

The Impact of Gamification in Enhancing Students' Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Gamification in education appears to be an emerging trend, as it is perceived to make teaching and learning more engaging and motivating. However, despite its popularity, there is limited research on how well it improves language skills, specifically speaking skills. Among the four language abilities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), speaking skills are considered the most important. This review therefore aims to recognise the impacts of gamification in improving speaking skills from learners' perspectives of different ages and academic levels by reviewing 13 articles and journals from the year 2019 to 2023. The findings suggest incorporating the elements of gamification in the classroom benefits the learners in terms of increasing motivation, enhancing speaking skills and competency, increasing participation and engagement, creating a better learning environment, fostering students' collaboration, reducing speaking anxiety and promoting overall positive perception towards gamification. This literature review aims to provide a better overview of the impact of gamification in enhancing learners' speaking skills and recommendations for future researchers to explore more benefits of gamification on speaking skills from both learners' and instructors' perspectives.

Keywords: Gamification; enhancing speaking skills; speaking skills; English language teaching and learning

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the world of education, the importance of technology has been long highlighted. The intersection of technology and pedagogy rose to innovative approaches which aimed at transforming traditional teaching and learning methods. Among these approaches is gamification. Gamification is defined as “the use of game design elements in a non-game context,” with the emphasis on the final product not being a game (Deterding et al, 2011). It refers to the use of game elements in educational contexts such as points, rewards, badges, leaderboards, scoreboards, challenges, and feedback (Barata et al., 2013; Kim, Rothrock, & Freivalds, 2016; Yildirim, 2017, Alomari et al, 2019). Gamification techniques are frequently used in higher education to boost learners’ motivation and engagement in a learning task (Alomari, Al-Samarraie & Yousef, 2019). However, gamification works for all levels of learners as gamification makes them more motivated during lessons. According to Gil-Aciron (2022), motivation is the closest element between language learning and gamification. When students are motivated to learn, it is easier for them to acquire knowledge and thus achieve the learning objectives.

In previous studies, gamification has shown some positive effects in learning language. Using gamification-based online learning makes classroom learning more enjoyable and has a positive impact on student learning outcomes. Gamification benefits students in a variety of ways, including increased motivation and good appearance, development of 21st-century skills, encouraging social interaction, increased competitiveness in learning, and giving students freedom (Wangi, Chandra & Ali, 2022). Furthermore, the learning process becomes more interactive and efficient, the user becomes more enthusiastic and motivated in learning, learning becomes more fun without forgetting the existing material, creating a balance between learning and play, and the user becomes more active in participating in learning (Fedro & Istiono, 2021). It is clear that gamification has impacts on language learning but how does it specifically have effects on students’ speaking skills?

This paper examines the theoretical foundations, practical applications, and empirical evidence surrounding the incorporation of gamification in language learning, with the focus on uncovering its potential to enhance learners’ speaking proficiency. By reviewing a selection of relevant previous studies on the benefits of gamification, we aim to explore how using gamification methods enhances students’ oral communication skills and how it is contributing to the ongoing discourse on optimising language education in the 21st century. Ultimately, educators are encouraged to incorporate this approach as an integral part of their teaching pedagogy within their classrooms.

2.0 ELEMENTS OF GAMIFICATION

Main Gamification, as a pedagogical strategy, encompasses a variety of elements designed to infuse educational experiences with the engaging dynamics found in games. As highlighted by Latkovska and Cine (2020), generally the main idea of gamification is turning the whole learning process into a game by including various elements like achievement badges and prizes, tracking points, scoreboards, progress bars, levels or quests, flexible goals, quizzes, problem solving and time limits into the teaching and learning process. Wanasek (2021) narrows these elements down by outlining four most significant elements or principles of gamification as follows:

1. Element 1 - Points and Rewards, where students earn points by successfully answering the questions correctly, completing a given task or any other achievement
2. Element 2 - Leaderboard describes how performing students are ranked on a leaderboard to showcase their progress like levels in a game
3. Element 3 - Badge, incorporated into the classroom to reward students for their accomplishments and knowledge learned

4. Element 4 - Challenge, refers to a game that is a journey, investigation, or quest that require students to look for specific information to ensure they have fully understood and read what they needed to

The incorporation of gamification elements in the English classroom not only makes learning enjoyable but also cultivates a sense of achievement and motivation, contributing to a more interactive and effective language learning experience. This is in tandem with Pfeiffer et al. (2020) as they view the trends in education to exercise the gamification concept helps to motivate people in different fields using elements of a game, as it provides a positive impact on learning outcomes in various forms such as enjoyment, engagement, motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), results and achievements, satisfaction, and attitudes.

Theoretical frameworks are essential in the field of gamification, particularly in improving students' speaking abilities. Landers (2014) proposed the Theory of Gamified Learning where it is based on this figure.

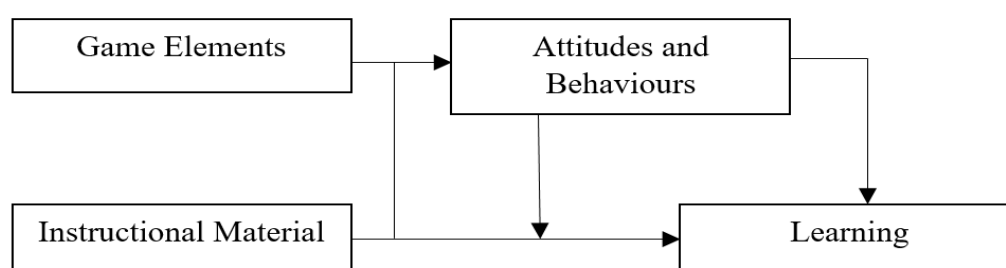


Figure 1: Landers's proposed theory on gamified learning environment

In Figure 1, Landers (2014) mentioned five propositions in his theory which are 1) instructional content influences learning outcomes and behaviours, 2) behaviours or attitudes affect learning, 3) game characteristics influence changes in behaviour or attitudes, 4) game elements influence behaviours and attitudes that influence instructional effectiveness and lastly, 5) behaviours/attitudes mediate the relationship between game elements and learning outcomes. The theory emphasises that teachers' planning in creating learning materials that involve game elements in the classroom affects learners' attitudes or behaviours, ensuring students achieve learning objectives. Hence, educators can create and utilise effective and engaging platforms for language acquisition by incorporating theoretical perspectives into the design and implementation of gamified learning environments.

2.1 Factors Affecting Active Participation In Speaking Lessons

It is critical to consider the factors that influence active participation in speaking activities to understand the impact of gamification on improving learners' speaking skills. One of the main factors is classroom management and environment (Razaghi et al, 2019). There should be a positive and supportive atmosphere that encourages students to feel at ease when they are expressing themselves while taking part during lessons, and this can be done by eliminating the impediments they usually face. Among the speaking challenges experienced by language learners include language anxiety. As Kayaoglu and Saglamel (2013) postulated, language anxiety is usually associated with situational anxiety since it is a particular language learning situation that triggers a learner to grow anxious. This view is supported by Chandra et. al (2021) that claims fear of making mistakes, anxiety, shyness, and a lack of confidence can restrict active participation in speaking lessons.

Moreover, a few studies have shown that lack of motivation would affect students' participation in speaking lessons. The finding in a study done by Khoiriyah (2016) stated that students with a good attitude and high motivation for the English language outperformed those with a poor attitude and low motivation.

Simultaneously, teachers can help to mitigate these negative effects by altering classroom teaching techniques, offering positive support and motivation, developing well-planned lesson plans, and implementing engaging and pleasant activities that can reduce anxiety when taking part in public speaking activities. Overall, by taking these various factors into account, teachers can create an environment and lesson that encourages active learning which then improves students' speaking skills.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study is a simple review of the relevant research on given research questions through the process of identifying, selecting, and analysing the results and discussion section of the selected articles. The selected journal articles are related to the use of gamification in EFL/ESL instruction and learning and its impact specifically on the learner speaking skills with the date of publication ranging from 2019 to 2023. To identify potential publications to be included in this review, literature was searched from the database such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate.

In examining 13 chosen articles on gamification published between 2019 and 2023, inductive content analysis was employed for the review. Vears and Gillam (2022) highlighted that inductive content analysis is particularly suited for analysing text-based data such as written transcripts or documents, whether pre-existing or specifically generated for research. In contrast to predefined content lists, this analytical approach entails a thorough reading of the text and the extraction of insights directly from the content. For this review, the journals were selected to answer this research question, what are the impacts of gamification in enhancing students' speaking skills?

The recurrent themes from the journals were highlighted, and the research which discussed similar benefits of gamification in ESL/EFL classrooms were grouped. These steps were taken to facilitate readers in selecting articles tailored to their specific interests and requirements. Moreover, the recognized themes can serve as a reference for subsequent research, offering a groundwork for further exploration and investigation in the field. Table 1 below presents the list of selected research for this review.

Table 1: List of respondents

No.	Author / Year	Title	Research Design
1	Barcomb & Cardoso (2019)	Rock or Lock? Gamifying an online course management system for pronunciation instruction: Focus on English /r/ and /l/	Mixed method
2	Farhan (2019)	The Role of Gamification in Students' Speaking Learning Activity	Qualitative
3	Cabrera-Solano (2020)	The Use of Digital Portfolios to Enhance English as a Foreign Language Speaking Skills in Higher Education	Mixed method
4	Ahmed (2021)	The Use of Digital Portfolios to Enhance English as a Foreign Language Speaking Skills in Higher Education.	Quantitative
5	Alfuhaid (2021)	The Utilisation of Duolingo to Enhance the Speaking Proficiency of EFL Secondary School Students in Saudi Arabia	Qualitative
6	Azizah et. al (2021)	Enhancing students' communication skill by creating infographics using Genially in learning climate change.	Qualitative

7	Thuy & Hung (2021)	Teachers' Perceptions of using Gamification Apps in Teaching Speaking Skill to EFL Young Learners.	Mixed method
8	Abadi et. al (2022)	The Effects of Gamification on Undergraduate Engineers' Public Speaking Anxiety and Competency	Mixed method
9	Cabrera-Solano (2022)	Game-Based Learning in Higher Education: The Pedagogical Effect of Genially Games in English as a Foreign Language Instruction	Mixed method
10	Siregar et. al (2022)	Teaching Indonesian Speaking Skills with A Gamification Approach	Mixed method
11	Abdul Rahim, et. al. (2023)	More Than Child's Play: Tackling Speech Anxiety Among Malaysian ESL Learners Through Gamification.	Quantitative
12	Huseinovic (2023)	The Effects of Gamification on Student Motivation and Achievement in Learning English as a Foreign Language in Higher Education.	Quantitative
13	Jie et. al (2023)	The Use of Gamification in Enhancing Students Engagement and Performance in ESL Speaking Lessons	Qualitative

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the study based on the research question mentioned in the methodology section.

4.1 Applications used to incorporate gamification in the lesson

The analysis of the applications or websites used to incorporate the elements of gamification in the study is presented as follows:

Table 2: Application, websites or methods used to incorporate gamification in the lesson

No	Applications/ Websites/ Methods	Research
1	Duolingo	Ahmed (2021), Alfuhaid (2021) Huseinovic (2023)
2	Genially	Azizah (2021), Cabrera-Solano (2022)
3	Modified board games (Monopoly-based)	Siregar, et.al. (2022)
4	Digital Escape Room	Jie et al. (2023)
5	Classcraft	Ahmed (2021)
6	Kahoot	Ahmed (2021)

7	Google Drive	Cabrera-Solano (2020)
8	Plotagon	Farhan (2019)
9	VirtualSpeech speaking practice simulation using a VR headset	Abdul Rahim (2023)
10	The Rhetoric: Public Speaking Board Game	Abadi et al. (2022)
11	English Language Learning (ELL) Games	Huseinovic (2023)
12	Moodle	Barcomb & Cardoso (2019)

It is interesting to note that the applications or methods used to incorporate the elements of gamification vary among the articles selected. According to Table 2, two most common tools or platforms used are Duolingo and Genially. Duolingo, is described by Alfuhaid (2021) as a mobile-based, versatile language learning platform known for its emphasis on games and casual conversations, making language learning enjoyable. Its primary function includes facilitating communication with native English speakers, enhancing the overall language-learning experience. Being a tool made specifically to enhance speaking skills and the fact that it is allowing its users to practise real life conversations, it is also considered as a great platform for language learners. Genially, as described by Castillo-Cuesta (2022) and Cabrera-Solano (2022), on the other hand, is one of the most innovative platforms with an intuitive and easy-to-use interface that enables its users to create games which foster interactive communicative experiences. This made it easier for educators or teachers to utilise the platform in the classroom. It is also important to note that some researchers such as Ahmed (2021) did not employ only one application or platform. This shows the flexibility of the educators in deciding the platforms that best suited the need of their research. Other than that, some researchers chose interesting and new platforms to incorporate gamification in their research such as *The Rhetoric: Public Speaking Board Game*, *Monopoly-based board game*, *(Yuk Sama-Sama Skilled Talk (YS-Tc))* and even the *VirtualSpeech speaking simulation*. It shows that there are endless possibilities to be explored, adjusted, or adapted by teachers to create more interesting language lessons. It is hoped that this section can offer some suggestions of the platforms or applications that can be considered by teachers or educators who aspire to gamify their language lesson in the future.

4.2 The impacts of gamification in enhancing students' speaking skills

The analysis of the recurrent themes found in the 13 selected articles on the impacts of gamification in students' speaking skills is tabulated as follows:

Table 3: Recurrent themes for the impact of gamification on students' speaking skills in the discussion section

No	Theme	Research
1.	Higher interest and motivation	Farhan (2019), Cabrera-Solano (2020), Ahmed (2021), Alfuhaid (2021), Abadi et al. (2022), Cabrera-Solano (2022), Siregar et al. (2022), Abdul Rahim, et al. (2023), Huseinovic (2023), Jie et al. (2023)
2.	Improve speaking skills and competency	Barcomb & Cardoso (2019), Farhan (2019), Ahmed (2021), Azizah (2021), Thuy & Hung (2021), Alfuhaid (2021), Abadi et al. (2022), Cabrera-Solano (2022), Siregar et al. (2022)
3.	Active participation and engagement	Cabrera-Solano (2020), Thuy & Hung (2021), Cabrera-Solano (2022), Siregar et al. (2022), Abdul Rahim, et al. (2023), Jie et al. (2023)
4.	Better, fun, and enjoyable learning environment	Barcomb & Cardoso (2019), Farhan (2019), Ahmed (2021), Thuy & Hung (2021), Abdul Rahim, et al. (2023)

5.	Increase confidence and lower speaking anxiety	Barcomb & Cardoso (2019), Alfuhaid (2021), Abadi et al. (2022), Abdul Rahim, et al. (2023)
6.	Collaboration	Barcomb & Cardoso (2019), Abadi et al. (2022), Abdul Rahim, et al. (2023), Farhan (2019), Cabrera-Solano (2020), Ahmed (2021)
7.	Positive perception	Alfuhaid (2021), Siregar et al. (2022), Jie et al. (2023)

According to Table 3, 13 articles were published between 2019 and 2023. It shows that the incorporation of gamification methods in the teaching and learning process exhibits numerous benefits in developing the students' speaking skills. These benefits include increased students' motivation, improved speaking skills and competency, increased participation and engagement, the establishment of a more favourable learning environment, the promotion of student collaboration, the reduction of speaking anxiety, and the cultivation of an overall positive perception towards gamified learning.

10 out of 13 the studies collectively reported that utilising gamification elements in the classroom can increase the students' interest and motivation to practise their speaking skills. Studies by Farhan (2019), Cabrera-Solano (2020), Ahmed (2021), Alfuhaid (2021), Abadi et al. (2022), Cabrera-Solano (2022), Siregar et al. (2022), Abdul Rahim et al. (2023), Huseinovic (2023) and Jie et al (2023) has shown that gamification helps to increase students' motivation. This is because the elements of points and rewards through gamification can motivate the students to perform better in the classroom. Rewards such as badges, certificates or virtual items can be awarded as the students managed to complete tasks, answer questions correctly or achieved the learning objectives, creating a sense of accomplishment for them and consequently increasing their level of motivation and interest, as highlighted by Alomari, Al-Samarraie and Yousef (2019).

Gamification method also found to contribute to students' improvement in speaking skills and competency as indicated by the studies by Barcomb & Cardoso (2019), Farhan (2019), Ahmed (2021), Alfuhaid (2021), Azizah (2021), Thuy & Hung (2021), Abadi et al. (2022), Cabrera-Solano (2022) and the study by Huseinovic (2023) on private and public universities students in Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that gamification does not show a significant influence on speaking skills in contrast to the students in the primary and secondary schools in other studies.

Additionally, gamification can also help to promote active participation and engagement in the classroom, as proven by the studies by Cabrera-Solano (2020), Thuy & Hung (2021), Cabrera-Solano (2022), Siregar et al (2022), Abdul Rahim, et al. (2023) and Jie et al (2023). Teachers can also incorporate language-learning games such as crossword puzzles, word searches or interactive games through websites like Genially and Kahoot! which promotes interactivity among the students. This helps to keep students engaged and motivated throughout the lesson. Although it is not easy to ensure every student in the classroom participates in the lesson, the element of competition that goes hand in hand with gamification can encourage the learners to participate in the learning process as they work through the tasks and quests together in pairs or in groups. As stated by Siregar et al (2022), who employed Monopoly-like games with dice,

Siregar et al (2022). One of the elements of gamification is the element of level and progression and leaderboard. Having their progress displayed clearly can help the learners to modify their progress and review their whole learning journey. Besides, it fosters a healthy competition and encourages students to strive for improvement as they go through the learning activities. However, it is interesting to note that the result could be different depending on the type of students. For instance, command cards and prizes in the form of coloured medals known as *Yuk Sama-Sama Skilled Talk* (YS-Tc), the game's competitive nature makes students feel motivated to show their abilities in order to win the game. Nurturing a participatory learning environment will lead to enhanced learning experience and learning outcomes, especially in terms of speaking skills.

Consequently, the elements of challenges and quests via gamification can create a better, fun and more enjoyable learning environment which is clearly highlighted by the studies by Farhan (2019), Ahmed (2021), Thuy & Hung (2021) and Abdul Through gamification, teachers or educators can frame the language

learning activities as challenges and quests in which the tasks can be presented with increasing difficulty level. Besides, in role-playing activities such as VirtualSpeech speaking practice simulation using a VR headset and ‘The Rhetoric: Public Speaking Board Game’ which were employed by Abdul Rahim et al. (2023) and Abadi et al. (2022) respectively, students can take on different characters and engage in language use within specific scenarios so they can practise real-life communication skills in a more fun and enjoyable way.

It is also interesting to note that gamification can help in reducing speaking anxiety as well as increasing the students’ confidence in speaking, as shown by the studies by Alfuhaid (2021), Abadi et al. (2022) and gamified lessons provide a new and interesting model which encourages more practice in speaking. In addition, studies by Farhan (2019), Cabrera-Solano (2020) and Ahmed (2021) also show that incorporating gamification in the classroom can promote collaboration among the students. When planning the activities, teachers can opt for collaborative games or activities that require teamwork. Websites such as Genially and Kahoot! which were utilised by Cabrera-Solano (2020) and Ahmed (2021) respectively as some examples of very useful tools that can encourage the students to work as a team to complete learning tasks. As the students work together to achieve their common goals, they will have to learn how to cooperate and communicate using the target languages and this will simultaneously help to enhance their speaking skills. This is supported by Yaccob et al. (2022) who stated that enhancing interactions through the maximisation and exploitation of elements that enrich engagement makes learning more interactive and meaningful. Most importantly, it underscores the implementation of a student-centred learning approach, which is strongly advocated.

Finally, studies by Alfuhaid (2021), Siregar et al (2022) and Jie et al (2023) also indicated that the students quoted positive perceptions towards the incorporation of the elements of gamification in the classroom. Gamification of the lesson should also include regular reviews of the students’ achievements and challenges to complete the tasks so it will provide the students to reflect on their progress. As quoted from the study by Siregar et al (2022), after the game was conducted in the lesson, when asked, the students claimed that the little time allotted by the class hours makes the game feel constrained and prevents them from exploring and practising speaking abilities for longer. Similarly, based on the study by Jie et al (2023) which utilised the online game, *Digital Escape Room*, when asked during one-to-one interview session after the lesson, the students explicitly stated to have a positive perception towards the use of gamification in their speaking lesson, and requested for gamification to be used in future English lessons. This shows that the students find the gamified lesson as something interesting and more time should be allocated to maximise the benefits from it in terms of the students’ overall progress. In conclusion, these research papers together improve understanding of the impacts of gamified lessons in boosting students’ speaking skills. These findings add to the existing knowledge base and inform instructors about the potential benefits of gamifying language lessons as well as providing some suggestions on useful tools that can be utilised to help gamifying language lessons. It also provides policymakers with evidence that gamification can improve the students’ speaking abilities and competency.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this review, it shows that incorporating game-like activities into language lessons is proven to bring positive impact for the students. The introduction of gamification in ESL/EFL classrooms is proven to have a significant impact, particularly in the improvement of speaking skills, when contrasted with traditional and non-game-like English lessons. If the gamified language learning experiences are constructed and crafted with a great consideration of the students’ diverse language needs and abilities, it will not only enhance students’ motivation but also enrich engagement while simultaneously improving their speaking skills and competency. The competitive aspect of gamified lessons fosters a better learning environment as the students learn how to collaborate as evidently shown through its positive perception from the students. Besides, the opportunity to get more speaking practice through gamified lessons helps in terms of increasing the students’ confidence as well as reducing their speaking anxiety. The advantages of gamification in language education highlight its potential for creating effective and enjoyable learning experiences that encourage student active participation and skill development. One argument against using

gamification to improve students' speaking skills is that it may distract students from the actual language learning process. Some may argue that incorporating game elements into the classroom will shift the emphasis away from developing linguistic proficiency and toward entertainment. Nevertheless, this argument is incomplete and overlooks the potential benefits of gamification. While it is true that using games without clear educational goals can be counterproductive, well-designed gamified activities can improve language learning, specifically in students' speaking skills as per discussed earlier. Thus, it is suggested that more extensive research should be conducted in the future on the benefits of gamified lessons particularly in terms of speaking skills. Collaborative efforts between policymakers and educators are essential for crafting guidelines and training initiatives that facilitate the seamless integration of gamification approaches. Future research should delve into the applicability of these findings in diverse cultural settings, investigate the long-term impacts and sustainability of gamification in language classrooms, and consider the individual learning differences. In conclusion, the thoughtful integration of gamification presents a promising paradigm for revitalizing Islamic education, aligning contemporary pedagogical methods with timeless spiritual objectives. By framing religious learning within engaging, reward-based systems, educators can potentially foster deeper motivation and enhance the retention of sacred knowledge. Ultimately, this approach serves as a strategic tool to cultivate a generation that is both intellectually engaged and faithfully grounded in their Islamic heritage.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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