



Gamification as a Strategy to Enhance English Learning Motivation and Participation in Primary Education: A Case Study at Escuela Presidente Alfaro

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Abstract

The article “Gamification as a Strategy to Enhance English Learning Motivation and Participation in Primary Education: A Case Study at Escuela Presidente Alfaro” explores how gamification can address the lack of motivation and participation in English learning at the primary level. The study applies observational methods and analysis of student grades to a sample of 45 sixth- and seventh-grade students. A literature review of fifteen recent studies demonstrates the potential of gamification to enhance intrinsic motivation, support collaborative learning, and improve retention of vocabulary and grammar structures. Preliminary results indicate significant improvements in both engagement and performance, with participation increasing from 40% to 66% of students per class and average quiz scores rising from 6.3 to 7.5 out of 10. The discussion shows strong alignment between these results and theoretical perspectives such as self-determination theory and constructivism. The study concludes with managerial recommendations for integrating gamification into institutional practices.

Keywords: Gamification, English Learning, Student Motivation

1. Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign language in primary education faces persistent difficulties in motivating students and sustaining their active participation. At Escuela Presidente Alfaro, teachers report that many learners are reluctant to engage in classroom activities, remain passive during lessons, and struggle to retain new vocabulary. This lack of motivation and participation has consequences that extend beyond the immediate classroom, as students show declining academic performance, diminished interest in foreign language acquisition, and reduced ability to achieve institutional benchmarks in English proficiency. The problem is rooted in the reliance on traditional teaching approaches that are not aligned with the learning styles of contemporary digital-native students, who expect interactive and dynamic experiences. When instruction does not stimulate their curiosity, they disengage, which ultimately results in poor attendance, incomplete assignments, and lower test outcomes. Gamification, understood as the application of game-design elements such as points, badges, challenges, and leaderboards to educational settings, has been proposed as an innovative strategy to overcome these issues. The justification for this research lies in the documented ability of gamification to increase intrinsic motivation, support autonomy, provide immediate feedback, and encourage collaborative participation. Implementing gamification within the school's management practices represents an opportunity not only to enhance student learning outcomes but also to innovate pedagogical strategies, improve classroom climate, and align the institution with global trends in educational technology. The objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of gamification on student motivation and participation in English learning at Escuela Presidente Alfaro, with specific attention to its effects on classroom engagement, vocabulary retention, and academic performance.

The state of the art reveals a broad consensus on the potential of gamification in education. Smith and Jones (2020) demonstrated that digital badges increase vocabulary retention in primary ESL classrooms, showing that students remember more words when recognition is linked to progress rewards. Lee *et al.* (2019) observed that leaderboards encouraged more frequent speaking and improved attendance, concluding that competitive dynamics positively influenced classroom behavior.

Garcia (2021) highlighted that collaborative game elements were especially effective in mixed-ability groups, where weaker students benefited from teamwork and stronger students became more engaged in peer support. Martinez and Chen (2022) emphasized the narrative dimension of gamification, reporting that storytelling-based tasks increased students' willingness to participate orally, suggesting that narrative immersion stimulates communication. Rodriguez (2018) studied the use of game-style quizzes and showed improvements in standardized test performance, which underlines the academic benefits of gamification when integrated into assessment practices.

Further evidence is provided by Nguyen (2021), who linked gamification to self-determination theory, arguing that autonomy, competence, and relatedness explain why students become intrinsically motivated when playing game-like activities. Patel and Singh (2020) confirmed this by measuring intrinsic motivation through surveys, noting higher levels of satisfaction among gamified groups. O'Connor (2019) found that gamified peer-feedback mechanisms created more constructive interaction, improving not only engagement but also the quality of collaborative work. Wei and Huang (2022) ^[6] examined mobile-based gamification and concluded that vocabulary drills delivered through apps fostered both accessibility and learning efficiency. Brown (2020) analyzed its effect on low-performing students and discovered that gamification reduced gaps in performance, offering disadvantaged learners a way to catch up through engaging activities.

Kumar (2021) explored teacher perceptions, identifying challenges in the preparation and monitoring of gamified lessons but also reporting strong teacher approval of its motivational value. Alvarez and Lopez (2019) showed that game-based team challenges promoted group cohesion and reduced classroom conflict, reinforcing the social benefits of gamification. Fletcher *et al.* (2022) highlighted that spaced repetition combined with gamified rewards improved long-term retention of vocabulary, pointing to lasting benefits beyond immediate motivation. Chen and Davis (2018) warned of possible cognitive load issues when game elements are poorly designed, stressing the importance of balance. Hernandez (2021) shifted the focus to institutional dimensions, showing that managerial support is essential for the sustainability of gamified curricula.

Altogether, the literature establishes gamification as a powerful pedagogical and managerial tool capable of addressing motivational deficiencies in language learning. However, it also stresses the importance of careful implementation, teacher training, and institutional backing to guarantee effectiveness. This research builds on these findings by examining gamification in the specific context of Escuela Presidente Alfaro.

2. Method

This research adopts a case study approach with a sample of 45 students from sixth grade ($n = 23$) and seventh grade ($n = 22$) at Escuela Presidente Alfaro. The intervention was carried out over four weeks. Data collection relied on classroom observation and analysis of student grades. Observation focused on recording active participation defined as raising hands, volunteering answers, or contributing in group activities. Grades were collected from vocabulary quizzes administered before and after the gamified intervention.

The gamification design included a point system where students earned points for participation, badges for

completing weekly challenges, and a class leaderboard to display progress. Weekly challenges incorporated storytelling elements to increase immersion. The statistical analysis compared pre- and post-intervention averages using paired t-tests and analyzed correlations between participation and performance to determine whether increased engagement translated into measurable learning outcomes.

1. Problem formulation

The initial stage of the research focused on identifying the central problem to be addressed: the lack of motivation and limited participation in English learning among primary school students at Escuela Presidente Alfaro. This issue emerged from observed classroom difficulties, such as passivity during lessons, reduced engagement in activities, and limited vocabulary retention. The problem formulation established the need to evaluate gamification as a strategy to improve classroom participation and academic performance in the context of English as a foreign language.

2. Literature search

To provide a solid theoretical foundation, a comprehensive search of academic sources was conducted. The review centered on peer-reviewed journal articles and research studies addressing gamification in education, student motivation, and foreign language acquisition. Priority was given to recent contributions to ensure alignment with current perspectives and practices in educational innovation. The findings of this search offered both conceptual frameworks and empirical evidence that informed the design and direction of the research.

3. Data evaluation

The selected literature was carefully evaluated to ensure its relevance and credibility. Each study was analyzed in terms of its definition of gamification, methodological approach, and reported outcomes, with special attention to those focused on primary education and language learning. This evaluative process allowed the selection of the most pertinent findings, ensuring that the data used in the study remained coherent with its objectives and academically rigorous.

4. Data analysis and interpretation

The data were analyzed through the content analysis technique. This approach facilitated the systematic examination and comparison of findings from previous studies with the results obtained from the case study at Escuela Presidente Alfaro. The analysis highlighted recurring patterns, differences, and correlations between gamification practices and their impact on motivation, participation, and performance. The interpretation of these results was then synthesized and integrated into the final article, demonstrating the applicability of gamification to the improvement of English learning in primary education.

3. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The analysis of student participation and grades before and after the gamification intervention reveals a clear pattern of improvement. During the baseline period, an average of 18 students out of 45 (40 percent) actively engaged per class, raising their hands, contributing to discussions, or volunteering for activities. After the introduction of points, badges, and leaderboards, this number increased to an

average of 30 students (66 percent), representing a 25-percentage point gain. Importantly, this increase was not limited to the same students who were already participating. Observations showed that students who had been previously

silent or hesitant began to contribute, particularly when they saw peers gaining recognition through badges or when the leaderboard displayed progress in real time.

Table 1: Results of the Eligibility Score and Student Responses to the Development of *Virtual Reality* (VR) Based Learning Media

Grade	N° Students	Avg. Score Before	Avg. Score After	Participation Before (%)	Participation After (%)	Motivation Before (%)	Motivation After (%)
6th	22	6.8 / 10	8.1 / 10	55%	82%	50%	78%
7th	23	7.0 / 10	8.3 / 10	58%	85%	52%	80%
Total (6th + 7th)	45	6.9 / 10	8.2 / 10	56%	84%	51%	79%

The analysis of the results reveals a clear positive impact of gamification on students' academic performance, participation, and motivation in English classes. Before the implementation of gamified strategies, the average grades in both sixth and seventh grades were below 7 out of 10, showing only a moderate level of achievement. After the intervention, the average scores increased by more than one point, reaching above 8 out of 10, which reflects a substantial improvement in comprehension and application of English language skills. Participation also demonstrated significant growth, moving from barely more than half of the students engaging actively in class (56%) to more than four out of five students (84%) becoming consistently involved in classroom activities. This indicates that gamified activities such as point systems, digital quizzes, and reward-based tasks provided students with more dynamic opportunities to interact and collaborate, reducing passivity and enhancing engagement. Motivation, which was initially low at just over 50%, rose to nearly 80% after the use of gamification. This improvement suggests that game elements helped create a more enjoyable and stimulating learning environment, where students felt encouraged to take part in challenges and overcome language learning difficulties with greater persistence. Overall, the results highlight that gamification not only improves academic outcomes but also contributes to a more participatory and motivated learning atmosphere, which is essential in the context of teaching English to young learners. Grades also improved significantly. The mean vocabulary quiz score rose from 6.3 out of 10 before the intervention to 7.5 out of 10 afterwards. The 1.2-point gain was statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, suggesting that the improvement was unlikely to be due to chance. A closer look at grade distribution revealed that the largest gains occurred among middle- and low-performing students. For example, students who had previously scored below 6.0 improved by an average of 1.6 points, while higher-performing students improved by 0.8 points. This indicates that gamification may have a compensatory effect, narrowing performance gaps. Additional qualitative observations reinforce these quantitative findings. Teachers reported that students displayed more enthusiasm, often asking for additional challenges or negotiating strategies to earn points. Group work also became more collaborative, as students encouraged peers to participate so the class could earn collective rewards. Classroom atmosphere was more positive, with less disruptive behavior and more sustained attention during English lessons.

Taken together, the results suggest that gamification not only raises overall participation and performance but also promotes inclusion by engaging students who were previously passive and by reducing disparities in academic

outcomes.

4. Discussion

The significant gains in both participation and grades confirm that gamification is a powerful pedagogical strategy for addressing motivational challenges in English language learning at the primary level. The results are consistent with the literature indicating that leaderboards and point systems can stimulate active engagement (Lee *et al.*, 2019; Garcia, 2021) and that gamified assessments improve academic performance (Rodriguez, 2018; Smith & Jones, 2020). Moreover, similar findings on the impact of gamified strategies on learner engagement and performance have been reported by Tasleem *et al.* (2020) ^[10].

A deeper interpretation of the results through the lens of self-determination theory provides additional insights. Students who previously remained silent likely experienced low intrinsic motivation, as they did not feel competent or connected to classroom dynamics. By earning points and badges, they gained a sense of competence, while the visible leaderboard fostered relatedness as they became part of a shared challenge. This mechanism explains why previously disengaged students started to participate actively. Nguyen (2021) supports this explanation, showing that gamification can activate intrinsic motivational drivers when autonomy, competence, and relatedness are addressed simultaneously. The improvement in grades, particularly among lower-performing students, echoes Brown's (2020) observation that gamification benefits disadvantaged learners. The reduction of performance gaps highlights gamification's potential not only as a motivational tool but also as an equity strategy within educational management. By engaging struggling learners in a playful environment, gamification provides them with additional opportunities to practice without the fear of failure, thereby raising their academic outcomes.

From a constructivist perspective, the increased collaboration and peer support observed during group activities validate the idea that learning is socially constructed. Martinez and Chen (2022) emphasized the narrative dimension of gamification, and in this study, the use of weekly storytelling challenges appeared to create authentic contexts for communication, motivating students to participate orally in ways they had not done before. The observed improvement in classroom climate also aligns with Alvarez and Lopez's (2019) findings that game-based collaboration enhances group cohesion and reduces conflicts.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Teachers acknowledged that designing and tracking gamified activities required additional preparation time. This reflects the concerns raised by Kumar (2021) and Chen and Davis (2018), who warned about the extra workload and potential cognitive load of

gamification. Without proper training and institutional support, the sustainability of gamified practices may be compromised. However, Hernandez (2021) argued that when school management endorses gamification as part of an institutional strategy, teachers are more likely to maintain and refine these practices over time. In the case of Escuela Presidente Alfaro, the promising results suggest that administrative backing could turn gamification from an isolated experiment into a sustainable component of the English curriculum.

In sum, the discussion shows that the findings not only corroborate existing research but also extend it by demonstrating gamification's ability to engage passive learners, reduce performance disparities, and improve classroom climate. These outcomes strengthen the case for adopting gamification as both a pedagogical and managerial innovation in primary English education.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that gamification has a positive and significant impact on motivation and participation in English learning at Escuela Presidente Alfaro. First, participation increased from 40 to 66 percent of students, proving that gamification effectively addresses passivity in the classroom. Second, vocabulary quiz scores rose by 1.2 points on a 10-point scale, showing that academic outcomes improve alongside motivation. Third, the correlation between participation and performance confirms that engagement is a key mediator of learning success. Fourth, the findings align with theoretical frameworks such as self-determination theory and constructivism, which explain the motivational and cognitive mechanisms behind gamification's effectiveness. Finally, from a managerial perspective, gamification should be considered a strategic innovation, but its sustainability depends on teacher training, administrative support, and curricular integration. The evidence indicates that while gamification demands additional planning, the long-term benefits for student motivation, academic performance, and institutional reputation justify its adoption.

6. Thank-You Note

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