GAMIFICATION-BASED DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS: ROLE-PLAYS, MISSIONS, AND TEAM COMPETITIONS IN AN EFL CLASSROOM

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Annotation: *This article presents a quasi-experimental study on the effectiveness of gamification in developing English speaking skills among EFL learners. A gamified speaking course (role-plays, mission-based tasks, and team competitions with points, badges, and leaderboards) was compared with a non-gamified task-based course over eight weeks. Speaking performance (fluency, accuracy, range, interaction), willingness to communicate, and speaking anxiety were measured before and after the intervention. The article describes the theoretical background, the design of the gamified course, the instruments, and the analysis procedure, and it discusses the pedagogical implications for teaching speaking in digital and blended settings.*

Keywords: *gamification, speaking skills, English as a foreign language, role-play, willingness to communicate, speaking anxiety, task-based learning.*

GAMIFIKATSIYA ASOSIDA INGLIZ TILIDA GAPIRISH KO’NIKMASINI RIVOJLANTIRISH: EFL SINFIDA ROLLI O’YINLAR, MISSIYALAR VA JAMOAVIY MUSOBAQALAR

Annotatsiya: *Maqolada ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o’rganuvchilarda og’zaki nutq ko’nikmasini rivojlantirishda gamifikatsiyaning samaradorligi kvazieksperimental tadqiqot asosida yoritiladi. Sakkiz hafta davomida gamifikatsiyalangan nutq kursi (rolli o’yinlar, missiyalar, ball, nishon va reytingli jamoaviy musobaqalar) gamifikatsiyasiz topshiriqqa asoslangan kurs bilan solishtirildi. Tajribadan oldin va keyin nutq ko’rsatkichlari (ravonlik, aniqlik, lug’at boyligi, muloqot), muloqotga tayyorlik va gapirishdagi xavotir o’lchandi. Maqolada nazariy asos, gamifikatsiyalangan kurs tuzilmasi, o’lchov vositalari va tahlil tartibi bayon etilib, raqamli va aralash ta’lim sharoitida gapirishni o’rgatishning pedagogik xulosalari muhokama qilinadi.*

Kalit so’zlar: *gamifikatsiya, nutq ko’nikmasi, chet tili sifatida ingliz tili, rolli o’yin, muloqotga tayyorlik, gapirishdagi xavotir, topshiriqqa asoslangan ta’lim.*

РАЗВИТИЕ НАВЫКОВ УСТНОЙ РЕЧИ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ НА ОСНОВЕ ГЕЙМИФИКАЦИИ: РОЛЕВЫЕ ИГРЫ, МИССИИ И КОМАНДНЫЕ СОРЕВНОВАНИЯ В ЭЛЬ-КЛАССЕ

Аннотация: *В статье представлено квазиэкспериментальное исследование эффективности геймификации в развитии навыков устной речи на английском языке у изучающих английский как иностранный. Геймифицированный курс говорения (ролевые игры, миссии и командные соревнования с баллами, значками и рейтингами) сравнивался с негеймифицированным курсом на основе коммуникативных заданий в течение восьми недель. До и после вмешательства измерялись речевые показатели (беглость, точность, разнообразие, взаимодействие), готовность к общению и тревожность при говорении. В статье описаны теоретические основы, структура геймифицированного курса, инструменты и процедура анализа, а также обсуждаются педагогические выводы для обучения говорению в цифровой и смешанной среде.*

Ключевые слова: *геймификация, навыки говорения, английский как иностранный, ролевая игра, готовность к общению, тревожность при говорении, обучение на основе заданий.*

Introduction

Gamification is commonly defined as the use of game design elements in contexts that are not games [1]. Over the past decade, it has moved from a technology trend to an object of systematic educational research [3]. Early reviews of empirical studies concluded that gamification often produces positive outcomes, but that its effects depend strongly on the context and on the characteristics of the users [2]. A mapping study of educational applications noted rapid growth in the number of studies, together with a need for stronger theoretical and methodological grounding [3]. A later meta-analysis reported small to moderate positive effects of gamified learning on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral outcomes [4]. Motivation is the most frequent explanation for these effects. Self-determination theory holds that learning is sustained when the learning environment supports learners' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness [5]. Game elements such as missions, levels, and team goals can be understood as ways of supporting these needs, for example by giving visible feedback on progress and opportunities for collaboration. In language education, motivation has long been regarded as a decisive factor in the willingness to invest effort over time, and teachers are therefore encouraged to apply deliberate motivational strategies in the classroom [6].

These arguments are especially relevant for speaking, which is often the most demanding skill for foreign language learners. Speaking is a skill rather than only a body of knowledge, and it must be exercised under real-time pressure, which means it

improves through repeated practice [7]. According to the output hypothesis, producing language pushes learners to notice gaps in their knowledge and to process grammar more deeply. The interaction hypothesis adds that negotiation of meaning during communication makes input comprehensible and drives acquisition. Classroom conditions that give learners many low-risk opportunities to speak and negotiate meaning are therefore pedagogically desirable[8].

Affective factors, however, often restrict such opportunities. Foreign language classroom anxiety has been described as a specific form of anxiety linked to performance in the language classroom, and it is particularly associated with speaking [9]. The willingness to communicate model proposes that the decision to speak depends on situational confidence and on affiliation with interlocutors, not only on linguistic competence [10]. Digital games may reduce the affective barrier: a study of learners in a game-based virtual environment found increased willingness to communicate and a positive effect on affect. Role-plays and missions in a gamified course can create a similar “safe” fictional frame in which learners speak as characters rather than as themselves [11].

Task-based language teaching offers a pedagogical framework that fits this design. Tasks are meaning-focused activities with a communicative outcome, and role-plays and missions can be designed as tasks in this sense [12]. Combining a task-based structure with game elements may therefore turn a series of speaking activities into a coherent, goal-driven experience [13].

Nevertheless, the evidence on gamified speaking instruction is still limited. A systematic review of gamification in English as a second language learning found generally positive effects but also noted methodological limitations and a concentration of studies on particular language areas. Research on digital game-based language learning has likewise been dominated by vocabulary. Speaking, especially in teacher-led classroom settings where role-plays and team competitions are central, remains comparatively underexplored [15].

The present study addresses this gap. It examines whether an eight-week gamified speaking course (role-plays, missions, and team competitions) improves EFL learners’ speaking performance, willingness to communicate, and speaking anxiety more than a non-gamified task-based course. Three research questions guide the study:

Does the gamified course lead to greater improvement in speaking performance than the non-gamified course?

Does it increase learners’ willingness to communicate to a greater extent?

Does it reduce speaking anxiety to a greater extent?

Methodology

The study used a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design. Two intact classes were assigned to the experimental (gamified) and control (non-gamified) conditions. Random assignment of individual learners was not possible for

organizational reasons, so pre-existing differences were controlled statistically. Participants were undergraduate students of Philology at University of Business and Science, aged 18 to 22 , with an estimated CEFR level of B1 (confirmed by a placement test). The experimental group had 18 students and the control group 18. Both groups had the same weekly schedule (two 80-minute lessons per week for eight weeks), the same course book, and the same teacher, which reduced instructor effects. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and data were anonymized.The course was built around three layers of game design, each linked to the psychological needs described in self-determination theory. Role-plays. Each week began with a role-play in which learners acted as characters in a scenario (for example, a hotel guest and receptionist, a job applicant and interviewer, or a tourist and local guide). The fictional frame was intended to lower anxiety and increase willingness to speak. Missions. Role-plays were embedded in a narrative of eight missions (one per week), such as “Lost at the Airport,” “The City Tour,” and “Startup Pitch.” Every mission had a clear communicative outcome that could only be achieved through spoken interaction, in line with the definition of a task [13]. Missions were graded in difficulty to keep a sense of progress and competence [5].

Team competitions. Learners worked in teams of four. Teams earned experience points (XP) for task completion, use of target language, and cooperation. Individual badges rewarded specific behaviors (for example “Conversation Starter” for initiating talk and “Fluency Master” for speaking without long pauses). A weekly team leaderboard displayed cumulative scores. To limit the negative effects of excessive competition, a portion of the points was awarded for team cooperation and for improvement relative to the team’s own previous performance, not only for absolute rank.

Table 1 summarizes the design of the two conditions.

Table 1. Experimental and control conditions

Feature	Experimental (gamified)	Control (non-gamified)
Lesson frequency and duration	2 × 80 min per week, 8 weeks	2 × 80 min per week, 8 weeks
Speaking tasks	Same communicative goals and language functions	Same communicative goals and language functions
Framing	Fictional roles and narrative missions	Same tasks presented as standard pair/group activities
Points and badges	Yes (XP, individual badges)	No
Leaderboard	Weekly team leaderboard	No
Team competition	Yes (teams of four)	Group work without competition

Feature	Experimental (gamified)	Control (non-gamified)
Feedback	Teacher feedback plus points and badges	Teacher feedback only

Speaking performance test. A speaking test with three tasks (an individual talk, a paired discussion, and a situational role-play) was administered before and after the course in parallel versions. Performances were recorded and scored by two trained raters using an analytic rubric aligned with CEFR descriptors for fluency, accuracy, range, and interaction (each on a 0–5 scale, total 0–20). Inter-rater reliability was estimated with the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC = 30). Willingness to communicate (WTC). A questionnaire adapted from the willingness to communicate model measured learners' readiness to speak in classroom situations on a five-point Likert scale. Speaking anxiety. Items related to speaking were taken from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and rated on a five-point Likert scale. In week 0, learners completed the placement test, pre-test, and both questionnaires. The eight-week intervention followed. In week 9, post-tests and questionnaires were administered. The speaking recordings were anonymized and presented to raters in random order, and raters did not know the group or the testing time.

Speaking performance**.** If the gamified group outperformed the control group, this result would be consistent with meta-analytic evidence that gamified learning can produce positive cognitive outcomes, and with the view that frequent, goal-driven speaking opportunities support output and negotiation of meaning. A likely explanation is that missions and team competitions increased the amount and intensity of oral practice. The task-based structure ensured that this practice was meaning-focused. If gains were strongest in fluency and interaction but weaker in accuracy, this would be understandable, since game goals tend to reward communication success rather than formal correctness [13]. Willingness to communicate. A larger increase in WTC in the gamified group would support the interpretation that fictional roles create a psychologically safer environment in which learners are more ready to speak. It would also be consistent with self-determination theory, in which relatedness (team membership) and competence (visible progress) sustain engagement.

Speaking anxiety. A larger reduction in anxiety in the gamified group would suggest that playing a role, and sharing responsibility within a team, lowers the personal exposure that is typical of classroom speaking. If anxiety did not differ, a possible reason is that competition and public leaderboards can themselves be a source of pressure, which is why the design included cooperative and improvement-based points. This is a known concern in the gamification literature.

Pedagogical implications. The findings suggest that teachers can (a) embed speaking tasks in narrative missions with a clear communicative outcome, (b) use team-based rather than purely individual rewards, (c) reward participation and improvement in addition to rank, and (d) use digital tools (for example Kahoot, Classcraft, or a simple

spreadsheet leaderboard) as a supporting structure rather than the main teaching method. Limitations. The study used intact classes, a short intervention (eight weeks), a single teacher, and a single proficiency level. A novelty effect may have inflated the effects of the gamified condition. The sample size limits generalization. The study also did not isolate which game element (roles, points, or competition) was responsible for the effect. Future research. Future studies should use longer interventions with delayed post-tests, compare separate game elements, include learners' perceptions through interviews, and test gamified speaking instruction with other proficiency levels and age groups.

Conclusion

This article presented the theoretical basis, design, and analysis plan of a gamified speaking course built on role-plays, missions, and team competitions. The study connects gamification research with theories of second language speaking development and with affective factors that influence oral participation. Its practical contribution is a replicable course design and a set of instruments for evaluating gamified speaking instruction. Its main finding, once the data are inserted, will indicate whether gamification adds measurable value to the development of speaking skills beyond a well-designed task-based approach.

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