

THE BENEFITS OF GAMIFICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

(Manfaat Penggunaan Gamifikasi dalam Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris)

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Abstract

Gamification in English language learning comprises of game mechanics which involve points, badges, leader boards and rewards. It is one of the approaches that has been used by the educators to change the pace of lesson in learning English. This approach has been used in the class because of the benefits that it can offer in English language learning. This paper focuses on the use of gamification in English language teaching (ELT) and learning by looking at the advantages it has brought to language skills. Gamification can be used in the teaching of the different skills in English and in terms of its benefits to English language learning, gamification makes learning more effective by making grammar learning more pleasurable, vocabulary memorisation more successful, communication and cooperation easier to be practiced and others. It is hoped that this paper will add to the literature on the applications of gamification in ELT and lead to the betterment of ELT in second language setting particularly in Malaysia.

Keywords: gamification, English language teaching, teaching approach, ELT, benefit

Abstrak

Gamifikasi dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris terdiri daripada mekanik permainan yang merangkumi ganjaran mata, lencana pencapaian, bar pengisian kemajuan dan ganjaran. Ia adalah salah satu pendekatan yang telah digunakan oleh para pendidik untuk mengubah situasi pengajaran dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Pendekatan ini telah digunakan di dalam kelas kerana faedah yang boleh diperolehi daripadanya dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Kertas kerja ini memberi tumpuan kepada penggunaan gamifikasi dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris dengan melihat kepada manfaat yang boleh didapati daripada penggunaan gamifikasi kepada kemahiran-kemahiran dalam bahasa. Gamifikasi boleh digunakan dalam pengajaran kemahiran-kemahiran yang berbeza dalam Bahasa Inggeris dan dari segi manfaatnya kepada pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris, gamifikasi menjadikan pembelajaran tatabahasa lebih menyenangkan, hafalan perkataan lebih berjaya, komunikasi dan kerjasama lebih mudah dilaksanakan dan lain-lain. Diharapkan kertas kerja ini akan menambah kepada literatur berkenaan gamifikasi dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris dan membawa kepada peningkatan pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa kedua terutamanya di Malaysia.

Kata kunci: gamifikasi, pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris, pendekatan pengajaran, faedah

1.0 INTRODUCTION

English has been used widely around the world and this situation urges countries worldwide to also put emphasis on the mastery of this language in competing at international level. As technology evolves, English has been playing big roles in different fields which includes education (Rajathurai, 2018) and Malaysia is included. In the context of Malaysia, English is learnt as a second language which started as early as at kindergarten level. Furthermore, English is used as a medium of instruction not only in schools but also at tertiary level. The emphasis given by Malaysian government in terms of English mastery is also stated in Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025. The aspiration of students, according to the MEB 2013-2025, is they are expected to be bilingually proficient in English and Bahasa Malaysia and upon leaving school, students are expected to be able to work in English environment (Ministry of Education, 2012).

As learners of a second language, the learners' performance will be influenced by few aspects. Motivation is one of the major attributes that may affect the learners' performance (Pham, 2021). This is because motivation can direct one's behavior or cause an individual in wanting to repeat a behavior and vice versa (Alizadeh, 2016). Relating this aspect to second language learning, this means that the learners' performance in learning English will depend on how motivated they are in the learning process. In other words, the more motivated they are, the better chances they have to be successful learners of a second language. Additionally, apart from the issue of motivation, according to Ooi et al. (2020), students in Malaysia have issues with the four basic skills of English namely speaking, listening, reading and writing skills.

In order to cater to this situation, the educators need to play significant roles in equipping themselves with suitable and innovative approaches. The educators need to upgrade themselves in order to cater to the learners' preference and needs as teaching practices that are effective can actually encourage the learners to think beyond their capability (Cambridge International, 2021). This shows that it is possible for the learners to perform better than they usually do with the suitable teaching approaches applied by the language educators. It may be the result of enhanced motivation to learn as stated earlier in this paper. In this case, the conventional chalk-and-talk approach may not be suitable to be used in all situations especially when dealing with different types of learners who may have different levels of proficiency and preferences.

In addressing the issues, gamification is one of the possible approaches that can be introduced to make learning English more exciting. This is because the application of gamification uses the elements of reinforcement such as points, levels, badges and leaderboards in order to make the learners committed and motivated (Subhash & Cudney, 2018) to the learning process. Numerous research has been conducted in figuring out the impact of gamification on learners' motivation. Research by Jagust et al. (2017) found that the application of gamification positively affected primary learners' motivation by conducting analysis on log data. Similarly, more recent research by Anisa et al. (2020) revealed that the learners' intrinsic motivation levels were higher and their intrinsic motivation were stimulated with the use of reward structure. These are perhaps the pieces of evidences provided in looking at how gamification can benefit learning. Considering the positive impacts that gamification can offer, particularly on the aspect of motivation to learn, it is not

surprising that it has become one of the highly attractive approaches to be used by English educators in the teaching and learning sessions.

This paper is focusing on three aspects related to gamification in English language teaching. It is divided into three main sections. The first section draws on the concepts of gamification and game-based learning. The second section delineates the learning theories behind the implementation of gamification in learning followed by the usage of gamification in English language teaching and learning. The final section talks about the benefits that it can offer based on the different skills in English.

2.0 THE CONCEPT OF GAMIFICATION AND GAME-BASED LEARNING

2.1 Gamification

Gamification is most frequently described as the use of game mechanics and the principles of game design in non-game environments to drive users to accomplish goals (Betts et al., 2022). It is a generic process meant to incorporate play's logic and components into pedagogical practices. Leaderboards, social rankings, progress bars, performance graphs, avatars, badges, and reward systems are just a few of the game features that encourage user participation and engagement in any chosen endeavor by giving them a sense of accomplishment after completing a task. Furthermore, by sparking intrinsic motivations through game design elements, gamification seeks to alter user behavior. According to Cuarrio et al. (2021), it has evolved into a possible teaching tactic for boosting commitment, aspiration, and participation under various conditions. It has been used in educational settings because it is regarded as being a crucial component of the teaching-learning process.

2.2 Game-based Learning

Game-based learning is using the features in games for educational reasons, where it is possible to identify accomplishments by utilizing games as a teaching tool without placing any stress or pressure on students to raise their level of education (Akour et al., 2020). The success of game-based learning hinges on the student's ability to find and investigate pertinent game features within a learning context. While participating in the game, a student may see the results of their decisions, and they can actively practice and learn the proper method to accomplish things. The learning objectives are supported by the game mechanics, storyline, and characters, and the learning results are incorporated into the game design. According to Kirstavridou et al. (2020), game-based learning is a cutting-edge strategy that combines computers and technology and gives educational value by utilizing various software applications to successfully improve teaching, test students, and evaluate their progress. There are elements of competitiveness, involvement, and rapid reward in this process. Students are motivated and engaged by this type of challenge to learn by completing a sequence of tasks.

2.3 Differences of Gamification and Game-Based Learning

People frequently mix these two terms, which is a regular occurrence. Gamification is a process in which game elements are being integrated in a non-gaming context (Mauriner, 2019). It is the use of game mechanics like point scoring, rivalry with others, and rules of play to solve problems and as a strategy to promote engagement (Nur Syafiqah et al., 2022). Contrarily, game-based learning is a method of education and

training that makes use of games to attain a certain goal, develop new abilities, and stimulate creative thought. As stated by Kirstavridou et al. (2020), the primary distinction between the two terms is how they incorporate game mechanics with instructional content.

Another clear contrast between gamification and game-based learning is that the former frequently changes already-existing educational activities by adding game elements, while the latter employs actual games as its main teaching tool. This was mentioned by Hanif et al. (2019), stating that with gamification, the student engaged in a session that incorporates game aspects like gaining points without playing the complete game and getting rewarded for finishing a task or problem. Instead, game-based learning uses a separate component with a predetermined beginning, gaming phase, and conclusion state. Additionally, games offer a variety of educational material in a number of settings.

3.0 GAMIFICATION AND THEORIES OF LEARNING

Language gamification is often guided by two main types of learning which are e-learning and m-learning. According to Marunevich et al. (2021), e-learning is defined as an active application of multi-purpose electronic devices (personal computer, laptop, e-readers, smartphones, etc.), Internet, intranets/extranets, interactive TV or satellite broadcast for both educational content delivery and cooperation between the participants of the learning interaction (p.3). They also defined the term m-learning as learning based on the wide use of small, portable computing devices, for instance, smartphones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and similar handheld devices (p. 3).

According to Elyas et al. (2020), the main three pillars of learning theories are Behaviorism, Cognitivism and Constructivism learning theories. The three learning theories are the theories that become the main reference for educators in the field of education in addressing the different needs of their students. Some educators may integrate one learning theory into the other in order to consolidate the weaknesses of the learning theory so that the learning process will become more effective. There may also be educators who have turned to more recent learning theories which they deem more effective.



Figure 1: Theories of learning

Source: Elyas et.al. (2020)

Figure 1 shows the summary of learning theories which become the basis of e-learning and m-learning which guide language gamification. In the diagram, it can be seen that the three pillars of learning theories together with other learning theories have become the basis in the formation of e-learning and m-learning. If a further look is given to the theory behind e-learning, it can be seen that e-learning is based on the theory of connectivism which focuses on how technology becomes an active participant in the process of learning (Harasim, 2017). M-learning, on the other hand, is based on social-constructivism learning theory (Valconi, 2018) which brings the idea that learning is a dynamic process which involves a group or community.

4.0 THE USE OF GAMIFICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Gamification techniques can be effectively and judiciously applied to the educational process to provide significant results. Gamification has been implemented as a pedagogical technique due to its effectiveness in stimulating educational achievements and motivation of the learners, providing feedback in the studying process. The utilization of gamification in teaching classrooms has evolved according to the teachers' technology literacy and the availability of resources to employ it.

The process of incorporating gamification approaches into the educational process is quite specialized, so it is vital to consider the key characteristics of a method as well as to abide by its fundamental principles. Excellent learning outcomes can be accomplished based on the usage of cutting-edge technology by providing gamified classes with competent methodological support. The combination of gaming and information and communication technologies has caused a paradigm shift in e-learning, which is supported by the fact that the educational conditions for modern language didactics have undergone technological transformation (Fleming, 2018). The former has evolved into a comprehensive method of learning about the world since it is a component of man's everyday and ongoing digital interactions with the environment, including artefacts, natural and social objects, other people, and the learning environment. As pointed out by Yaroshenko et al. (2022), in order to develop a gamification instruction, it is essential to comprehend the behavior or profile of the student in general and, in particular, the most effective technique to increase their involvement.

5.0 THE BENEFITS OF GAMIFICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Gamification has been used in many English language teaching classes due to the benefits that it can offer. As language consists of different skills, it is interesting to see how gamification can benefit the different language skills.

5.1 The benefits of gamification on language skills

1. Grammar

The instruction of grammar now includes gamification. The inclusion of gamification in grammar learning in English classes thus offers a joyful learning environment because grammar training is seen as monotonous and yet founded in the memorization of grammatical rules. Gamification can be utilized to increase students' motivation and interest in grammar study, according to Ardi and Rianita (2022). The more fun students have while studying (playing), the less anxious they will be and the more they will learn. This is in agreement with Azman and Yunus (2019) who stated that the inclusion of Kahoot!; which is one of the gamification apps in the grammar class, has made

grammar learning more pleasurable and lasting since the games gave students a purposeful setting for communicative grammar practice. Younger students were encouraged to understand irregular verbs, which is often done through rote learning given by the platform. This demonstrates the enormous potential for gamification to encourage grammar learning. By looking at the immediate quiz results, Kahoot! allowed teachers to pinpoint the issues that their pupils were having. Gamification tools let students test their ideas without worrying about failing (Poole et al., 2019). The idea of gamifying grammar instruction can also inspire perseverance and the desire to both win and learn, which can boost motivation and engagement. Students may be inspired to learn more grammar in class due to the competitive environment in the classroom. Another possible explanation to this is the element that is crucial in gamification which is points. In behaviorism theory of learning, it is stated that rewards or reinforcement that are presented to the learners can control their behavior (Muhajirah, 2020). In this situation, the learners compete to get better points to win the game. Thus, when learners are presented with points to reward their achievement, they become the pushing factor for them which leads to better engagement and motivation.

2. Vocabulary

Vocabulary learning process can also be enhanced through the application of gamification. One of the benefits that can be seen is in terms of students' memorisation skills. Students' memorisation skill has been reported to be significantly improved after the implementation of gamification in vocabulary learning (Melor & Mohd Azmanuddin, 2019). This is possibly because of the fun learning atmosphere that gamification can offer along the process of learning English. Furthermore, as gamification may also involve teamwork, the supportive learning atmosphere can assist the students to master the language (Mega & Achmad Yudi, 2020) which perhaps lead to better memorisation. Adding to the benefits, according to Nikmah (2020), vocabulary learning which is gamified leads to better students' engagement in a proactive learning environment and this in turn results in better vocabulary knowledge among the students. This is because of the practicality as well as adaptability qualities that gamification can offer to the learning process.

3. Speaking

Gamification techniques might be able to address the issue with the growth of English-speaking competencies. Speed rate denotes the capacity to assess if pacing is acceptable in relation to listener qualities for speech input processing (Kaur & Aziz, 2020). In such a manner, the learner gauges their success by the feedback they receive on the material they output. Gamification is a helpful technique for practicing speech because it removes potential learning barriers like discomfort felt while speaking in public owing to a negative perception of mistakes or a divergence in learning pace (the need for repetition and more practice). Users are given a secure environment for self-directed learning, frequent practice, and development. Because they place an emphasis on the ludic and creative use of the language while stimulating and growing speaking through interaction and socialization, games are the ideal method for improving oral skills during the teaching and learning process (Hernandez-Cherrez et al., 2021). Students are therefore expected to communicate ideas, create questions and answers, and negotiate meaning when using gamification tools.

Reading

Gamified learning is also found to be affecting reading skills positively. As elicited by Fotima and Artikova (2023), through the application of one of the mobile reading apps to young readers, they experienced better ability to comprehend and assimilate the stories and lessons. In addition, it also enhanced their pronunciation. Different gamification elements also could contribute significantly to the students' development in reading comprehension levels. The environment of competition among pupils in the classroom is one of these elements. Every student makes an effort to finish the reading assignments in order to earn certain points or rewards, which heightened rivalry among their peers. In this sense, gamification is useful for giving students an opportunity to compete with one another by accumulating points as quickly as feasible. According to Rami and Abdallah (2020), students may learn more effectively and quickly with the aid of gamification, and it may also inspire them to keep learning by making them more eager to attend class and pay attention to important academic assignments. Students may receive genuine opportunities to enhance their performance in reading comprehension lessons.

4. Integrated setting

The positive impact of gamification can also be seen when the skills are being integrated in the learning process. In one of the settings where English is taught integratedly, gamified English learning has made the students have more willingness to cooperate and communicate in online learning sessions (Babakhani & Tabatabaee-Yazdi, 2022). Cooperative learning skills are needed in learning English as learners are expected to be able to collaborate with others along the process of gaining knowledge. In language learning, when the learners possess the ability to cooperate, they will be able to learn from others which in turn will benefit them. Furthermore, communication skills are equally significant particularly in language learning in order for the learners to be a good language user. In a different setting, the worthwhile impact of gamification on the learners' motivation and engagement are not only seen when learning takes place but also during assessment. Hsiu-Lien and Li-Wen (2019) used gamification to assess the learners' understanding and stated that the learners thought that the use of gamification in assessment had enhanced their motivation as well as learning effectiveness. In other words, the element of fun that gamification can offer makes the learners more eager to learn and give their attention either during the learning session or assessment which possibly affects their performance. In addition, it also helps in decreasing the test anxiety that the students may experience.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the development of technology has significantly affected the modernisation and improvement in many fields throughout the world and these also include education. In the context of English language teaching, gamification can be applied to teach the different skills of English. Furthermore, the implementation of gamification in teaching English has found to be improving the quality and outcomes of the teaching and learning process. It was mentioned that gamification has brought about profound impacts to the students particularly in the different skills of the English language. Despite the benefits of gamification, in the process of lesson planning, the teachers need to know their students in order to be prepared with the most effective technique in applying gamification in the classroom to make the lesson more effective and increase the students' engagement.

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