

GAMIFICATION IN ELT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS EFFECTS ON LEARNER ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION

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ABSTRACT

Gamification is gaining increasing attention in English Language Teaching (ELT) as a strategy to increase learner engagement and motivation through game elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and digital platforms such as Kahoot, Duolingo, and Quizizz. This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) analyzes 30 empirical studies published between 2021 and 2025 using the PRISMA framework to investigate the effects of gamification on learner motivation and engagement. The review finds that gamification generally has a positive impact on learner participation and enjoyment, increasing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. However, challenges remain regarding the long-term sustainability of these motivational benefits and the risks of over-reliance on extrinsic rewards. The analysis also reveals that while digital tools dominate gamification in ELT, the use of mixed or adaptive strategies is limited. Furthermore, little research addresses the long-term effects of gamification on language proficiency and skill retention. These findings highlight the need for future research to explore adaptive gamification models, the integration of non-digital elements, and their alignment with pedagogical principles. This review offers valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers who wish to implement effective and sustainable gamification strategies in ELT.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Gamification, Learner Engagement, Motivation, Systematic Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Gamification has gained significant attention in English Language Teaching (ELT) as a pedagogical strategy to address the challenge of maintaining learner motivation and engagement in digital learning environments. Traditional instructional approaches often fail to resonate with digital-native learners, who are accustomed to interactive, visually rich, and goal-oriented experiences (Deterding et al., 2011; Kapp, 2012). By integrating game elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and interactive platforms, gamification aims to enhance learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, foster engagement, and improve learning outcomes (Subhash & Cudney, 2018; Su & Cheng, 2015; Kuo-Wei Lee, 2023).

A growing body of empirical research further supports the relevance of gamification in ELT. Several studies have shown that gamified platforms like Kahoot, Quizizz, and Duolingo

not only increase student participation but also foster positive emotional responses to learning (Amin, 2021; Mahbubah & Anam, 2022). In contexts where learners face anxiety or lack of motivation, gamification has been shown to reduce affective barriers and promote autonomous learning (Zarzycka-Piskorz, 2016; Daulay & Adelita, 2023). For example, Inayati and Waloyo (2022) found that Quizziz-based gamification enhanced both discipline and interaction in online English classes. Likewise, Yu (2023) reported that gamification significantly improved vocabulary acquisition and learner satisfaction compared to traditional instruction.

Despite these promising findings, the current literature presents several critical limitations. Most studies focus on short-term outcomes such as motivation, satisfaction, or engagement but rarely examine the long-term effects on actual language proficiency (Baah, Govender, & Subramaniam, 2023; Zhou & Yu, 2022). Furthermore, many interventions are limited in duration and scope, often involving small or homogeneous samples, and rely heavily on perception-based data rather than objective language performance measures (Sadeghi et al., 2022; Huseinović, 2023).

Another significant concern is the lack of pedagogical alignment in gamified instruction. While gamification tools are widely adopted, few studies integrate them with well-established instructional frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy, Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction, or constructivist learning theories (Aguilar-Cruz & Álvarez Guayara, 2021; Torres Rodríguez et al., 2023). This disconnect can result in a superficial application of gamification that emphasizes entertainment over educational value. Consequently, educators may struggle to design gamified activities that promote deeper learning processes such as analysis, synthesis, and application.

Moreover, research rarely addresses how gamification impacts specific language skills such as grammar, speaking, listening, and writing in a targeted and sustained manner. Most studies aggregate outcomes under general constructs like "motivation" or "engagement," leaving unclear whether gamification leads to measurable improvements in linguistic competence (Rodríguez et al., 2023; Nordin & Swanto, 2023). Additionally, there is limited exploration of adaptive gamification strategies that tailor learning experiences to individual learner needs, proficiency levels, or learning preferences (Oliveira et al., 2022). These limitations point to an urgent need for more comprehensive and theoretically grounded research in the field. Future studies should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method designs, assess specific skill outcomes, and evaluate how gamified instruction aligns with pedagogical principles. By addressing these gaps, educators and researchers can better understand not only whether gamification works but how and why it contributes to sustainable language learning. Based on this gap in the literature, this study seeks to answer two key questions: (1) What is the effect of gamification on learners' engagement in English Language Teaching (ELT)? (2) What is the effect of gamification on learners' motivation in English Language Teaching (ELT)? and (3) (What are the limitations and potential improvements in gamification strategies in ELT, particularly concerning long-term impact and instructional design?

The novelty of this study lies in its dual emphasis on pedagogical alignment and longitudinal effectiveness. Unlike previous reviews, this systematic literature review

critically evaluates not only learners' perceptions but also the extent to which gamification supports sustainable language proficiency and the development of targeted language skills. This comprehensive synthesis offers actionable insights for designing adaptive, skill-specific, and theory-driven gamified instruction for diverse ELT contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to investigate the effects of gamification on learner engagement and motivation in English Language Teaching (ELT). The research followed the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency, objectivity, and replicability throughout the review process. The SLR approach was selected as it allows researchers to comprehensively synthesize empirical findings across multiple studies, evaluate current trends, and identify knowledge gaps in a structured and evidence-based manner.

The review process was conducted in four main stages according to the PRISMA flow: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. These steps helped ensure that only high-quality and relevant studies were selected and that the findings would reflect the actual state of research in the field. The goal of this review was to answer the following questions: (1) What is the effect of gamification on learners' engagement in English Language Teaching (ELT)?, (2) What is the effect of gamification on learners' motivation in English Language Teaching (ELT)? and (3) (What are the limitations and potential improvements in gamification strategies in ELT, particularly concerning long-term impact and instructional design?

To collect relevant studies, a comprehensive search was conducted using the Mendeley database. Mendeley was chosen due to its accessibility and functionality in organizing academic literature. The search was carried out using predefined keyword combinations such as "Gamification" AND "English Language Teaching," "Gamification" AND "Learner Engagement," and "Gamification" AND "Motivation." These keywords were selected to ensure that the search results would include studies that specifically focused on gamification strategies within English language teaching contexts. The initial search yielded a total of 87 records.

To ensure the quality and relevance of the included studies, the researchers established clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, as summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Study Selection Criteria in the Review Process

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods)	Non-empirical studies (e.g., literature reviews, conceptual papers, editorials)
Peer-reviewed articles	Articles not published in peer-reviewed journals
Published between 2021 and 2025	Articles published before 2021
Written in English	Articles written in languages other than English
Focused on gamification in English Language Teaching (ELT)	Studies outside the scope of ELT or not involving gamification

To ensure the systematic and transparent selection of relevant studies, this research employed the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram, which outlines the step-by-step screening and inclusion process.

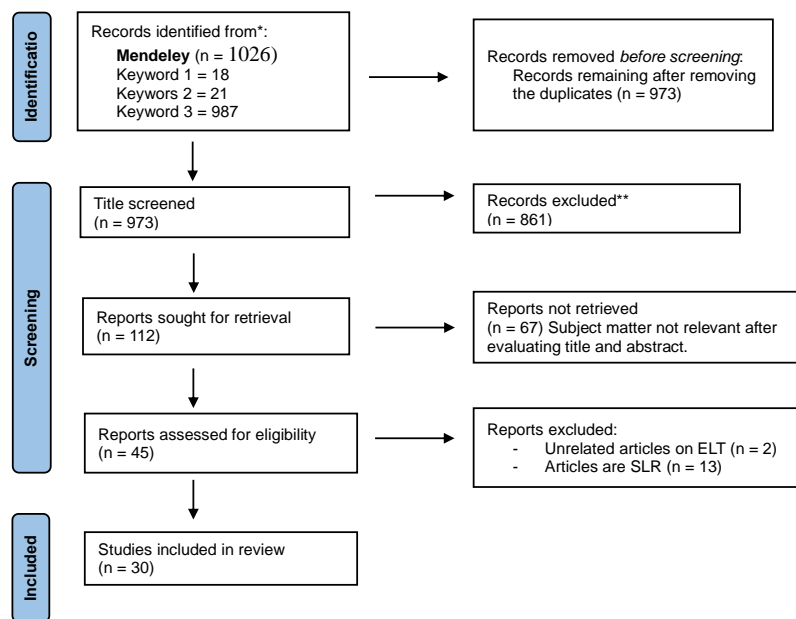


Figure 1. Flow Chart Process Selection

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 flow. In the identification stage, 1026 records were retrieved from the Mendeley database using the defined keywords. During the screening stage, 53 duplicate records were removed, leaving 973 articles for initial review. These remaining studies were screened by reading their titles and abstracts, resulting in the exclusion of 943 articles that did not meet the predefined inclusion criteria such as being non-empirical or irrelevant to ELT and gamification. In the eligibility stage, 30 full-text articles were assessed in detail. All 30 studies met the inclusion criteria and were considered eligible. Finally, these 30 articles were included in the synthesis and thematic analysis stage of the review.

To collect and organize relevant information from the selected studies, the researchers used a structured data extraction approach. Each article was reviewed to gather data on the authors, year of publication, research setting and country, educational context (such as primary, secondary, or tertiary Education), research methodology (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), gamification elements applied (such as points, badges, leaderboards, and platforms like Kahoot, Duolingo, or Quizizz), variables measured (e.g., motivation, engagement, or learning outcomes), and major findings and limitations. This structured documentation ensured that all studies could be compared systematically and fairly.

The extracted data were then analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach involved reading each study multiple times, identifying repeated patterns and meaningful themes, and grouping them into categories relevant to the research questions. The coding process

was both deductive, based on the objectives of the review, and inductive, emerging from the actual content of the articles. The main themes that emerged included the effectiveness of gamification in enhancing motivation and engagement, the variety and frequency of gamification elements used, the short-term versus long-term impact of gamification, and the methodological limitations in current research.

To ensure replicability and academic rigour, the review process was documented and followed consistent procedures at every stage. Although the study did not involve experimental instruments or human participants, it was conducted with full adherence to research ethics and transparency. By using the PRISMA framework, defining clear inclusion criteria, and employing a structured analysis method, the researchers ensured that the findings of this review could be reliably validated and extended by future research in similar contexts.

RESULTS

Distribution of Research Methodologies in Gamification Studies in ELT

In research on gamification in English Language Teaching (ELT), various methodological approaches are employed to analyze its effectiveness and impact. Each approach has its advantages, whether in measuring outcomes quantitatively, exploring learners' experiences qualitatively, or combining both methods for a more comprehensive understanding. The following pie chart displays the distribution of research methodologies utilized in 30 studies on gamification in English language teaching.

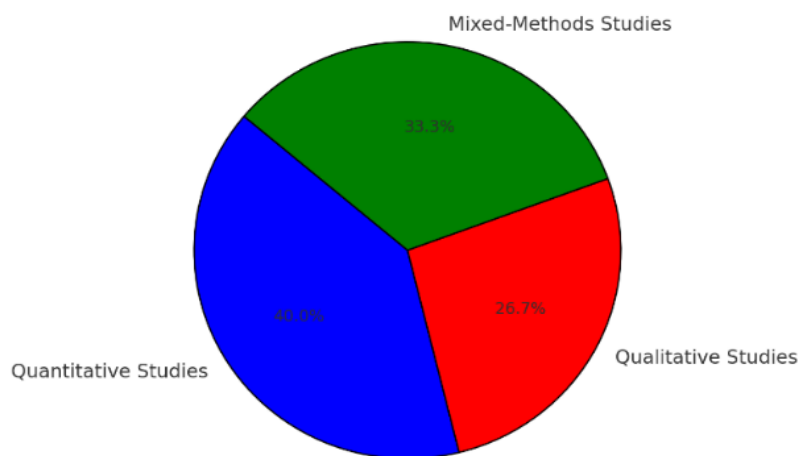


Figure 2. Distribution of Research Methodology in 30 Studies in Gamification & ELT

This pie chart illustrates the distribution of research methodologies used in 30 studies on gamification in English Language Teaching (ELT). The numbers show that 40% (12 studies) used a quantitative approach to find out how gamification affected language learning. These studies mostly used experiments, surveys, and questionnaires. Meanwhile, 26.7% (8 studies) adopted a qualitative approach, focusing on interviews, observations, and

thematic analyses to explore students' perceptions of gamification. In addition, 33.3% (10 studies) used a mixed-methods approach, which combined quantitative and qualitative methods to get a fuller picture of how gamification affects ELT. This distribution highlights the dominance of quantitative research in gamification studies, while mixed-methods research also plays a significant role in offering deeper insights.

Gamification in English Language Teaching: An Analysis of Commonly Used Elements

Gamification has gained increasing attention in English Language Teaching (ELT) as an innovative strategy to enhance student engagement and motivation. By incorporating game-like elements into learning activities, educators aim to create more interactive and enjoyable experiences for students (Deterding et al., 2011; Kapp, 2012). This study analyses findings from 30 empirical studies to identify the most commonly used gamification elements and their effectiveness in ELT. The results provide valuable insights into which gamification features are most prevalent and how they contribute to student learning.

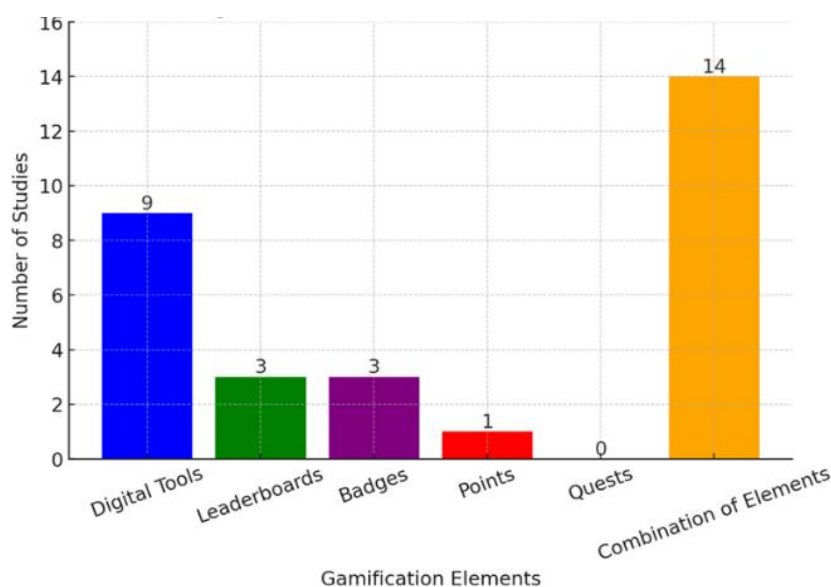


Figure 3. Usage of Gamification Elements in 30 Studies

Based on the analysis of 30 studies, digital tools such as Kahoot, Quizizz, and Duolingo were the most frequently used gamification elements, appearing in 9 studies. These tools enhance student engagement by providing interactive learning experiences and real-time feedback. Leaderboards, used in three studies, help foster a sense of competition among students by ranking their performance and motivating them to improve. Similarly, badges, also used in 3 studies, serve as virtual rewards that recognize achievements and encourage continuous participation in learning activities. Surprisingly, only one study used points, a fundamental gamification feature, suggesting their limited adoption in educational contexts. Interestingly, despite being a common feature in game-based learning, none of the analyzed studies explicitly mentioned quests.

In addition to individual gamification elements, 14 studies combined multiple elements to create a more engaging learning experience. These studies incorporated different combinations, such as digital tools with leaderboards or badges with points, to enhance motivation and student performance. The findings suggest that blended approaches, integrating multiple gamification elements, may be more effective in fostering student engagement. Overall, digital tools emerged as the most dominant gamification element, while points and quests were the least utilized in the reviewed studies. From the 30 studies analyzed, digital tools were the most frequently used gamification element, followed by leaderboards and badges. No study explicitly mentioned points or quests. Additionally, 14 studies combined multiple gamification elements, showing that blended approaches may be more effective for student engagement.

The Effects of Gamification on Learner Engagement in ELT

The following table summarizes various studies that investigate the impact of gamification on learner engagement in English Language Teaching (ELT). These studies employ diverse methodologies and focus on different aspects of engagement, providing a comprehensive overview of how gamified strategies influence student participation and interaction in the classroom.

Table 2. Studies Investigating the Effect of Gamification on Learner Engagement in ELT

No	Author(s) Year	Title	Methodology	Gamification Elements	Key Findings	Strengths & Limitations
1	Oliveira et al. 2022	<i>The Effects of Personalized Gamification on Students' Flow Experience, Motivation, and Enjoyment</i>	Mixed factorial	Customized based on BrainHex types (points, badges, leaderboard, etc.	No significant differences; some gamer types preferred non-personalized version	Streng: Controlled design, validated tools. Limitations: Limited personalization, short duration
2	Amalia, Inayati, Marini, 2023	<i>Improving Students' Motivation in Learning English through Gamification</i>	Classroom Action Research (2 cycles)	Nearpod, Quizizz, Mentimeter, Zoom Whiteboard, Canva	Gamification increased motivation, participation, and classroom engagement; some students had speech anxiety	Streng: Real classroom setting, mixed methods, multiple platforms. Limitations: Small sample, short duration, online constraints, emerging issue of speech anxiety
3	Sausan Nafis Amin, 2021	<i>Gamification of Duolingo in Raising Student's English Language</i>	Qualitative case study	Lingots, leaderboard, XP points, badges, skill tree, streaks, translation/	Duolingo increases motivation and engagement; gamification elements make learning	Streng: Real-life mobile application use; detailed gamification features. Limitations: Small sample size, limited generalizability; lacks grammar

		<i>Learning Motivation</i>		speaking/listening tasks	enjoyable and consistent	instruction, internet-dependent
4	Baah, Govender & Subramaniam, 2023	<i>Exploring the Role of Gamification in Motivating Students to Learn</i>	Quantitative	Points, leaderboard, freedom to fail	Only Satisfaction significantly influenced motivation; other ARCS-SDT factors were not significant	Streng: Strong theoretical model, quantitative rigor, 90% variance explained. Limitations: Small sample, cross-sectional, no qualitative data
5	Kuo-Wei Lee, 2023	<i>Effectiveness of Gamification and Selection of Appropriate Teaching Methods of Creativity</i>	6-week intervention, AHP method, self-assessment survey	Points, leaderboard, competitive tasks, reward (cash red envelope)	Gamification increased motivation, creativity, collaboration, and communication. SCAMPER, balloon competition, and Mandala thinking were the most effective methods	Streng: Student-centered, mixed methods, AHP-based ranking. Limitations: Small sample, short duration, only self-report data, team composition & fairness issues.
6	Lamija Huseinović, 2023	<i>The Effects of Gamification on Student Motivation and Achievement in Learning EFL in Higher Education</i>	Survey-based quantitative research, descriptive stats, regression, correlation	Games & apps: Duolingo, Babbel, Memrise (points, badges, levels, leaderboards)	Significant positive correlations between game use and motivation, language skills, and academic performance	Streng: Large diverse sample, comprehensive analysis, reliable instruments. Limitations: Self-reported data, no experimental control, possible bias, some students viewed games as childish
7	Zhonggen Yu, 2023	<i>Learning Outcomes, Motivation, and Satisfaction in Gamified English Vocabulary Learning</i>	Quasi-experiment + semi-structured interviews (mixed-method)	Kingsoft Powerword (points, games, vocabulary test games, rankings, rewards, progress tracking)	Gamification significantly improved learning outcomes, motivation, and satisfaction compared to non-gamified learning	Streng: Strong design, multiple measures, real context. Limitations: Limited to one app (Kingsoft), short duration, gender imbalance in sample

8	Casanova-Mata (2023)	<i>Enhancing English Acquisition: Effects of Among Us Game-Based Gamification on Language Competence, Motivation, Attention, and Attitude towards the English Subject</i>	Experimental (pre-test/post-test, control vs. experimental group)	ClassDojo, points, badges, mini-games, impostor roles, story-based gameplay	Gamification improved writing skill, motivation, attention, attitude, and participation; significant gains in experimental group	Strength: Well-structured gamified design, multi-dimensional assessment. Limitation: Small sample, short-term, potential emotional variability due to competition
9	Kusumaningrum & Binarti (2021)	Jeopardy Classroom Instruction: Fostering Students' Motivation to Learn English Vocabulary	Classroom Action Research (3 phases)	Jeopardy game (points, competition, team play, feedback)	Jeopardy improved motivation, engagement, and test scores; reduced anxiety and failure avoidance behaviors	Strength: Rich classroom insight, multi-instrument data, clear behavioral impact. Limitation: Small scope, no long-term tracking, uneven student motivation at start.
10	Sholihatul Hamidah Daulay & Devika Adelita (2023)	Using Scrabble as a Gamification to Enhance Students' Motivation and Vocabulary Acquisition	Qualitative, case study with open and closed questionnaires	Game-based learning using digital/physical Scrabble games	Scrabble increases motivation through fun, competition, and challenge; vocabulary improves due to contextual word use, exploration, and memorization via play.	Strengths: Rich teacher insights; qualitative depth; practical relevance. Limitations: Small sample size; limited to teacher perspectives; lacks student performance data; challenges with resources (e.g., dictionaries, tile limitations).
11	Mezia Kemala Sari, Nurul Hadina, Nahla Rahmandia (2022)	Duolingo as an Attractive Application to Upgrade Student's Motivation in Learning English	Quantitative, closed questionnaire	Achievements, Lingots, Crown Levels, Daily Goals, Forum, vocabulary/speaking/listening/translation	75% agreed Duolingo motivates independent learning; 62.5% felt it gives more learning opportunities; 43.75% were	Strengths: High student approval, real-world relevance, explores gamification features. Limitations: Small sample size, single school, only uses perception data

		Independently		lation exercises	encouraged to study more outside class. Duolingo makes learning fun, accessible, and game-like, increasing curiosity and consistency.	without performance measurement.
12	Dedi Rahman Nur (2021)	Student's Voices on Kahoot at Tertiary Level in East Kalimantan	Descriptive qualitative design; questionnaires (open and closed-ended); 5-point Likert scale; SPSS analysis	Kahoot: classroom competition, reward system, time limits, visual content, social media sharing	Kahoot increased student interest, motivation, understanding, teamwork, and created a competitive classroom atmosphere	Strengths: Structured instrument, popular and easy-to-use app, positive student responses Limitations: Technical issues (slow/freeze), dependency on stable internet connectivity
13	Sausan Nafis Amin (2021)	Gamification of Duolingo in Raising Students' English Language Learning Motivation	Case study; in-depth interviews and observations; qualitative analysis	Duolingo: skill trees, badges, XP points, leaderboards, streaks, rewards (lingots), voice/speech recognition, visual/audio elements	Duolingo significantly increased motivation and engagement; students preferred it over textbook-based learning; game elements made learning fun and consistent	Strengths: Deep qualitative insights; detailed exploration of gamified mechanics; strong practical application Limitations: Very small sample; no quantitative performance data; limited generalizability

Table 2 summarizes key studies that examine the effectiveness of gamification in promoting learner engagement within English Language Teaching (ELT). The most commonly used gamification strategies involve digital tools and platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz, Duolingo, Nearpod, and ClassDojo. These tools integrate various game elements—including points, badges, leaderboards, timed challenges, and interactive interfaces—to foster active participation, attentiveness, and collaboration. A number of studies also implemented physical or hybrid games, such as Scrabble and Jeopardy-style classroom games, demonstrating that both digital and non-digital approaches can be effective when aligned with classroom dynamics.

Different gamification elements appear to influence learners' engagement in specific ways. Points and leaderboards, for instance, were frequently associated with increased behavioural engagement, as they triggered competitiveness and goal-oriented participation.

Badges and achievement systems tended to support emotional engagement by offering visible recognition and satisfaction. A smaller number of studies incorporated storytelling elements or role-playing mechanics, which helped enhance cognitive engagement by immersing learners in meaningful, contextualized tasks. When these elements were combined in a blended approach, studies reported stronger engagement outcomes, suggesting that multi-faceted designs are more impactful than single-feature implementations.

Gamification was found to be particularly effective in secondary and tertiary Education, especially among learners with intermediate to advanced proficiency levels. Additionally, several studies demonstrated that online learning environments—especially during remote instruction—benefited significantly from gamified tools, as they helped mitigate distraction and foster real-time interaction. Nonetheless, studies conducted in offline or hybrid contexts also showed positive results, particularly when physical interaction and group-based activities were incorporated.

To measure learner engagement, researchers adopted diverse instruments, including classroom observations, engagement rubrics, surveys, and interviews. Some studies applied multi-dimensional frameworks that evaluated engagement through behavioural, emotional, and cognitive indicators. While many relied on qualitative insights, such as student reflections and teacher observations, others supported their findings with quantitative data, such as participation rates or performance improvements during gamified sessions. This combination of methods provided a holistic understanding of how and to what extent gamification fosters engagement in ELT classrooms.

The Effects of Gamification on Learner Motivation in ELT

Understanding the role of motivation in language learning is essential, as it significantly influences students' commitment, effort, and overall achievement. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), gamification has emerged as a promising strategy to enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Table 3 presents a summary of selected empirical studies that specifically investigate the relationship between gamification and learner motivation. The table outlines the research methodologies, types of gamification elements implemented, key findings, as well as the strengths and limitations identified in each study.

Table 3. Studies Investigating the Effects of Gamification on Learner Motivation in ELT

No	Author(s) /Year	Title	Methodology	Gamification Elements	Key Findings	Strengths & Limitations
1	Laily Mahbubah & Syafiul Anam (2022)	<i>Students' Perceptions on the Implementation of Kahoot! in English</i>	Descriptive qualitative; questionnaire and semi-structured interviews; classroom	Kahoot features: real-time quizzes, immediate feedback, leaderboards, timers, game PINs; MDA	Kahoot increased motivation, comprehension, and classroom participation; learning became fun, engaging, and less boring	Strengths: Detailed observation of engagement types; triangulated data collection (survey & interview) Limitations: Internet connectivity issues;

		<i>Language Teaching</i>	with brainstorming and Kahoot quiz sessions	(Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics) framework applied		lack of prior experience with tech tools; limited time and device access
2	Ahmed Ennouari & Khalid Houssaini (2023)	<i>Transformative Impacts of ICT-Based Gamification on English Teaching in Moroccan Education</i>	Quasi-experimental design; pre- and post-tests; surveys; ANOVA statistical analysis; classroom observations; teacher interviews	Digital games, Kahoot, Duolingo, mobile apps, leaderboards, quizzes, feedback, interactivity	Experimental group showed significantly higher motivation, comprehension, achievement, and positive behavior; ICT gamification proved effective over traditional methods	Strengths: Robust design with control group; triangulation of data; detailed statistical analysis Limitations: Small sample size; short-term scope; minimal impact on attendance; some teachers lacked ICT skills
3	Nina Inayati & Alimin Adi Waloyo (2022)	<i>The Influence of Quizziz-Online Gamification on Learning Engagement and Outcomes in Online English Language Teaching</i>	Descriptive case study; observations, interviews, and test results across six sessions	Quizziz: timed quizzes, real-time leaderboard, instant feedback, visuals, accessibility on mobile devices	Engagement improved steadily over time; learning outcomes fluctuated; Quizziz was effective for motivation but not consistent for achievement	Strengths: Multi-method data collection; observed real-classroom dynamics Limitations: Short study duration; no control group; learning gains not consistent across topics
4	Benjamin Panmei & Budi Waluyo (2023)	<i>The Pedagogical Use of Gamification in English Vocabulary Training and Learning in Higher Education</i>	Quasi-experimental; pre/post vocabulary tests; surveys; correlation and t-tests	Quizziz: online quizzes, instant feedback, leaderboard, memes, accessible via mobile, autonomous practice	Mixed results: no overall significant improvement between groups; experimental group outperformed in some tests; positive perceptions of Quizziz remained high	Strengths: Rigorous design; reliable instruments; explored under-researched app (Quizziz) Limitations: No qualitative data; short duration; app not designed specifically for vocabulary; perceptions decreased slightly post-intervention
5	Paola Julie Aguilar-Cruz & Henry	<i>A Serious Game to Learn English: The Case of</i>	Qualitative case study; open interviews; pre- and	Bethe1Challenge game: missions, levels, points, feedback,	Positive perceptions: 76% found the game fun and useful; 94% felt motivated by gamified activities;	Strengths: Rich qualitative insights; practical classroom integration; triangulation of

	Alberto Álvarez Guayara (2021)	<i>Bethe1Challenge</i>	post-tests; thematic analysis and paired t-test	learning analytics; plus gamified activities (e.g., Scavenger Hunt, Spelling Bee, Bingo, Debates, Tic-Tac-Toe)	measurable English improvement (e.g., pre-/post-test gains)	dataLimitations: Only 57% had access to the game due to device and registration issues; repetitive tasks; lack of in-game interaction
6	Paola Julie Aguilar-Cruz & Henry Alberto Álvarez Guayara (2021)	<i>A Serious Game to Learn English: The Case of Bethe1Challenge</i>	Qualitative case study; open interviews; pre- and post-tests; thematic analysis and paired t-test	Bethe1Challenge game: missions, levels, points, feedback, learning analytics; plus gamified activities (e.g., Scavenger Hunt, Spelling Bee, Bingo, Debates, Tic-Tac-Toe)	Positive perceptions: 76% found the game fun and useful; 94% felt motivated by gamified activities; measurable English improvement (e.g., pre-/post-test gains)	Strengths: Rich qualitative insights; practical classroom integration; triangulation of dataLimitations: Only 57% had access to the game due to device and registration issues; repetitive tasks; lack of in-game interaction
7	Trinh T. H., Nguyen M. N., & Tran T. T. H. (2022)	<i>Teachers and Students' Perceptions of Using Digital Games in Improving Vocabulary at Non-English-majored Class</i>	Mixed-methods (questionnaires + semi-structured interviews); piloted instruments	Quizizz, Kahoot, Wordwall; competitive rankings, colorful design, instant feedback, interactivity	Teachers and students view DGs positively for enhancing engagement, motivation, and vocabulary retention; however, drawbacks include time constraints, distractions, and technical issues	Strengths: Rich qualitative & quantitative data; dual perspectives (students & teachers); rigorous pilotingLimitations: Limited generalizability; lack of game-content effectiveness analysis; occasional access issues (devices, connectivity)
8	Salome Stephena Nordin & Suyansah bin Swanto (2023)	<i>The Impact of Implementing Quizizz on Developing Vocabulary Skills in Language Learning Among Malaysian</i>	Quasi-experimental (pre-test/post-test); questionnaire for perceptions; descriptive and inferential	Quizizz: gamified quizzes, instant feedback, collaboration, leaderboards, interactive design	Significant improvement in vocabulary scores post-Quizizz; high student satisfaction and engagement; positive views on collaboration and feedback	Strengths: Real classroom application; strong statistical evidence; rural context relevanceLimitations: Small sample size; limited generalizability; technology &

		<i>Secondary School Students in Rural Areas</i>	statistics (t-test)			connectivity barriers in rural areas
9	Kibbeum Na & Kwanghee Han (2023)	<i>How Leaderboard Positions Shape Our Motivation: The Impact of Competence Satisfaction and Frustration on Motivation in a Gamified Crowdsourcing Task</i>	Online experiment; image tagging game; leaderboard manipulated (high or low rank); behavioral and self-report measures	Leaderboards : fixed high/low rank, point scores, feedback; Self-Determination Theory applied	Low-rank users showed increased motivation and effort; high-rank users showed complacency; neither group demonstrated intrinsic motivation; trait competitiveness did not significantly moderate effects	Strengths: Strong SDT theoretical framework; diverse motivation measures (behavioral + subjective); novel experimental design Limitations: Limited generalizability (lab setting, one-time task); only competence need studied; small sample for trait competitiveness effects
10	Zhou Zhihao & Yu Zhonggen (2022)	<i>The Impact of Gamification on the Time-Limited Writing Performance of English Majors</i>	Mixed-method; quasi-experiment (control vs. experimental group), 5-week duration, writing tests, questionnaires, interviews	Points, badges (bronze/silver/gold), levels (bronze/silver/gold), leaderboards, bonus tasks	Gamification significantly improved all aspects of writing; motivation peaked in week 3, then declined; excessive rewards reduced motivation	Strengths: Rich data sources (quantitative + qualitative); strong gamification design; real classroom setting Limitations: Short duration; unclear which game elements had most effect; varied responses by personality type; drop in novelty effect
11	Rabea Ali & Mohamed Abdalgane (2022)	<i>The Impact of Gamification "Kahoot App" in Teaching English for Academic Purposes</i>	Quasi-experimental design; pre/post vocabulary tests and motivation questionnaire; 4-week intervention	Kahoot: MCQs, timed responses, game-based feedback, individual play, leaderboard (disabled for objectivity)	Kahoot significantly improved vocabulary scores and motivation compared to traditional methods; students enjoyed the gamified environment	Strengths: Detailed and structured methodology; controlled group comparison; reliable tools (vocab test + scale) Limitations: Small sample; short intervention period; no long-term retention measures
12	Panduperdana Putra & Arif Suryo	<i>Students' Perception Toward Gamification Applied in</i>	Descriptive qualitative; questionnaires (Likert	Kahoot, Quizizz; points, badges, leaderboards,	Strongly positive perceptions: increased engagement, enjoyment,	Strengths: Rich student feedback via multiple instruments; clear data

	Priyatmojo (2021)	<i>English Language Classroom</i>	scale) and interviews	competition, rewards	motivation, understanding; minimal distraction; competition and fun fostered learning	presentationLimitations: Small sample; limited to one school; no academic performance data
13	Frieska Angelia, Suharjito & Sani M. Isa (2020)	<i>Improving English Learning by Gamification with MDA Framework</i>	Mixed methods; paired t-test (score improvement), user experience survey; design and implementation of gamified app	MDA: Mechanics (timed quiz), Dynamics (competition, feedback), Aesthetics (pride, excitement, fear); Points, badges, leaderboards, achievements	Statistically significant improvement in learning outcomes; users highly motivated by gamified elements; positive perceptions of interface and engagement	Strengths: Custom-built app; robust gamification model; quantitative + experiential dataLimitations: Small sample; short usage period; no long-term retention evaluation
14	Torres Rodríguez, D. A., Armijos Ramírez, M. R., Criollo Vargas, M. I., & Salazar Chamba, E. M. (2023)	<i>Gamification Strategies on the Development of English Listening Comprehension Skills</i>	Mixed-method action research; pre-/post-tests, questionnaires, observation checklists; 10-lesson intervention based on Gagné's nine events	Games: "Simon says," "Pass the ball," "Running dictation," "Pointing out," "Shopping Race"; Badges, leaderboards, rewards, competition	Post-test scores rose from 6 to 8.3/10; subskills significantly improved; students felt highly motivated and engaged; gamified lessons enhanced comprehension	Strengths: Well-structured intervention; integration of theory (Gagné events); both qualitative and quantitative insightsLimitations: Small sample; results context-specific (single school); short-term scope
15	Mohsen Jabali & Carol Walker (2021)	<i>An Exploratory Cross-Sectional Study: FlipQuiz as a Digital Tool for Learning English Vocabulary in Language Classroom</i>	Quasi-experimental; pre/post vocabulary tests; Likert-scale surveys; comparison between control (traditional) and experimental (FlipQuiz) groups	FlipQuiz: digital gameboard, verbal response, feedback, interactive play, competitive review format	No statistically significant difference in vocabulary scores, but experimental group showed higher engagement and positive attitudes toward tech-based learning	Strengths: Direct classroom application; comparative design; clear motivation dataLimitations: Short duration (2 weeks); limited age and gender diversity; potential verbal participation bias (FlipQuiz required speaking)
16	Hayatul Mila &	<i>An Alternative</i>	Sequential explanatory	Board game: physical	Participants reported high	Strengths: Mixed-method approach;

	Moh. Arif Mahbub (2022)	<i>Board Game to Promote EFL Learners' Grammatical Skill</i>	mixed-method; online Likert questionnaire + semi-structured interviews	interaction, engagement mechanics, challenge, fun, collaborative play	motivation, engagement, and fun; gamification made grammar more accessible and enjoyable	deep qualitative insight; strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.928) Limitations: Very small sample (n=4); limited to one institution and skill area; not generalizable
17	Kiki Dwi Sartika, Dwi Fita Heriyawati & Sonny Elfianto (2023)	<i>The Use of Blooket: A Study of Students' Perception Enhancing English Vocabulary Mastery</i>	Descriptive quantitative ; 12-item Likert-scale questionnaire analyzed with SPSS	Blooket: points, avatars, images, competitive game modes (e.g., Racing, Tower Defense), instant feedback	Students found Blooket fun, competitive, and helpful for vocabulary learning; visuals and feedback enhanced understanding; minor tech issues noted	Strengths: Valid & reliable instrument (Cronbach's alpha = 0.836); practical classroom use; detailed analysis Limitations: Descriptive only; no learning performance metrics; tech dependency

Table 3 provides a detailed synthesis of empirical studies that explore the role of gamification in enhancing learner motivation within English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. The analysis reveals that the most commonly used gamification strategies include the use of digital platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz, Duolingo, and Blooket, which often incorporate elements like points, badges, leaderboards, levels, and instant feedback. These elements are frequently combined to create interactive, competitive, and rewarding learning experiences that aim to sustain learners' interest and encourage active participation. Among these, leaderboards and badges are particularly prevalent, used to generate extrinsic motivation by offering visible recognition and competition, while features like missions, levels, and game-based tasks are more aligned with intrinsic motivators such as autonomy, curiosity, and the sense of achievement.

Different gamification elements influence motivational outcomes in distinct ways. For instance, points and rewards tend to boost extrinsic motivation, especially when linked to performance tracking or competition, whereas interactive gameplay and personalized progression systems (e.g., levels or challenges tailored to learner ability) are more effective in fostering intrinsic motivation. However, several studies caution that over-reliance on external rewards can diminish long-term engagement if not balanced with meaningful learning goals.

Gamification has been applied effectively across various educational contexts, with notable success in secondary and tertiary Education, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and writing skills development. Contexts with flexible access to technology and supportive classroom environments reported the most consistent motivational gains. Conversely, in under-resourced or rural settings, the effectiveness of gamification was sometimes limited by technical constraints such as internet access and device availability.

To assess motivational outcomes, researchers employed a range of measurement tools, including Likert-scale questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, pre-and post-tests, and observation protocols. Some studies used well-established theoretical frameworks, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) or the MDA framework (Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics), to guide their measurement and interpretation of motivation. While self-report instruments were the most commonly used method, a few studies incorporated mixed methods to triangulate data and enhance the validity of findings.

Overall, the findings presented in Table 3 suggest that gamification, when thoughtfully designed and pedagogically aligned, can significantly enhance learner motivation in ELT settings. Nevertheless, researchers emphasize the importance of contextual sensitivity, balanced reward systems, and ongoing evaluation to ensure that gamification contributes meaningfully to both student engagement and language learning outcomes.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings of this systematic literature review reinforce the increasingly recognized role of gamification in enhancing learner engagement and motivation in English Language Teaching (ELT). Across the 30 analyzed studies, gamification—particularly through digital tools like Kahoot, Quizizz, and Duolingo—was consistently associated with increased learner participation, enjoyment, and attentiveness (Mahbubah & Anam, 2022; Amin, 2021; Yu, 2023). These outcomes align with motivational theories such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key drivers of intrinsic motivation. Game-based elements such as leaderboards and badges support this by offering immediate feedback, encouraging self-directed learning, and fostering a sense of achievement (Subhash & Cudney, 2018).

Notably, the frequent use of blended gamification strategies amplifies positive outcomes compared to single-element implementations. Studies that combined multiple elements—such as points, badges, and interactive platforms—tended to report more robust engagement and motivation (Kapp, 2012; Oliveira et al., 2022). This suggests that variety and interactivity are crucial factors in maintaining learner interest, echoing the findings of Kuo-Wei Lee (2023) and reinforcing the importance of design diversity in gamified environments.

Shortcomings in Implementation and Research Scope

Despite these positive trends, several limitations within the body of research were evident. Many studies suffered from short intervention durations, making it difficult to assess the sustainability of gamification's effects over time (Baah, Govender, & Subramaniam, 2023; Zhou & Yu, 2022). This temporal limitation raises important questions about the long-term pedagogical value of gamification: Does initial excitement translate into meaningful language acquisition, or is the impact fleeting?

Additionally, the over-reliance on self-report measures—such as perception surveys or interviews—poses concerns about validity and objectivity. Few studies included performance-based metrics or assessed actual gains in language skills (Huseinović, 2023;

Aguilar-Cruz & Álvarez Guayara, 2021). This methodological weakness limits the capacity to draw firm conclusions about gamification's effectiveness in improving specific competencies such as vocabulary retention, grammar accuracy, or speaking fluency.

Moreover, the literature shows a disproportionate focus on general engagement or motivational outcomes, while core language skills are often under-examined. Only a minority of studies directly measured improvements in vocabulary, speaking, listening, or writing (Rodríguez et al., 2023; Nordin & Swanto, 2023). This reveals a gap between gamification's psychological effects and its instructional impact and points to a need for greater alignment between gamified design and specific learning objectives.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings highlight the need to bridge gamification practice with pedagogical Theory. While many studies implement gamification for engagement, few explicitly integrate it with frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy or constructivist learning models (Aguilar-Cruz & Álvarez Guayara, 2021; Torres Rodríguez et al., 2023). Doing so could help ensure that gamified activities not only motivate but also facilitate higher-order thinking, such as application, analysis, and synthesis (Landers, 2014).

From a practical standpoint, educators and curriculum designers should prioritize the strategic integration of gamification, ensuring that game elements align with learning outcomes, learner profiles, and classroom realities. Personalized and adaptive gamification models—those that respond to individual student progress, preferences, and needs—appear especially promising but remain underexplored in current literature (Toda, Valle, & Isotani, 2019).

Directions for Future Research

Given the limitations identified, future studies should adopt longitudinal research designs to assess the lasting impact of gamification on language proficiency. Research should also move beyond affective outcomes and explore how gamification influences academic performance, particularly in specific language domains (Yu, 2023; Sadeghi et al., 2022). Furthermore, integrating mixed-method approaches—combining quantitative performance data with qualitative learner insights—would provide a richer, more balanced understanding of gamification's pedagogical value. Finally, there is a need to explore non-digital or hybrid gamification models, especially in contexts where technological access is limited (Mila & Mahbub, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review explores the impact of gamification on learner engagement and motivation in English Language Teaching (ELT), based on 30 empirical studies. Results show that gamification—especially via digital platforms—positively influences learner motivation and participation, particularly when multiple game elements are combined, aligning with Self-Determination Theory.

However, most studies had short durations, limited sample diversity, and relied on self-reported data, offering only a partial view of gamification's instructional impact.

Additionally, few studies focused on specific language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, or speaking. Future research should apply longitudinal, mixed-method designs and target skill-specific outcomes. Incorporating adaptive gamification aligned with pedagogical frameworks like Bloom's Taxonomy or constructivism is recommended.

In conclusion, while gamification enhances motivation and engagement in ELT, its full pedagogical potential lies in thoughtful, learner-centered implementation and long-term impact evaluation. Future educational innovations should move beyond surface-level engagement to integrate gamified strategies that foster measurable language proficiency, align with instructional goals, and adapt to diverse learner needs. This will ensure gamification evolves from a motivational tool into a sustainable and transformative practice in English language education.

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