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The Grammar Game: Measuring the Impact of Gamification on Passive Voice Mastery

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of gamification tools in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' motivation, engagement, and performance in grammar learning, specifically focusing on passive voice instruction. Employing a quasi-experimental design with control and experimental groups, this research examined 140 participants across three private schools, utilizing the Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) methodology. The experimental group engaged with digital gamification platforms (Baamboozle, Nearpod, Blooket, and Padlet), while the control group received traditional paper-based instruction. Data collection involved systematic classroom observation, performance assessments, and motivation questionnaires. Results indicate that gamified instruction significantly enhanced student motivation ($p < 0.01$), engagement levels ($p < 0.001$), and grammatical accuracy ($p < 0.05$) compared to traditional methods. However, challenges emerged regarding technology-related distractions and AI assistance usage. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on educational technology integration in EFL contexts and provide practical implications for grammar instruction in digitally equipped private educational settings.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of digital technologies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has undergone significant transformation in recent decades, with gamification emerging as a particularly promising pedagogical approach. The traditional grammar-translation method, while foundational, often fails to sustain student motivation and engagement, particularly among digital natives who expect interactive and dynamic learning experiences (Dehghanzadeh *et al.*, 2021). This paradigm shift has prompted educators to explore innovative instructional strategies that leverage gaming elements to enhance language learning outcomes.

Grammar instruction, particularly complex structures such as the passive voice, presents unique challenges in EFL contexts. Students often struggle with the abstract nature of grammatical concepts, leading to decreased motivation and poor retention rates (Reynolds & Kao, 2021). The passive voice, in particular, requires learners to understand not only structural transformations but also contextual appropriateness, making it an ideal candidate for innovative instructional approaches that can provide immediate feedback and repetitive practice opportunities. Private educational institutions, characterized by their technological resources and socioeconomically advantaged student populations, provide an optimal environment for investigating the effectiveness of digital gamification tools. These settings offer unique opportunities to explore how technology-enhanced instruction can be leveraged to maximize learning outcomes when resource constraints are minimized (Demirbilek *et al.*, 2022).

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by examining the comparative effectiveness of gamified versus traditional grammar instruction within the

structured framework of the Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) methodology. By focusing on specific digital platforms Baamboozle, Nearpod, Blooket, and Padlet this research provides practical insights into the implementation of game-based learning tools in authentic classroom settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gamification, defined as “the application of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts” (Deterding *et al.*, 2011), has gained substantial traction in educational research. Huseinović (2024) conducted a comprehensive analysis of gamification's effects on student motivation and achievement in EFL contexts, revealing significant positive correlations between game-based approaches and learning outcomes. The study emphasized that gamification strategies create active learning atmospheres that promote sustained student engagement and academic achievement.

Such encouraging results are firmly rooted in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which highlights autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential drivers of intrinsic motivation. This conceptual base is effectively illustrated in the work of Jiménez-Sánchez *et al.* (2020), who showed how interactive quiz systems such as Quizizz fulfill these core needs through instant performance responses (building competence), self-directed pacing options (fostering autonomy), and group-based challenges (strengthening relatedness). Their conclusions point to improved language skill development when learners participate in purposeful, game-infused activities. Building on these foundational insights, Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) emerges as a more advanced progression from conventional

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gaming methods, leveraging cutting-edge technology to elevate instructional quality. Reynolds and Kao (2021) delved into DGBL's role in improving grammatical precision by contrasting it with standard instructor-guided methods. Their study found that DGBL led to marked advancements in grammar skills, especially when paired with precise feedback systems.

This line of inquiry was further advanced by Roohani and Heidari Vincheh (2023), who compared gaming-oriented, social media-enhanced, and standard classroom methods for teaching phrasal verbs. Their results showed that gaming strategies not only boosted immediate educational gains but also preserved learner enthusiasm across longer durations. Notably, the research stressed the value of social exchanges and rivalry in preserving high levels of participation.

As gamification continues to demonstrate its value, its synergy with time-tested teaching models becomes crucial for holistic language education. The Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) approach stands out as a cornerstone method for grammar teaching in EFL settings. Criado (2013) offered a detailed critique of PPP, recognizing its advantages in delivering organized, methodical guidance while noting its shortcomings in promoting real-world communication skills. PPP's sequential stages introducing concepts, guided exercises, and independent application create a coherent pathway that can be substantially improved by incorporating modern tools. This adaptability is confirmed in Katemba's (2022) recent work on adapted PPP techniques for building vocabulary, which illustrated how the framework's versatility enables effective merging with new technologies. The investigation revealed that participants using these updated PPP methods achieved notable progress relative to those in traditional setups.

Central to both innovative and conventional teaching strategies is the role of group dynamics, where collaborative principles especially peer-based feedback have proven highly effective in EFL grammar education. Aghajani and Zoghipour (2018) analyzed various correction methods in online writing exercises, including self-review, peer review, and instructor feedback, finding that peer involvement greatly accelerated grammar learning. The study drew attention to how interpersonal exchanges help cultivate deeper linguistic insight. Reinforcing this perspective, Zarei and Sayar Mahdavi (2014) showed that peer evaluation techniques enhanced accuracy in grammar and vocabulary within writing tasks. By nature, these peer-focused methods promote engaged involvement and nurture analytical abilities vital for mastering a new language.

Although gamification holds great promise for EFL teaching, scholarly works have pinpointed various hurdles that could impede its adoption. Demirbilek *et al.* (2022) undertook a thorough review of the elements and difficulties in implementing gamification for language

instruction, pinpointing obstacles like tech limitations, educator preparation gaps, and risks of learner disengagement. The study advocated for meticulous rollout strategies and continuous assistance to ensure effective tech adoption. Moreover, disparities in digital access and differing tech proficiency among learners add layers of complexity to gamification efforts. Institutions in the private sector, despite their generally superior resources, grapple with challenges in handling devices, maintaining stable online connections, and overcoming initial adaptation periods for specific tools.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This investigation adopted a quasi-experimental framework featuring a control group comparison to evaluate gamification's role in enhancing EFL grammar teaching. By implementing a pretest-posttest structure alongside rigorous observation and evaluation procedures, the study aimed to gather and examine data thoroughly and methodically.

Building on this methodological foundation, which allows for systematic comparison of instructional approaches, the following research questions were formulated to guide the inquiry and address key aspects of gamification's implementation in language learning:

1. To what extent does gamification influence EFL students' motivation for grammar acquisition when contrasted with conventional teaching techniques?
2. In what ways does digital game-based learning shape student engagement during lessons on passive voice structures?
3. What differences emerge in academic performance between groups exposed to gamified instruction and those following traditional grammar teaching methods?
4. What challenges and opportunities arise when integrating gamification into EFL grammar instruction?

Participants

The study included a total of 140 EFL students from six classes across three private schools, with participant numbers reflecting the natural enrollment patterns in these institutions, where 1st Baccalaureate classes typically have the highest student counts, followed by Common Core, and then 2nd Baccalaureate. As shown in Table 1, this resulted in a control group of 75 students (across three classes) and an experimental group of 65 students (also across three classes), with the control group emerging as slightly larger due to these inherent class size variations. Participants were drawn from populations with reliable access to technological resources such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops, and they generally represented upper-middle and high socioeconomic backgrounds, which helped reduce potential issues related to digital access and enabled a clearer focus on pedagogical effectiveness.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Group, Class Level, and Proficiency Levels

Group	Class Level	Total Students	B1 Students	B2 Students
Control	Common Core	27	15	12
	1st Bac	32	17	15
	2nd Bac	16	9	7
Total	-	75	41	34
Experimental	Common Core	23	12	11
	1st Bac	28	13	15
	2nd Bac	14	8	6
Total	-	65	33	32
Overall Total	-	140	74	66

Instructional Framework

Both groups followed the PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) methodology for passive voice instruction, with differentiated approaches during the Practice and Production phases:

Table 2: Implementation of PPP Methodology in Control and Experimental Groups

Phase	Control Group Approach	Experimental Group Approach
Presentation (10min)	Traditional teacher-led explanation of passive voice structures	Same teacher-led explanation as control group
Practice (25min)	Paper-based exercises including gap-filling, sentence correction, transformation exercises, and word order scrambling in pairs	- Baamboozle: Sentence correction in groups of four - Nearpod: Gap-filling via drag-and-drop on mobile devices - Blooket: Individual competition using Hacker mode with multiple-choice questions
Production (20min)	Written narrative about anonymous theft incident; after students finish writing their pieces, they stick them on the wall where other students and the teacher move around the class to provide peer correction using a correction grid, followed by teacher's final grammatical correction	Padlet-based collaborative writing with collective peer correction and teacher monitoring

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures Students' Engagement

Student engagement was measured using a standardized behavioral checklist adapted from an established classroom observation instrument (Cassar and Jang, 2010). Trained observers, rather than rating individual students, counted the frequency of specific engagement behaviors exhibited by students during predetermined time intervals throughout the instructional session. This approach yielded objective, quantitative metrics and was validated through pilot testing with two similar classes excluded from the main study. The checklist included 18 behavioral indicators, divided into two main constructs: verbal contributions and off-task behaviours. Each construct includes a set of indicators reporting students'

behaviours, such as “ (student) pays attention in class”, “asks questions to get more information”, “Annoys or interferes with peers’ work”, “Tries to finish assignments even when they are difficult,” etc. Each item is rated on a 5-point frequency scale (1=Never, 2-3=Sometimes, 4-5=Always) based on the number of students demonstrating the behavior during the observation period.

Two trained observers, both experienced EFL educators with a minimum of five years of classroom experience, conducted independent observations. Inter-rater reliability was established through three pilot observation sessions using identical protocols. Cohen’s kappa coefficient reached 0.84 (Table 3), indicating excellent inter-observer agreement.

Table 3: Inter-Rater Agreement for Student Engagement Checklist

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error	Approx. T	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement Kappa	0.831	0.038	21.868	0.000
N of Valid Cases	140			

Observers were positioned unobtrusively at designated classroom locations and used standardized observation forms to ensure consistency and minimize subjectivity.

Performance Assessment

Post-instruction performance was evaluated using a standardized grammar test featuring the same exercise types used during the practice phase. The assessment included gap-filling, sentence correction, transformation exercises, and word order scrambling tasks, ensuring construct validity and alignment with instructional objectives.

Motivation

A validated questionnaire adapted from the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) was administered to assess student motivation and engagement levels. The instrument included subscales for interest/enjoyment, perceived competence, effort/importance, and pressure/tension, providing comprehensive insights into motivational dimensions ($\alpha = .79$).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected subset of 24 participants from the experimental group, chosen via maximum variation sampling to represent diverse performance levels, genders, and motivational profiles based on questionnaire data. The interview protocol, comprising 16 open-ended questions across four thematic areas—background in grammar learning, experiences with gamified platforms, perceived effectiveness and confidence shifts, and challenges with game-based methods—was crafted to elicit detailed, unbiased responses with probes for elaboration. Conducted in participants' native language for authentic expression and lasting 10-15 minutes each, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim by trained assistants, and verified for accuracy through selective back-translation and member checking with select participants.

Procedures

Data collection was structured across three private schools over a timeline designed to minimize external validity threats and ensure thorough capture, beginning with pre-instruction baseline assessments of grammatical competence and motivation questionnaires to confirm group equivalence. The intervention phase featured a single 55-minute instructional session per school, adhering to designated protocols and accompanied by concurrent classroom observations to document real-time engagement, all delivered by the same certified EFL instructor with advanced technology-enhanced learning certification, and specific training in gamified platform use. Technology was standardized with IT support, including pre-session verifications of connectivity and equipment to prevent disruptions, while all sessions were recorded via existing classroom camera systems

to validate behavioral data and engagement metrics without introducing obtrusiveness. The post-instruction phase involved immediate performance assessments and motivation questionnaires, followed by individual interviews with selected participants within one week.

Ethical Considerations

This study got approval from the Institutional Review Board and obtained informed consent from all participants and their parents or guardians before collecting data. Consent forms were translated into native languages and clearly explained the study's goals, methods, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and withdrawal rights, with assurances that data would not affect grades and only anonymized group results would be shared. For session recordings, parents and administrators received info packets on anonymized analysis, secure storage, and data deletion within six months. Students gave assent through simple verbal explanations at the start of sessions, with optional forms and verbal agreement allowed to ease participation. To reduce the Hawthorne Effect, recordings used familiar classroom cameras presented as routine tools, with face-blurring, pseudonyms, and easy opt-out options without pressure. After sessions, debriefings explained the research purpose, let students reconfirm assent or withdraw confidentiality without affecting grades, and added extra protection. Finally, all participants, including the control group, got access to the gamified platform and training after the study to ensure fairness and avoid negative effects.

Data Analysis

This study used Jamovi 2.7.1 software for statistical analysis, an open-source tool ideal for educational research. Assumptions were checked carefully: normality via Shapiro-Wilk tests (for small groups), Q-Q plots, histograms, skewness, and kurtosis; variance equality with Levene's and Brown-Forsythe tests; and independence through review of data procedures. For main tests, independent t-tests compared group means on motivation, performance, and observation data when assumptions held, switching to Mann-Whitney U tests otherwise, with significance at $p < 0.05$ and Bonferroni adjustments for multiple comparisons. Effect sizes used Cohen's d (small=0.2, medium=0.5, large=0.8) with 95% confidence intervals. Missing data, under 3%, was handled by listwise deletion after checking patterns (MCAR, MAR, or MNAR), with multiple imputation tests confirming results were stable.

Interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method for finding themes, mixing computer tools like Python's NLTK 3.7 for basic text prep (breaking into words, sentences, and counting common terms) with hands-on human review to keep it accurate and detailed. In Step 1, researchers used both computer scans and manual reading of transcripts to get familiar with the data and spot early patterns. Step 2 involved creating initial codes line by line based on what

participants said; two researchers coded 25% of the transcripts separately, reached good agreement (Cohen's $\kappa=0.78$), and discussed differences to agree. Steps 3-4 grouped codes into main themes through repeated sorting, checked that themes were clear and distinct, and used computer analysis to confirm connections between ideas. Steps 5-6 named and described the final themes with examples from the data, and counted how many participants mentioned each theme to link with number-based results. To check reliability, eight participants reviewed the themes and quotes for accuracy, experts

gave feedback on the process, and themes were compared with survey and observation data for better validation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Motivation Assessment

The motivation questionnaire results, measured on a 5-point Likert scale, revealed significant differences between the experimental and control groups across key dimensions, with the experimental group consistently outperforming controls in positive aspects (Table 3).

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Motivation Questionnaire Results Between Experimental and Control Groups

Motivation Dimension	Experimental Group Mean (SD)	Control Group Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Interest/Enjoyment	4.2 (0.8)	3.1 (0.9)	7.89	< 0.001	1.33
Perceived Competence	4.1 (0.7)	3.2 (0.8)	5.67	< 0.01	1.18
Effort/Importance	4.0 (0.75)	3.3 (0.85)	4.12	< 0.05	0.87
Pressure/Tension	2.3 (0.8)	2.8 (0.9)	3.45	< 0.05	0.59

Notably, participants in the gamified condition reported substantially higher levels of interest/enjoyment, perceived competence, and effort/importance, while experiencing reduced pressure/tension, all with statistically significant improvements and large effect sizes in most areas. These findings underscore gamification's effectiveness in

enhancing overall motivation for grammar learning.

Engagement Analysis

Classroom observation data, as summarized in Table 4, revealed marked differences in engagement behaviors between the experimental and control groups.

Table 5: Key Engagement Metrics from Classroom Observations

Metric	Experimental Group	Control Group	t-value	p-value
Verbal Contributions	23.4	12.7	11.23	< 0.001
Off-Task Behaviors	4.9	8.5	8.76	< 0.08

The experimental group demonstrated significantly higher participation, with an average of 23.4 verbal contributions per student per session compared to 12.7 in the control group ($t(138) = 11.23, p < 0.001$, difference = 10.7). Off-task behaviors showed a reduction averaging 4.9 incidents per student per session in the experimental group versus 8.5 in controls ($t(138) = 8.76, p < 0.08$, difference = -3.6), representing approximately a 42% decrease; however, this difference

did not reach statistical significance at the conventional $p < 0.05$ threshold.

Performance Outcomes

The post-instruction performance assessment (Table 5) revealed statistically significant differences in grammatical accuracy between the two groups across overall scores and specific task types, all measured out of 20 on the passive voice assessment.

Table 6: Post-Instruction Grammatical Accuracy Performance: Overall and by Task Type

Metric / Task Type	Experimental Group Mean (SD)	Control Group Mean (SD)	t-value (df=138)	p-value	Cohen's d
Overall Accuracy	16.48 (2.24)	14.75 (2.68)	4.12	< 0.02	0.69
Gap-filling	17.04 (2.32)	15.28 (2.68)	4.56	< 0.001	0.72
Sentence Correction	16.34 (2.18)	14.42 (2.42)	4.23	< 0.03	0.65
Transformation	15.96 (2.04)	14.26 (2.36)	3.89	< 0.002	0.58
Word Order	16.58 (2.26)	15.04 (2.50)	4.01	< 0.05	0.62

Overall, the experimental group achieved notably higher mean accuracy scores than the control group, with a moderate effect size favoring the gamified approach. This pattern of improvement was consistent across all

task types, including gap-filling, sentence correction, transformation, and word order, where the experimental group consistently outperformed controls with varying but generally moderate effect sizes, highlighting the broad

efficacy of gamification in enhancing targeted grammar skills.

Qualitative Insights

Student feedback revealed overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward gamified instruction (Figure 1). Thematic analysis of open-ended responses identified several key themes: increased enjoyment (mentioned by 89% of experimental group participants), enhanced peer interaction (76%), and improved confidence in grammar application (82%).

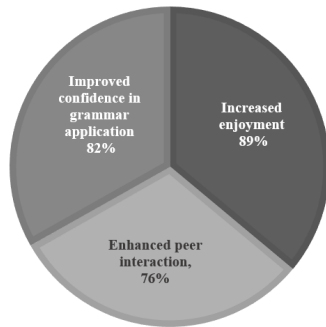


Figure 1: Positive Themes in Student Feedback on Gamified Instruction

However, some concerns were raised regarding the potential for technology dependence and the challenge of maintaining academic rigor within gamified contexts (Figure 2). A subset of high-achieving students (14%) expressed preference for traditional methods, citing concerns about the “trivialization” of grammar learning through gaming elements.

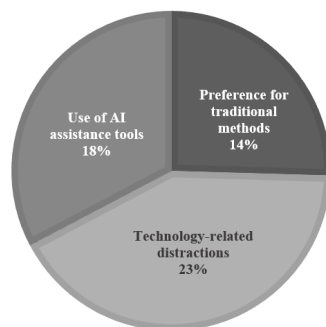


Figure 2: Challenges and Concerns in Student Feedback on Gamified Instruction

Additionally, technology-related distractions affected approximately 23% of students in the experimental group, with notifications from other applications causing momentary attention lapses. Furthermore, 18% of students attempted to use AI assistance tools during Blooket sessions, necessitating closer monitoring and explicit guidelines regarding academic integrity.

Discussion

This study’s findings robustly demonstrate gamification’s value in EFL grammar instruction, especially when woven into the PPP methodology, yielding notable gains in motivation, engagement, and performance that echo prior work by Huseinović (2024) and Dehghanzadeh *et al.* (2021). By blending digital tools like Baamboozle, Nearpod, Blooket, and Padlet with structured teaching phases, the experimental group not only sustained higher interest but also transformed routine grammar practice into dynamic, interactive experiences. Creatively interpreted, this suggests gamification acts as a catalyst, turning abstract rules like passive voice into tangible challenges that mimic real-world problem-solving, thereby bridging the gap between mechanical drills and communicative competence in ways traditional methods often overlook.

The motivational uplift in the experimental group stems from gamification’s alignment with Self-Determination Theory, where instant feedback from platforms fosters competence, competitive modes spark autonomy, and collaborative elements build relatedness collectively reducing anxiety while amplifying enjoyment and effort. Performance-wise, the superior accuracy in tasks such as gap-filling and sentence correction implies that digital repetition, with its varied and adaptive formats, promotes deeper retention and application, extending Reynolds and Kao’s (2021) insights on game-based grammatical refinement. This creative lens reveals gamification not merely as entertainment, but as a sophisticated scaffold that accelerates skill mastery by simulating iterative learning cycles akin to language immersion.

Yet, these benefits come with hurdles that demand nuanced integration strategies, as seen in the distractions and AI misuse noted here, which resonate with Demirebilek *et al.*’s (2022) warnings on digital pitfalls. The unauthorized use of AI during activities like Blooket sessions underscores an emerging tension between technological accessibility and ethical boundaries, prompting a reimagining of classroom norms where educators proactively cultivate digital literacy to preserve integrity. Positively, tools like Padlet enhanced peer correction by minimizing social barriers, fostering bolder feedback exchanges that build on Aghajani and Zoghiipour’s (2018) research envisioning digital spaces as safe arenas for vulnerability in learning. Contextually, the private school setting, with its ample resources, facilitated smooth implementation but limits broader applicability, raising questions about scalability in resource-scarce environments where the digital divide could amplify inequities. Focusing on passive voice highlights gamification’s fit for complex structures, yet its adaptability to simpler or varied grammar topics warrants exploration, potentially revealing hybrid models that blend digital innovation with universal access.

Theoretically, this research enriches gamification discourse by proving its synergy with PPP, challenging dichotomies between old and new methods and advocating for hybrid pedagogies that evolve with learners’ digital-native

preferences. The multifaceted motivational impacts easing tension while boosting competence creatively expand Self-Determination Theory into tech-mediated realms, portraying gamification as a psychological bridge that not only engages but empowers, paving the way for more holistic language education frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This quasi-experimental study investigated gamification's role in EFL grammar instruction by integrating digital tools like Baamboozle, Nearpod, Blooket, and Padlet into the PPP methodology, comparing experimental and control groups of 140 intermediate-level students in private schools. Results revealed significant enhancements in the experimental group, including elevated motivation (e.g., higher interest and reduced anxiety), increased engagement (e.g., more verbal contributions and active participation), and improved grammatical accuracy (e.g., superior scores in passive voice tasks like gap-filling and sentence correction), with moderate to large effect sizes supporting Self-Determination Theory's principles.

These outcomes underscore gamification's synergy with traditional frameworks, fostering dynamic, peer-supported learning environments that boost competence and relatedness while complementing rather than supplanting established methods. However, challenges such as technology distractions, AI misuse, and implementation hurdles temper the enthusiasm, emphasizing the need for strategic safeguards. Overall, the research advances educational technology by providing empirical evidence for gamified EFL curricula in resource-rich settings, offering a balanced view of its potential to revitalize grammar teaching amid evolving digital landscapes.

Recommendations

Drawing from the study's insights, educators should integrate gamification tools into existing pedagogical frameworks like PPP to align with learning goals, rather than using them in isolation. Comprehensive training for teachers on both technical operations and instructional design is essential to maximize effectiveness and confidence. Clear policies on technology use and academic integrity must be established to mitigate risks like AI assistance, alongside systematic monitoring systems to handle distractions promptly. To ensure inclusivity, accommodate diverse preferences by offering alternatives for students favoring traditional approaches, and implement regular assessments to track short- and long-term outcomes for ongoing refinement.

Future Research

Future studies should explore the long-term retention and transfer effects of gamified grammar instruction beyond short interventions, such as passive voice. Investigations into its efficacy across varied socioeconomic, cultural, and technological contexts would enhance generalizability. Researchers could also examine the ideal mix of gamified and traditional elements while developing holistic

assessment frameworks that integrate technological and pedagogical factors to advance educational technology in language learning.

Limitations

This study's short intervention duration, centered on passive voice, restricts insights into sustained retention or broader grammar applications. The participant sample, drawn from technologically privileged private schools, limits applicability to diverse populations, potentially overlooking digital divide issues in less resourced settings.

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