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The Impact of Gamification Tools on Improving Learners' Engagement in Oral Communication Classroom

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Abstract:

English is considered as global language that many foreign learners seek to master, they are driven by the desire to improve professional prospects, pursue global education, or interact seamlessly in multicultural environments, yet while attempting to do so they face many difficulties and obstacles. This leads English teachers to adopt gamification as an alternative teaching strategy to enhance learners' oral skills. This study aims to investigate the impact of gamification tools in enhancing oral communication skills through exploring learners' opinions and perceptions toward the use of games in oral classes. The research is conducted through a semi-structured questionnaire which is distributed to a random population of forty-eight first year students in the English department at the Ecole Normal Superieur 'Assia Djebar', Constantine, Algeria, for the academic year 2023_2024. The results of the research show that gamification is a powerful tool that enhances oral communication skills through overcoming the difficulties that English learners encounter.

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Keywords: English learners; gamification tools; oral communication skills; engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

There was a notable change in language teaching and learning where traditional ways of teaching have become repetitive, uninteresting and monotonous. Besides, there was an urgent need for integrating innovative teaching strategies and techniques that would carry joy and engagement to the English classroom. Oral communication skills are considered as noteworthy to English students since communicating the language for them is more essential than reading or writing it, learning foreign languages in general aims to comprehend and produce oral language. Oral skills are important as they enable learners to express their ideas and thoughts easily and accurately. Many linguists have agreed on the importance of speaking and communicating in English which is considered as a priority in foreign language learning. Communicating the language is very crucial aspect in each individual's life(1). English learners study it in the first place for the purpose of speaking and communicating the language with proficiency(2). In the same respect, speaking English is a priority to learners and essential means for communicating thoughts, information, ideas and emotions to others(3). Hence, oral communication skills are of utmost importance to English learners in the teaching and learning process. Learners can produce oral language through mastering both fluency and accuracy. This means that learners would first gain a comprehensive understanding and control over the language's systems and structures., in addition to learners' ability to manage their speech easily and quickly without a pause or stop. This

(1) Scott Thornbury, How to Teach Speaking Pearson Longman, Essex, UK, 2005, p.1.
(2) Jack Richards & Willy Renandya, Methodology in language teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2002, p.69.
(3) Tricia Hedge, Teaching and learning in the language classroom, Oxford university press, Oxford, 2000, p. 261.

explains why oral skills are challenging and difficult for English learners. They are required to have a good command of the different components of speaking skills which were classified into five components and they are as follow: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, comprehension and fluency(1). Another challenge that English learners may face while learning oral communication skills is linguistic and psychological barriers. Accordingly, teachers have to incorporate innovative teaching strategies that would facilitate oral communication learning.

Gamification has been introduced to EFL classrooms as an innovative strategy to prevent boredom and encourage learners to engage in oral sessions. Although games have been used for a long time in entertaining learners in the learning process, they have become a tendency in empowering English learners to interact and collaborate with teachers and peers. Gamification can be a productive strategy to English learners in many aspects in language learning. It is effective in pushing learners to involve and participate in realizing the different tasks(2). In addition to motivating learners to enhance their language skills in enjoyable and pleasant learning environment. Hence, learners feel confident and interested to produce oral language, participate in discussions and conversations and strengthen their oral communication skills. Technology is a crucial element while using games in language classrooms; combining games with technology together in English classroom helps learners to increase their critical thinking and problem-solving skills that enable them to provide solutions to the problems they encounter(3). The present research paper seeks to investigate the impact of gamification in increasing learners' engagement in oral communication classrooms. The study examines

(1) Douglas Brown, Teaching by Principles: Language Assessment, Pearson Education, New York, 2004, pp. 172-173.
(2) Jonna Koivisto & Juho Hamari, Demographic differences in perceived benefits from gamification. Computers in Human Behavior, 35(1), 2014, pp. 181-182.
(3) Robert Z. Zheng & Michael K. Gardner, Handbook of Research on Serious Games for Educational Applications, IGI Global,Hershey PA, USA, 2017.

learners' opinions and impressions toward using games to enhance their oral communication skills. The research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what degree is gamification applied in English classrooms?
2. What is the impact of games on oral communication skills?
3. What solutions do gamification provide to overcome learners' oral communication difficulties?
4. What are learners' perceptions toward using gamification in oral communication classrooms?

2. Literature Review

This section would introduce the two main concepts that compose this research paper. The first one is related to innovative strategy integrated to English classrooms which is gamification. The second concept is concerned with introducing oral communication skills.

2.1 Gamification

It is a technique that uses game elements in other different contexts, the term has been defined as the application of game-like elements including rules, visuals, designs, critical planning for the purpose of engaging individuals, increasing motivation, and stimulating learning(1). Gamification is not anymore a mere tool for entertainment in classroom, yet it is used to stimulate curiosity and engagement in the educational process. Researchers have found a strong relationship between playing games and activating the neural system in individuals' brains(2). This explains learners' ability to think critically and make decisions in learning while playing games.

(1) Karl Kapp, The gamification of learning and instruction: Game-based methods and strategies for training and education, John Wiley & Sons, San Francisco, CA, 2012, p.10.
(2) Gabe Zichermann & Christophe Cunningham, Gamification by design: Implementing game mechanics in web and mobile apps, O'Reilly Media, Sebastopol, Canada, 2011, p. ix.

Gamification is used in education through implementing game design elements. The latter are categorized into mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics. Game mechanics refer to the rules that govern a game and allow to transfer players' actions into results and outcomes. This includes scoring system, feedback, rewards and decision-making. Game dynamics define the relationship between players and the rules throughout the game. Aesthetics explains how both game mechanics and dynamics interact together through applying the artistic image of the designer. Aesthetics define the whole game system and emotional status(1). The use of game mechanics in educational process proves to increase school and academic achievement. Learners become more engaged when they involve in playing games for many reasons including the following; learners enjoy to engage in challenges and quests to gain more points, badges and rewards in a restricted period of time which increase their spirit of competition and collaboration. In addition to that, games provide them also with instant feedback about their continuous progress toward achieving the game goals that would improve their self-confidence, esteem, and motivation to learn(2).

As technology has witnessed a flourishing boom in all fields and domains. Learning and teaching process has integrated digital games as they distribute joy, interest and motivation among learners because they are used easily and with fun. Unlike traditional games, digital games are those found in the digital devices like computers and mobile phones, they are frequently supported by internet and artificial intelligence. Digital games are available in the online websites, in CDs and DVDs, in addition to the varied game applications that are downloaded in mobiles and portable computers(3). Hence, the use of technology together with

(1) Ibid, p. 36.

(2) Asli Bahar Ivgin & Hakan Akcay, The impact of using educational and digital games on middle school students science achievement. International Journal of Technology in Education (IJTE), 7(3), 2024, p.387.

(3) Sebastian Deterding et al, From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness: Defining Gamification, MindTrek '11: Proceedings of the 15th International =

game elements provide learners with self-confidence to involve, collaborate, and participate with their peers and teachers. In addition to that, digital games enable learners to develop a great sense of responsibility, autonomy and self-directed learning since they learn without the help of teachers who serve as a facilitator, guide, and observer. Consequently, learners build a greater understanding of instructional content and acquiring the learning skills.

2.2 Oral Communication Skills

English learning has become a current trend in all over the world, as it is the most spoken language. Individuals hope to learn oral skills over the other skills for the purpose of communicating with others, in addition to expressing their own thoughts, ideas, and emotions. English learners are equally interested to learn oral skills as priority because for them speaking and communicating in English means mastering that language. Indeed, language is not used only to form grammatical structures but also the ability to use them in actual reality(1). Oral communication skills include both speaking and listening which are interconnected, and the occurring of one of them related to the other, in addition to pronunciation which also plays an important role in exchanging information and comprehending ideas between interlocuters. Although oral communication is significant to English learners, yet those skills are considered as complex and challenging since they require the knowledge of both accuracy and fluency. Accuracy is concerned with producing accurate language including correct grammatical structures, wide-ranging vocabulary and proper pronunciation(2). Fluency in the other hand is concerned with the speaker's ability to use the language in natural and smooth way that is similar to native speakers' tone, speed, interpositions, and

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Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments, 2011, p. 13.

(1) Jeremy Harmer, The practice of English Language Teaching , 3rd ed, Logman, London, 2001, p. 284.

(2) Ibid, p.104.

pauses. Fluent speakers usually produce the language without pauses and stops(1). Hence, English learners have to be aware of these different components while learning oral communication to better communicate with others.

English learners face many impediments when they attempt to communicate orally with others. Those impediments are classified principally into two categories which are linguistic and psychological barriers. First of all, linguistic barriers usually include learners who lack enough grammatical background and retain limited lexicon and English terms. In this respect, researchers have classified the difficulties that English learner may face in oral classroom including the following; nothing to say problem where learners either do not find the right terms and words to express them in conversation. Further, learners have limited grammatical structures to use them in combining sentences and phrases. Another problem is low or uneven participation where only few students dominate involvement and engagement in discussions. Mother tongue use is another difficulty that English learners encounter, they prefer to communicate with each other in their native language which prevent them from communicating proficiently(2). In addition to pronunciation issues where learners face problems in stress, rhythm and intonation when articulating words and sentences. Psychological barriers in the other hand make learners feel worried, stressed and scared from making mistakes or being criticized by others. Most English learners feel frustrated, anxious, and shy to take part in oral discussions and conversations since they lack enough background of the lessons' topics, grammar, and vocabulary. Those factors lead to decreasing learners' self-confidence, self-esteem and motivation to talk

(1) Jack Richards, John Talbot Platt & Heidi Weber, Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 2nd ed, Longman, London, 1992, p.204.
(2) Penny Ur, A course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

in front of others[1]. Thus, linguistic and psychological obstacles play a significant role in inhibiting learners from communicating effectively. So, it is the teachers' role to adapt innovative teaching strategies that encourage learners to take part in oral classes.

3. Methods and Materials

The research is carried out via a qualitative and quantitative methods. The study uses a questionnaire as a research tool to gather information from first year English students at l'Ecole Normale Supérieure of Constantine, Algeria. The latter is a training school which is specialized in preparing pre-service teachers to improve their language skills and abilities for future profession.

3.1 Participants

The research is implemented through choosing random participants to answer the questionnaire. 48 learners have answered the questionnaire. Their ages are between 17 and 18 years old. Most of them are females (44) in addition to four males. The study is held in the English department at l'Ecole Normale Supérieure of Constantine, Algeria in the second semester from the academic year 2023_2024.

3.2 Research Instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire has been administered to first year students at l'Ecole Normale Supérieure of Constantine, Algeria. The study investigates the impact of gamification tools in enhancing learners' engagement in oral communication classroom. It seeks to examine learners' perception toward the use of gamification in improving their oral communication skills. The questionnaire consists of three sections, the first one is concerned with demographic information including age and gender of the participants. The second

(1) Habtamu Walga Adaba, Exploring the Practice of Teacher-Student Classroom Interaction in EFL to Develop the Learners' Speaking Skills in Tullu Sangota Primary School Grade Eight Students in Focus. Arts and Social Sciences Journal, 8 (4), 2017, p. 2, doi: 10.4172/2151-6200.1000295.

section searches in learners' oral communication skills. The third section explores the impact of gamification tools in boosting learners' engagement to communicate in oral sessions.

4. Results

The results of the questionnaire are displayed as the following

4.1. Demographic Information

Demographic information concerns learners' general information including age and gender. Results are shown in table one.

Table 1. Learners' Demographic Information

Age		Gender	
17 years	6.25%	Male	8.33%
18 years	93.75%	Female	91.66%

Table one shows that learners' ages range between 17 and 18 years old. Most of them are eighteen years old (93.75%). Concerning the gender of learners, majority of participants are females (91.66%) which is the case in most foreign language classes.

4.2. Learners' Engagement in Oral Communication Classroom

English learners are interested primarily in learning oral skills and how to communicate with the language rather than anything else. However, they usually face difficulties that prevent them from communicating effectively.

Question 1. Do you prefer oral skills (speaking and listening) over the other skills?

Table 2. learners' opinion about preferring oral skills

Preferring oral skills		
Yes	42	87.5%
No	6	12.5%

Table two demonstrates learners' preference of oral skills. Most of them (87.5%) prefer speaking and listening over reading and writing.

Question 2. Specify your fluency level in English oral skills

Figure 1. Learners' Level in English Oral Skills



Figure one displays the results of learners' opinion about their English level in oral skills. Majority of learners say they have a good level (62.5%) while (10.41%) say they have very good level. 20.83% of learners declare their oral skills are not bad. Hence most of student have an adequate level in speaking and listening.

Question 3. What difficulties do you encounter in oral classes?

Figure 2. Oral Communication Problems

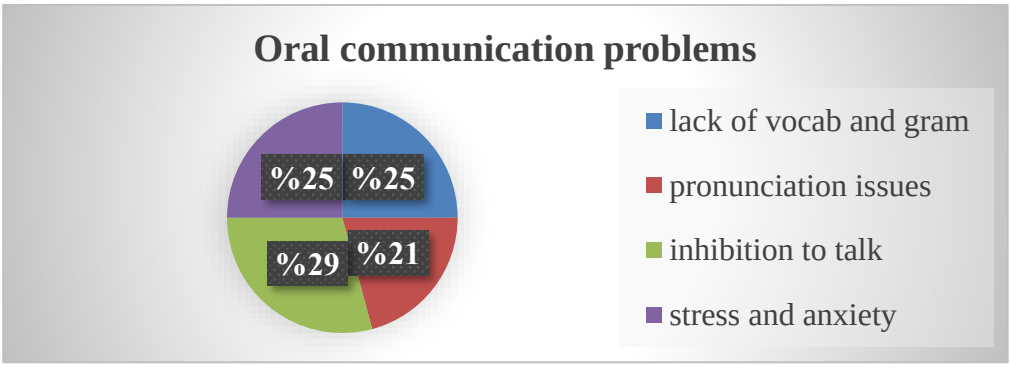


Figure two shows the results of problems that face learners in oral

communication classes. 25% of learners answer that they lack vocabulary and grammar, the same percentage answer with stress and anxiety. 21% of them say they have pronunciation issues while 29% are inhibited to talk in oral sessions.

4.3. The Impact of Gamification Tools in Improving Oral Communication Skills

Many learners feel bored and uninterested, in addition to facing many hurdles while attending English classes, especially in oral classes. This leads teachers to adopt alternative strategies like gamification tools.

Question 1. Do like using games in oral class?

Table 3. Opinion about Using Games in Oral Class

Opinion about using games in oral class		
Yes	46	95.83%
No	2	4.17%

Table three shows the results of learners' opinion about using games in oral class. Nearly all of them (95.83%) enjoy using games in oral communication classroom.

Question 2. How often do you play games in oral classroom?

Figure 3. Frequency of Using Games in Oral Classroom

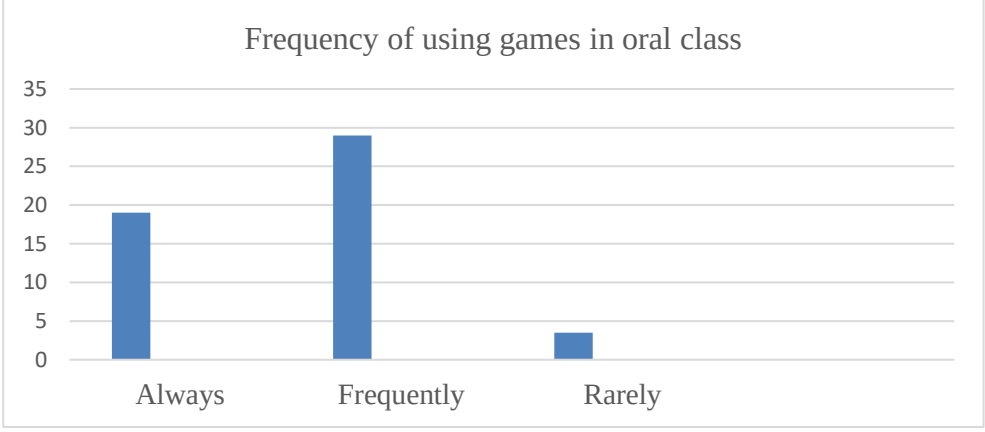


Figure three shows the results of the frequency of using games in oral class. All learners use games in oral class whether always (39.58%) or frequently (60.42%).

Question 3. Which game element do you prefer most?

Figure 4. Preferred Game Element

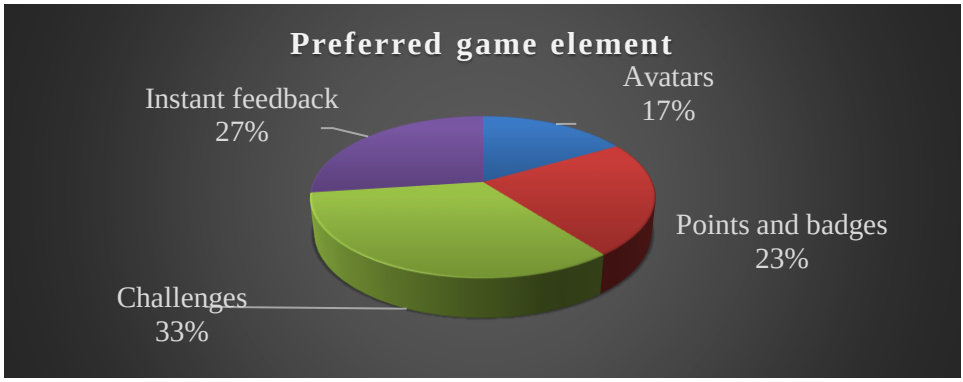


Figure four shows the results of learners' preference for game elements. Their opinions are varied; 33.33% prefer challenges and competitions, 27.08% favor instant feedback. 16.6% like avatars while 22.91% prefer points and badges.

Question 4. Specify your degree of agreement to the following statements

Table 4. learners' opinions toward the impact of using gamification tools in enhancing oral communication skills.

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.Gamification tools prevent boredom and indifference in oral sessions.	31.25%	56.25%	8.33%	2.08%	2.08%
2. Playing games increases my self-confidence and motivates me to participate in discussions.	25%	62.5%	6.25%	4.16%	2.08%
3. Using language learning games encourages me to involve in conversations without being criticized of making mistakes.	37.5%	52.08%	4.16%	2.08%	4.16%
4.Gamification tools help me to	25%	68.75%	2.08%	2.08%	2.08%

overcome oral difficulties like lack of grammar and vocabulary.					
5. Playing educational games spreads joy, interest and competition in the learning environment.	20.83%	72.91%	4.16%	2.08%	0%

Table four shows the results of learners' opinion toward using gamification tools in improving oral communication skills. In the first statement which says that gamification tools prevent boredom and learners' indifference, most learners agree (56.25%) and strongly agree (31.25%). The second statement, playing games increases self-confidence and motivates learners to participate in discussions nearly all learners (87.5%) answer whether they agree or strongly agree. In the third statement using language learning games encourages learners to involve in conversations without being criticized of making mistakes also learners answer with agree and strongly agree (89.08%). Next, Gamification tools help to overcome oral difficulties like lack of grammar and vocabulary, learners agree (68.75%) and strongly agree (25%). The last statement, playing educational games spreads joy, interest and competition in the learning environment, mostly all learners (93%) agree and strongly agree.

Question 5. What are your perceptions about using gamification tools in enhancing oral communication skills?

Most learners answer that they like using gamification strategy in oral sessions. Majority of them state that playing games reduce anxiety, stress, and fear of making mistakes during oral sessions which increase their self-confidence, esteem, and motivation to talk in discussions and conversations. Others say that playing digital games improve their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation with the repeated practice which encourages them to participate in oral classroom. In addition to that playing games prevents boredom and dullness that English learners usually feel. They enjoy competition and challenges that games create in engaging and pleasant learning environment

5. Discussion

Concerning the first question which is "to what degree is gamification applied in English classrooms?". Games have been used in English learning for many decades, yet with the technological advancements and learners' need to experience alternatives to improve their language skills and especially their oral communication abilities. Eventually, English teachers in all over the world tend to adopt gamification strategy as a support to learners in oral communication English classrooms.

Concerning the second question and third question "What is the impact of games on oral communication skills? and "What solutions do gamification provide to overcome learners' oral communication difficulties?" the two questions are interrelated since the impact of games on oral communication skills lies on the various solution that gamification provides to overcome learners' oral communication difficulties. Gamification plays an important role in engaging learners to take part in English classroom and develop their language skills. Additionally, games include educational content that motivates learners to develop their vocabulary and grammar which enables them to gain self-confidence to talk without being scared to receive criticism from teachers and peers(1). Furthermore, it enhances pronunciation issues through the playback option and instant feedback that games offer. Gamification as well provide learners interesting game elements that motivates them to participate including challenges, rewards, points, badges, feedback and avatars that spread joy and excitement in the learning environment as a result stress and anxiety become decreased, inhibition to talk also disappear the fact that leads learners to involve in discussions and conversations(2).

(1) Sangkyun Kim et al, Gamification in Learning and Education: Enjoy Learning Like Gaming (Advances in Game-Based Learning), 1st ed, Springer International Publishing AG, 2018, p. 64.
(2) Ibid, p. 104.

The last question "What are learners' perceptions toward using gamification in oral communication classrooms?". The use of games in English oral classes make learners encouraged and involved with their teachers and peers. Gamification makes them feel interested and excited to engage in oral sessions and take an active part in communication activities. They feel comfortable while using alternative characters (avatars) in games the matter that suit introvert learners to talk and communicate without being shy or embarrassed. Thus, games provide a safe environment to both learners and teachers where they share positive attitudes and strong relationships(1).

6. Conclusion

English learning is considered as crucially significant to many learners. Mastering English provides access to vast resources of knowledge, entertainment, and cultural interaction, making it a highly desirable language to acquire. Nevertheless, they encounter several difficulties when they attempt to learn English oral skills which prevent them from communicating effectively. Therefore, teachers seek to find alternative strategies to implement them in oral classes. Gamification is a powerful tool that approve to be beneficial and successful in enhancing English learning in general and oral skills in particular. Furthermore, using games in oral classroom enables learners to overcome the different obstacles and difficulties that they encounter. Gamification motivates learners to face their fears concerning others' criticism and judgement. Furthermore, it provides learners with knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and enhances their abilities in pronunciation. This leads learners to gain self-confidence, esteem and motivation to take part in conversations and discussions which improves their oral communication skills and encourages them to communicate effectively in oral communication sessions.

(1) Edwin Alfonso Simbaña-Simbaña et al, Gamification for improving oral communication skills in English as a Foreign Language learners. *CIENCIAMATRIA*, *9*(2), 2023, p. 376.

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