conducted to explore their experiences and perceptions. Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of student engagement levels with the narrative.

Figure 7

Student engagement with gamified narrative.



Note. This Figure illustrates the distribution of percentage levels of student engagement with the gamified narrative. Own elaboration.

The results show that a vast majority of students (89,0%) were completely engaged with the narrative, while a very small percentage were either not interested (7,0%) or only slightly

interested (4,0%) (Figure 7). This high level of engagement indicates the effectiveness of a good narrative in maintaining student interest. By visualizing these responses, you can see the effectiveness of integrating a gamified narrative into learning activities.

4.3.1. *The power of a captivating story.*

A compelling narrative may significantly enhance student engagement, as it captures their interest and makes the learning process more enjoyable. Students expressed a strong interest in the robot narrative, which was interesting and relevant to them.

Student feedback further reinforces the power of narrative. Student 1 mentioned, “The narrative was very interesting because we love robots, but when other teachers have tried to tell us another narrative there are some things that we do not like, and that could discourage us” (Focus group, 2024). This highlights the importance of selecting themes that resonate with students. While the robot narrative was well-received, not all narratives may be equally effective.

Additionally, student 2 emphasized the role of the teacher’s delivery, stating: “The robot narrative was cool, but it also depends a lot on how the teacher explains it. If a teacher stands in front without emotion or writes it on the board, it would not cause anything” (Personal communication, 2024). This underscores the idea that the effectiveness of the narrative is not solely dependent on its content but also on how it is presented. An engaging and enthusiastic presentation can make the narrative more impactful, while a monotone or unengaged delivery can fail to capture students’ attention.

Finally, Student 3 commented: “The narrative helps us understand better what we are doing” (Focus group, 2024), highlighting the role of narrative in aiding comprehension next to provide context and relevance to the learning material. This contextualization aids in making abstract concepts more concrete and relatable, thereby facilitating better understanding and retention.

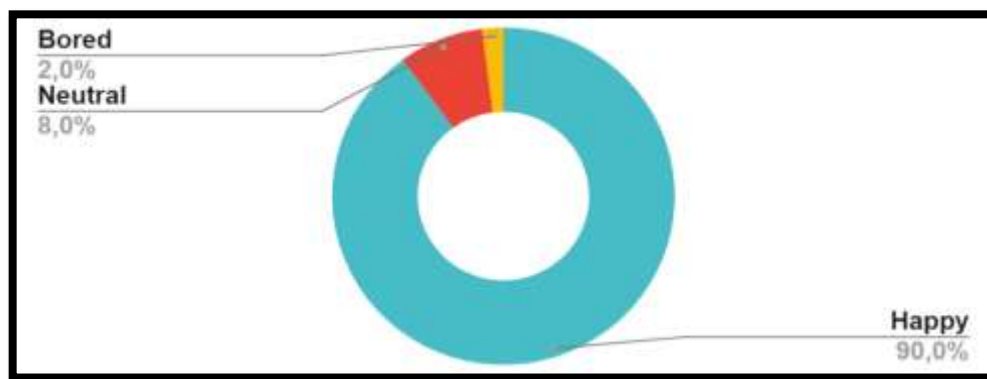
4.3.2. *Gamified narratives may have a positive emotional impact on student engagement.*

Within the broader category of how gamification narratives enhanced students’ engagement in language tasks, this subcategory explores the emotional impact specifically. It delves into how gamified narratives evoke positive emotions among students, fostering deeper

engagement in language learning activities. By examining emotional responses, we can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of gamification in educational settings. The Figure 8 shows the results of how students felt during the gamified sessions.

Figure 8

Feelings and Emotions about Gamification in the English Class



Note. This Figure shows the percentage results reported by students, regarding their emotions and feelings about the gamification of the English class. Own elaboration.

The results demonstrate that the majority of students (90,0%) felt happy during the gamified sessions, with only a small fraction feeling bored (2,0%) or neutral (8,0%) (Figure 8). This indicates a strong positive emotional response to the gamification strategy.

The data collected during the study revealed that the majority of students (90%) reported feeling happy during gamified English sessions. This high percentage indicates that gamification strategies effectively create a positive and stimulating learning atmosphere, and according to that, it is a fact that by integrating game elements and narratives into the learning environment, students not only engage more deeply with the English content but also experienced heightened levels of happiness and excitement.

To conclude this category, by integrating game elements and compelling narratives, teachers can not only promote deeper engagement with the English content but also cultivate a more joyful learning experience for students. This emotional connection to the learning process can lead to increased motivation, persistence, and improved EFL learning outcomes.

4.4. Category 3: Gamification may increase the use of language skills in EFL learners

This category explores the potential of gamification to increase the use of language skills among EFL learners. By integrating game mechanics into the classroom environment, gamification may transform a potentially passive learning experience into a dynamic and engaging one, encouraging students to actively practice their grammar, vocabulary, writing, and reading skills.

4.4.1. Addressing the challenge of active use.

Many EFL learners struggle with actively using their language skills. Gamification offers a solution by creating a fun and engaging environment that motivates students to use their language skills in a meaningful way.

The positive impact of gamification on active language is evident in students' feedback. Student 3 stated, “Last year, the professor taught us a little about conditionals but that was very difficult and confusing. This year with this way of learning, it was much better and easier to understand” (Focus group, 2024). This anecdote highlights how gamification can make complex concepts more accessible and engaging for them, leading to deeper understanding and retention. Student 5 further emphasized this point, stating, “This activity with the conditionals was great because when you made sentences and received rewards to build the robot, you wanted to make many sentences” (Focus group, 2024). This suggests that the desire to succeed within the game motivates students to actively seek out new vocabulary and grammar structures, fostering a more self-directed learning approach.

4.4.2. From rewards to accomplishment.

The opportunity to earn rewards, track progress, and compete with peers fosters a sense of accomplishment and excitement. Students become intrinsically motivated to “do more” and win, pushing them to utilize all aspects of the language throughout the gamified activities. The desire to master the language skills required to progress in the game, and ultimately achieve the sense of accomplishment from completing a task (e.g., building a robot), serves as a powerful motivator, leading to increased confidence and fluency using the language.

In essence, gamification leverages its interactive elements to transform the learning process, making language skills and even complex concepts more accessible and enjoyable for students. This increase in engagement translates to students dedicating more time and effort to understanding EFL topics. Students are no longer passive recipients of information; they become active participants, motivated to explore and experiment with the language, ultimately leading to improved language skills.

4.5. Category 4: Emerging category. Gamification may increase students' motivation toward language tasks

The study of motivation caused by gamification was not one of the principal objectives of this research. However, due to the constant feedback and anecdotal evidence about the high motivation students felt during the gamified activities, this emerging category has become a focus of discussion.

4.5.1. *Heightened engagement and intrinsic motivation.*

Students consistently expressed heightened engagement and enthusiasm during gamified activities, often attributing their increased motivation to the gamification activities. A remarkable outcome of gamification was the cultivation of intrinsic motivation, the self-driven desire to learn and engage with the language. In this sense, Student 2 states that “I liked the activity because it motivated us to use zero conditionals more” (Focus group, 2024). This shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation suggests that gamification taps into deeper psychological drivers, fostering a genuine love for language learning that transcends external rewards.

4.5.2. *From duty to enjoyment.*

Students articulated a distinct shift in their perception of language learning, moving away from perceived obligation toward a more enjoyable and engaging experience. This transformation was captured by student 2 who stated “There is a different motivation that feels because when you have to do activities just to win the subjects, you are not as motivated” (Personal communication, 2024). This highlights gamification's potential to transform language learning from a duty into a source of personal satisfaction, fostering a more positive attitude towards the learning process.

However, the competitive gamification elements, such as earning points and rewards, served as potent motivators, driving students to strive for excellence and improve their performance. Student 4 exemplified this, stating, “You get motivated because you think: I will try to do things better to get those extra points” (Focus group, 2024). This underscores the power of gamification to harness the natural human desire for recognition and achievement, channeling it toward language learning goals. By incorporating these elements, gamification creates a sense of accomplishment, encouraging students to continue putting in effort and refining their English skills.

Finally, the unexpected observation of gamification’s significant impact on student motivation transcends the initial focus of this research. It reveals a potentially transformative approach to language learning. The evidence in this category suggests that gamification is not merely a superficial tool for engagement. It possesses the power to fundamentally alter student perception of learning, transforming it from a perceived obligation into a source of personal satisfaction. Gamification creates a sense of accomplishment that fuels continued effort and skill development.

Chapter 5

5. Discussion

This chapter delves into the key findings of this study, addressing the central research question: “How may gamification strategies enhance the English language competence in a group of fourth-grade EFL learners?” The implemented gamification strategies were designed to address the challenges often faced in traditional EFL classrooms, such as maintaining student engagement and fostering effective language acquisition.

The findings yielded four distinct categories that illuminate the impact of gamification on fourth-grade students.

1. Gamification elements may improve the students’ English learning experience.
2. A Gamification narrative may enhance students’ engagement in language tasks.
3. Gamification may increase the use of language skills in EFL learners
4. Emerging Category: Gamification may increase students’ motivation toward language tasks

These categories are explored and discussed in detail throughout this chapter, drawing comparisons with existing literature.

To start, the category associated with is explored the possible potential of gamification elements to significantly enhance the student's English experience. The results showed that integrating game mechanics like challenges, rewards, and interactive feedback can make learning more engaging and rewarding, potentially leading to improved outcomes. The concept of using game-like elements to enhance learning experiences finds support in the work of scholars, like Garland (2015). His research suggests that gamification offers substantial benefits for student engagement and learning by incorporating game mechanics, the learning environment transforms into a more dynamic and interactive space, fostering a more positive and potentially effective learning experience.

A core principle of gamification, as emphasized by Lander et al. (2018) and cited in Vesa & Harviainen (2019), is to “use game-like elements to make non-game tasks more interesting” (p. 128). This translates into a shift in learner dynamics. Students are no longer passive recipients of

information; they become active participants motivated to learn and improve their skills through engaging challenges and rewarding feedback mechanics. This aligns with the work of Folmar (2015) and Gee (2003, 2008), who emphasize the importance of active participation in language acquisition. Gamification, by its nature, enhances the English learning experience creating a more dynamic and interactive learning environment.

Now, regarding the category on the potential of gamified narratives to significantly improve student engagement in English language tasks. The results demonstrated that the engagement is multifaceted, encompassing emotional involvement, cognitive interest, and active participation in learning activities. Moreover, a well-crafted narrative, particularly one that aligns with student interests and the curriculum, plays a crucial role in transforming the learning experience into a more positive and engaging one.

The findings in this category align with several existing theories on the power of narratives in education. Palomino et al. (2019) emphasize the interactive nature of gamified narratives, where students actively participate in building their own experiences within the narrative framework. This fosters a deeper emotional connection and enhances cognitive interest and motivation, which is reflected in the high level of engagement observed in this study.

The gamified narrative in this study provided a clear and logical structure that helped students understand the context and purpose of their learning activities. This is confirmed by the contributions of Schneider et al. (2020) and Gabele et al. (2019), since through the use of narrative-based gamification in e-learning environments, it was possible to demonstrate how structured narratives improve practical understanding and engagement with the learning material.

In this study, the narrative functioned as a tool for comprehension by providing context and relevance to the language exercises. These findings corroborate studies conducted by Ibarra-Herrera et al., (2019) and Rahim et al., (2019) who showed the effectiveness of gamified narratives in making complex and engaging concepts accessible in other disciplines such as biology and linear algebra. In this case, it is confirmed that gamified narrative in the EFL context allows students to see the practical application of their language lessons, facilitating deeper understanding and retention.

Finally, building on the positive engagement fostered by gamified narratives, this emotional shift goes beyond mere enjoyment. Shatz (2015) highlights the concept of “freedom to fail” within gamification, which encourages students to take risks without fear. This fosters deeper

engagement as students experiment and learn from mistakes within the narrative framework, free from the stress and anxiety often associated with traditional learning.

To continue, reference is made to the discussion of the findings obtained around the third category of analysis, related to gamification and the possibility of increasing the use of language skills in students of English as a foreign language, finding that the integrating gamification elements into the classroom significantly stimulated students' use of English in various aspects, including grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and listening. This improvement can be attributed to several factors related to the mechanics of gamified learning.

The integration of game mechanics encourages students to actively use and practice their language skills in a dynamic classroom environment. This aligns with the work of Hashim et al. (2019) who explored the effectiveness of gamification in improving ESL learners' grammar. In this way, the potential of gamified learning to address the challenges associated with vocabulary acquisition in a foreign language is confirmed and highlighted. The gamified activities fostered a strong sense of "wanting to do more" among students. This intrinsic motivation stemmed from the desire to win and collect rewards within the game framework. Barros-Lorenzo (2016) did a study that emphasized the role of gamification in fostering a positive learning environment where students are motivated to develop their language skills for the purpose of communication and collaboration with peers.

This category is relevant for this study because it demonstrates that integrating gamification elements significantly stimulates students' use of English across various skills. The particularly important as intrinsic motivation is a key driver of long-term educational success. Additionally, these findings suggest that thoughtfully designed gamification classes can create a dynamic and interactive classroom environment, leading to improved language proficiency and deeper English learning-.

The findings involved with the emerging category identified with the study are discussed, which is related to the increase in students' motivation towards linguistic tasks, through gamification. This study's exploration of gamified activities revealed a significant increase in student's motivation toward language tasks. The observed shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation suggested that gamification taps into deeper psychological drivers. Students were not just motivated by external rewards; they developed a self-driven desire to learn and engage with the language itself. This confirms the results referenced in the research by Azzouz and Gutiérrez-

Colon (2020), since with this study, similar positive effects on motivation in the acquisition of foreign languages were also documented.

Furthermore, Kap (2012) highlights how gamification leverages game design principles to enhance learning and development, incorporating player feedback to drive engagement and participation. This resonates with the heightened engagement and enthusiasm students consistently expressed during gamified activities. Likewise, the findings obtained with this degree thesis support the works of Folmar (2015) and Vesa and Herviainen (2019), since it was shown that gamification fosters intrinsic motivation focused on personal achievement and the inherent satisfaction of mastering language skills. In addition, the study underscores the importance of a well-structured gamified environment in educational settings to foster motivation. Properly designed gamification elements such as clear goals, instant feedback, and progressive challenges, were crucial in sustaining student interest and effort.

To conclude, this study explored the potential of gamification strategies to enhance EFL learning. The findings across all categories, such as game elements, narratives, motivation, and increased language skills use, consistently pointed towards a more engaging, rewarding, and ultimately more effective learning environment.

Chapter 6

6. Conclusions

The implementation of gamification strategies in the classroom has proven to significantly enhance English language competence among EFL learners. This research was driven by the necessity to address the challenges traditional teaching methods face in managing student engagement and fostering effective language acquisition. The integration of gamification elements into the educational framework was hypothesized to offer a viable solution, a hypothesis supported by existing literature.

The initial perceptions of the English class showed that over half of the students viewed their experience as normal, with a significant portion finding it fun and a smaller group finding it boring. These baseline findings indicated substantial room for improvement, suggesting that gamification could positively impact student engagement and learning outcomes.

The findings of this study demonstrated that a compelling gamified narrative significantly enhances student engagement. A Majority of students (89%) were fully engaged with the narrative, highlighting the effectiveness of integrating relevant and interesting gamified narratives into learning activities. The qualitative feedback from students underscored the importance of both the content of the narrative and the delivery method. An engaging and enthusiastic presentation can significantly enhance the narrative's impact, aiding comprehension and making the learning process more enjoyable.

The emotional engagement of students was also notably high during gamified sessions. Most students (90%) reported feeling happy, indicating that gamification strategies create a positive and stimulating learning atmosphere. This aligns with Shatz's (2015) concept of "freedom to fail", which encourages learners to take risks and engage deeply in the learning process without fear of failure. The positive emotional responses foster motivation, reduce anxiety, and enhance the overall learning experience.

Furthermore, the use of game mechanics and components such as leaderboards, point systems, and tokens was found to significantly improve the learning experience for 75% of students. These elements not only made learning fun but also encouraged active participation and practice, essential for language acquisition. The competitive aspect of gamification, particularly through leaderboards, motivates students to strive for higher performance and stay engaged in their

learning tasks. This supports Figueroa's (2015) argument that effective gamification requires a deep integration of pedagogically sound game mechanics aligned with educational goals.

Gamification also simplifies complex concepts, making them more accessible and enjoyable for students. This was evident from the student's feedback, where they expressed how gamification made difficult topics easier to understand and more engaging. This aligns with the research by Deterding et al. (2011), Hamari et al. (2014) and Kapp (2012), who highlighted the effectiveness of gamification in making complex concepts more comprehensible.

An emerging theme from the study was the increased motivation through gamification. Although not a primary objective, the high motivation reported by students during gamified activities became a significant finding. The intrinsic motivation fostered by gamification, driven by personal achievement and enjoyment, is crucial for sustained engagement and effective learning. This supports the findings of Azzouz and Gutiérrez-Colón (2020), Folmar (2015), Kapp (2012) and Vesa and Harviainen (2019), who all emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation in learning.

In conclusion, the integration of gamification strategies in the classroom has significantly promoted and stimulated English language competence among students. By making learning activities more engaging and rewarding, educators can create a dynamic and effective learning environment that fosters both motivation and improved academic outcomes. This study underscores the importance of thoughtfully designed gamification strategies that align with pedagogical objectives to provide a comprehensive and enriching English learning experience. The findings highlight the potential of gamification to transform traditional educational methods, offering a more engaging, enjoyable, and effective approach to English language learning.

Chapter 7

7. Limitations

This study, while providing valuable insights into the benefits of gamification in language learning, has several limitations. First, the study's duration was relatively short, which way not capture the long-term effects of gamification on language competence

Second, the study was conducted within a specific educational setting and demographic, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Replicating this study across diverse educational contexts, ages, groups, and cultural backgrounds is necessary to determine the broader applicability of the results. Additionally, the study focused primarily on the positive aspects of gamification, potentially overlooking any negative impacts or challenges faced by students and teachers.

Finally, the implementation of gamification strategies relied heavily on the teacher's delivery and enthusiasm, which could vary significantly across different teachers. This variation suggests that comprehensive teacher training is crucial for consistent and effective gamification in EFL classrooms.

Chapter 8

8. Pedagogical implications

This study serves as a valuable resource for enhancing teaching practices. It is demonstrated that gamification can significantly boost students' engagement and improve various aspects of language competence, including vocabulary acquisition, grammatical understanding, and writing skills. Teachers can transform lessons into dynamic and engaging experiences.

Additionally, this study highlights the importance of customizing gamified activities to suit different learning styles and proficiency levels, ensuring all students benefit. Also, it is underscored the need for effective teacher training on gamification tools and strategies. Professional development programs can equip educators with the skills needed to integrate gamification into their teaching practices successfully.

Chapter 9

9. Future research

The findings of this study highlight the significant impact that gamification can have on enhancing English language competence among EFL learners. However, there remain several areas that warrant further investigation to build upon these results and deepen our understanding of gamification's role in education. The following suggestions for future research are aimed at addressing the limitations of the current study and exploring new avenues for integrating gamification into language learning.

9.1. Long term studies

One limitation of this study was its relatively short duration. Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of gamification on language learning. Such studies would provide insights into how using gamified strategies influences language competence over extended periods, helping to determine whether the initial benefits observed are maintained or even enhanced over time.

9.2. Diverse educational contexts

This study was conducted within a specific educational setting, with a particular group of students. Future research should aim to replicate these findings across diverse educational contexts, including different age groups, proficiency levels, and cultural backgrounds.

9.3. Teacher training and implementation

The role of the teacher in delivering gamified lessons was highlighted as a crucial factor in this study. Future research should explore the best practices for teacher training and support in the implementation of gamification strategies. Investigating how teachers can be effectively trained to use gamification tools and techniques, and how their delivery impacts students' outcomes, would provide valuable insights for professional development programs.

9.4. Integration to new technological trends

Future research should explore how emerging technologies can enhance gamification in education. The use of virtual reality, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence in gamified learning environments could uncover new possibilities for engaging students and improving learning outcomes. Understanding how these technologies can be effectively integrated with gamification strategies would help teachers stay at the forefront of innovative teaching practices.

9.5. Policy and curriculum development

Finally, future research should investigate the implications of integrating gamification into educational policies and curriculum. Exploring how gamification can be systematically incorporated into language learning programs at the institutional or national level. This could include examining the potential for gamification to align with standardized testing and curriculum standards.

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