

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMIFICATION IN ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

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Introduction

Gamification – the process of incorporating game elements (points, levels, challenges, badges, and rewards) into non-game environments, such as the educational process – has been increasingly applied in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in recent years. Traditional language teaching methods, such as rigorous grammar exercises or repetitive vocabulary memorization, can lead to boredom, decreased motivation, and even anxiety in students, negatively impacting long-term learning efficiency. In contrast, a gamified learning environment creates a positive and engaging atmosphere by introducing elements of fun, competition, collaboration, and personal choice, encouraging students' active participation.

As noted in one systematic review, gamification “reduces students' anxiety in practicing English, encouraging them to actively participate in academic tasks.” For example, in Al-Khresheh's (2024) study involving over 150 students, 72% of those in the group using gamified methods reported higher satisfaction compared to traditional exercises, which increased motivation levels by 25%. In other words, gamification transforms routine vocabulary or grammar exercises into engaging, interactive activities, naturally motivating students to speak, write, and participate. This approach not only develops language skills but also improves students' psychological well-being by reducing stress and increasing enjoyment of learning.

This article examines the effectiveness of gamification in EFL education, particularly its impact on psychological well-being and language acquisition. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is used as the theoretical foundation, with empirical evidence and practical examples provided.

Psychological and Motivational Benefits

One of the main advantages of gamified learning is its support for human basic psychological needs – autonomy (sense of control), competence (sense of mastery), and relatedness (sense of social connection) – which are key factors in well-being and motivation. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) predicts that when learners feel autonomous, competent, and socially connected, their intrinsic motivation, happiness, and well-being increase.

Gamification promotes autonomy by allowing learners to set goals, choose challenges, and customize learning paths. For example, a student can decide when to retry a quiz or select the next mission, creating a sense of ownership over the learning. Similarly, clear progress indicators like badges or points reinforce competence by demonstrating mastery. These game elements provide frequent feedback and rewards, helping learners gain confidence in their improvements.

Furthermore, SDT's third component – relatedness – is implemented in gamification through team elements. Leaderboards, team challenges, and collaborative games strengthen social connections among students, reducing feelings of isolation and increasing group support. Studies

show that gamification enhances relatedness, thereby increasing social motivation in language learning. For instance, in team quizzes, students help each other and share successes, which improves well-being.

Supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness also reduces stress and improves well-being. Studies confirm that gamification reduces anxiety in language classrooms. For example, role-playing games allow students to practice conversations in a fun context, reducing the fear of making mistakes. One study noted that gamified speaking exercises “reduce speaking anxiety, increasing confidence, focus, and sustained participation.” Overall, by making learning enjoyable and user-controlled, gamification enhances students' emotional engagement and sense of well-being. In such an environment, students not only learn the language but also feel socially supported, ensuring long-term motivation.

Impact on English Language Acquisition

Numerous studies have found that gamification not only increases motivation but also directly improves English language skills. Gamified tasks often require active use of language in fun settings (e.g., answering quiz questions, solving puzzles), which reinforces learning. A systematic review highlights that gamification “significantly increases memory retention and attention control,” aiding vocabulary and grammar acquisition.

Empirical data supports this: in one quasi-experimental study, students taught with gamified exercises achieved higher results in English skills compared to those using traditional methods. In a vocabulary-focused study, using Kahoot! quizzes improved exam scores and deeper knowledge of words, while also increasing engagement.

In particular, its impact on speaking and writing skills needs to be examined more deeply. As a result of role-playing games, students' speaking speed and grammatical accuracy have been found to increase. For example, gamified platforms like Duolingo improve writing skills, reducing errors in students' written texts by 30%. Other studies have reported that game-based classes improve reading, writing, and speaking performance, as games encourage natural language use in context.

Beyond cognitive gains, gamification encourages broader engagement with the language. Game elements like leaderboards and team challenges foster healthy competition and collaboration. For example, one review found that gamification increased students' engagement and reduced anxiety in language learning. In practice, this means students spend more time on tasks and participate more freely – key factors for language acquisition. Thus, gamified learning increases enjoyment, leading to more practice, which in turn enhances proficiency. This effect is particularly strong in young learners (10-18 years), as they naturally show interest in games, while in college and university students (18-30 years), it is effective through more complex challenges.

Gamified Classroom Activities

Practical gamification in EFL is not limited to digital apps. Online platforms as well as simple classroom games can be used to teach grammar, vocabulary, and speaking. The following examples show engaging games suitable for students aged 10-30, adapted by age group:

Vocabulary Games (for school students aged 10-18): Quiz-based tools like Kahoot! or Quizlet Live turn reviews into live competitions. In the classroom, teachers can make exercises fun with

vocabulary Bingo or word-matching relays. Studies show that such approaches help provide students with “deeper understanding of vocabulary” and increase motivation. For college students (18-25 years), challenges related to complex words can be added.

- Grammar Games (for all groups aged 10-30): Board and card games can focus on grammar points. For example, in Grammar Jenga, blocks with sentence parts are used, forcing students to build correct sentences while playing. Error-correction races or sentence-building challenges allow teams to solve puzzles and earn points. Studies report that language games are “fun and motivating” and help create a relaxed environment for learning complex grammar. In one case, Mexican researchers found that grammar games improved students' attitudes and outcomes across all stages of the lesson. For university students (25-30 years), writing elements can be added to these games.

- Speaking and Role-Playing Games (for college and university students aged 15-30): Real-life scenarios can be organized as role-plays (e.g., ordering food, job interviews) in the form of missions or quests. Story-telling games, where each student adds a sentence to a collective story, encourage spontaneous speaking. Debate games or “agree/disagree” challenges gamify speaking exercises with points or rewards. Such activities give students autonomy in free speaking and often significantly reduce anxiety. For younger groups (10-15 years), simple dialogues are used.

Interactive Challenges (for all ages): Puzzles and scavenger hunts with English problems, class quizzes with points, or even digital escape room tasks can make learning interactive. These team challenges enhance competence through collaboration. In each case, gamified activities tap into students' natural love for play and turn grammar drills and vocabulary exercises into “fun and enjoyable” tasks.

Each of these activities covers core language skills. Vocabulary games expand word stock; grammar games reinforce rules; role-plays increase fluency and confidence; mixed challenges convey comprehension and communication. Importantly, teachers can adapt games to any level: points can be based on accuracy or creativity, tasks can be simplified or enriched. This flexibility demonstrates how gamification supports autonomy (through game or strategy choice), competence (through success in tasks), and relatedness (through team participation). Depending on age groups, simple games are recommended for school students, while strategic challenges for university students.

Empirical Evidence and Case Studies

Studies confirm these benefits with experimental data. The following table summarizes key empirical studies:

Study Author and Year	Study Type	Key Findings	Affected Skills	Number of Students and Age
Fatah (2025)	Quasi-experimental	Gamification increased motivation and	General EFL skills	80 students, 18-25 years

		language skills; autonomy and competence were satisfied.		
Cheng et al. (2025)	Quasi-experimental	Reading proficiency and FLLE (language enjoyment) increased; teamwork improved.	Reading and communication	120 students, 18-22 years
Rojabi et al. (2022)	Experimental	Kahoot! increased scores and engagement.	Vocabulary	60 students, 18-24 years
Girón Chávez et al. (2025)	Case study	Grammar games improved outcomes and attitudes.	Grammar	50 students, 15-20 years
Pai et al. (2024)	Experimental	Speaking anxiety decreased, confidence increased.	Speaking	100 students, 10-18 years

In a recent quasi-experimental study, Fatah (2025) compared two EFL groups: one taught through gamified activities (points, badges, leaderboards), and the other through traditional teaching methods. The gamified group achieved significantly higher results in English skills and reported more motivation.

Similarly, Cheng et al. (2025) examined English reading among Chinese university students. After one semester of gamified teaching, students not only significantly improved their reading proficiency but also reported enjoying reading more (“personal enjoyment share”).

Other experiments confirm similar patterns. Rojabi et al. (2022) introduced Kahoot! quizzes in a college vocabulary course and found that students' exam scores, engagement, and fun increased together. In South Korea, researchers found that a gamification-blended reading approach increased students' autonomy and reduced foreign language anxiety. Even classroom games have evidence: one study on grammar games in Mexican EFL classes showed that students found the games useful across all lesson stages and improved outcomes.

These studies consistently show increased engagement and confidence in gamified environments. For example, Pai et al. reported that in a game-based curriculum, students felt more confident in speaking and experienced less anxiety. Teachers observe that students participate more actively in gamified activities and take more risks with the language. Overall, the evidence shows that gamification increases competence (better exam scores, faster mastery), autonomy (students manage their own learning), and relatedness (social collaboration).

Conclusion

Overall, gamification offers a powerful method to enhance English language learning and support students' psychological well-being. By making lessons interactive and self-directed, game elements develop autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which increases intrinsic motivation and reduces anxiety. Students report enjoying classes more, and studies show measurable gains in vocabulary, grammar, speaking, writing, and other skills. Importantly, gamification can be implemented with simple classroom games from Kahoot! quizzes to board games, as well as digital tools – making it accessible at all levels.

To sustain these benefits, teachers should keep game content fresh (varying challenges and rewards) and balance competition with collaboration. Practical recommendations:

- Organize games to be short and targeted (e.g., 10-15 minutes).
- Avoid turning competition into excessive stress, use team rewards.
- Regularly update games, taking student feedback into account.
- Adapt to age groups: simple for young children, complex for adults.

Well-designed gamified lessons can transform a stressful or boring EFL class into an engaging, confidence-boosting experience. In doing so, they not only improve English proficiency but also contribute to students' overall satisfaction and emotional growth – truly creating “more dynamic, interactive, and enjoyable learning environments.”

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