

Article

Gamification strategies to promote motivation in English Language Learning among 14-year-old students

Estrategias de gamificación para promover la motivación en el aprendizaje del inglés entre estudiantes de 14 años

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Abstract: Teaching English is a complex process for students who do not speak it as their native language and find it uninteresting, which leads to boredom in English classes. It highlights a problem in language learning, as students have no interest in the subject. This article aims to implement playful activities to create a more active and thoughtful educational environment, such as gamification, one of the most interesting strategies in teaching. By playing different games that are not only entertaining but also educational, students learn and improve their language skills through challenges and rewards. Ultimately, students develop an interest in learning and improve their language skills.

Keywords: gamification; active; dynamic; teaching; performance

Resumen: La enseñanza del idioma inglés es un proceso complejo en estudiantes que no es su lengua nativa y lo ven como algo poco interesante lo que conlleva a un aburrimiento en las clases de inglés. Esto da énfasis a un problema en el aprendizaje del idioma ya que los estudiantes no tienen interés por la materia. Este artículo tiene como objetivo implementar actividades lúdicas, dando espacio a un entorno educativo más activo y pensante como la gamificación que es una de las estrategias más interesantes en la enseñanza. Realizando diferentes juegos, pero no solo son de entretenimiento sino educativos, quiere decir que mediante retos y recompensas los estudiantes aprendan y mejoren el rendimiento en el idioma. Finalmente, los estudiantes tengan ese interés por aprender, mejorando en sus habilidades lingüísticas.

Palabras claves: gamificación, activo, dinámicas, enseñanza, rendimiento

1. Introduction

English is one of the most important languages worldwide, making it essential for students' future success. Teachers need to seek alternatives for transforming English language learning, driven by technological advances, since these digital technologies are now available to everyone, enabling pedagogical transformation to meet students' evolving expectations (Pérez & Gómez, 2023). It is important to implement pedagogical approaches that not only introduce traditional knowledge but also foster an active approach that enhances student motivation and emotional state (Anisa et al., 2020). It is based on the idea that they have enjoyable encouragement for successful learning. Technology is one of the most sought-after resources, and it is essential to decide how to benefit students in their English language learning. According to (Ahmadi, 2018) one of the most important processes that has emerged is the use of technology, which is currently used to improve the teaching of different languages, allowing teachers to incorporate it into the classroom and enhance learning. Technology is a vital tool that enhances the educational environment and thus helps achieve the objectives expected for future generations, making the English language a feasible and beneficial means of communication for young people. To this end, this research analyzes how students can improve their learning skills through the beneficial integration of technology.

Gamification is one of the strategies that has gained significant relevance in the world of knowledge recently (Pérez & Gómez, 2023). It involves applying game dynamics in non-playful settings. It allows us to recognize students' weaknesses and develop innovative strategies, as gamification has recently gained significant relevance in the world of knowledge. It involves applying game dynamics in non-playful environments to foster positive attitudes among students (Sari, 2021). This approach is leading to a drastic change in education, innovating different ways of teaching students so that a classroom is not simply a monotonous place to receive lessons, but, on the contrary, an environment of joyful games. Including these different games helps increase students' motivation and productivity (Anisa et al., 2020).

It is important to emphasize that integrating games into teaching requires more than simply adopting any game; each is designed with the subject matter in mind. Several analyses conducted during academic periods in the field of English language teaching have shown that the use of gamification can significantly improve each student's academic performance, helping them participate in and attend classes much better than before (Anisa et al., 2020). These different activities help to include teamwork as part of their lives. While some students prefer individual work, isolating themselves from the outside world, the purpose of teaching is to include all students in cooperative work so they can learn together the different topics covered in the classroom, thus gaining feedback and diverse learning styles (Sari, 2021). The objective of this research is to analyze various gamification strategies that enhance English language learning (Pérez &

Gómez, 2023). Teachers must also be motivated to convey this desire to learn to their students, because they are a reflection of those who impart each lesson. If the teachers explore each of the processes, they will see that a lack of motivation will not only affect students in the classroom but also outside of it. Ultimately, the goal is for students to develop their English language skills progressively (Alhamdawee,2022).

1.1 What is Gamification?

Gamification is a method that can be used in the classroom to enable deeper interaction between teachers and students in unexpected ways (Pérez & Gómez, 2023). As everyone knows about learning, it should be emphasized that this method is not just a game mechanic in which the teacher decides to play a game and the students have fun or follow instructions, and the process is over. On the contrary, it includes educational contexts that students do not see as a simple game but as a way of learning through dynamics that are relevant to their learning (Sari, 2021). However, it should be noted that in teaching a new language, several important skills must be developed and refined so that, in the future, their education will benefit. For this, they can use vocabulary games, reward systems, team competitions, narratives, and missions (Anisa et al., 2020). A significant impact has been noted in the use of gamification to motivate students to learn a new language, such as English, and thus achieve academic success and achievement within the field of education, demonstrating that the inclusion of games has excellent validity in different skills, such as oral, written, reading, and speaking, in students (Huseinović, L., 2023). This includes an entire educational community in which parents, authorities, teachers, and students participate, all sharing the same goal. For students to engage in learning in a more relaxed and conscious way, understanding that learning a new language is not something monotonous that anyone can do, but rather a group effort and union in which the educational society increasingly sees prosperity and growth, always putting the education of children, young people, and adults as paramount in our lives. It is much better than applying different techniques that contribute to education, such as using these dynamic games to teach a new language in the environment where it is used. Analysis has shown that learning is more effective when it takes place through games, as educational environments are satisfied with the results and want to see even more of these strategies in the classroom (Wang,2023).

1.2 The importance of using gamification in learning the English language

Gamification has become a more interesting and meaningful learning evolution in learning a new language, taking as an example the memorization of grammar rules or vocabulary with activities that activate the intellectual system in students, allowing them to use the language in real time, interacting with people around them, applying their knowledge, and not just staying on the interface as something spontaneous, but rather making it fruitful in their lives. There are several benefits to using gamification in English language teaching, such as

encouraging students to engage in different areas of their daily lives and to actively learn, helping them make decisions and solve problems by applying the language they have learned during their learning period. The importance of gamification lies in its adaptability across different environments and learning styles, making it applicable to students of any age. The performance and motivation of a group of students are essential in the educational field, and the use of gamification has achieved this in a fruitful way, such as through cooperative challenges, improved language skills, and a greater sense of success within the educational community. (Begmatov, 2024). Currently, teachers and students can use various technological tools, each with its own benefits and strategies.

Teachers can adapt them to the class they want to teach, or if they want to modify games, they can do so because these platforms allow them to create interactive quizzes that are not as simple as one might imagine, but instead take the form of competitions between students, leading to an interface for interaction between them, transforming the classroom into a world of adventure where teachers and students complete tasks but differently and actively (Sari, 2021). One way teachers can help students become more enthusiastic about learning English is by supporting their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which helps them learn by fostering a desire to learn and the pleasure of incorporating this learning into their daily lives (Anisa et al., 2020). In the future, this is expected to yield great results, with achievements visible. This is why gamification is one of the most direct ways to meet these expectations.

In this medium, there are reward games, challenges, and different levels, where each student is viewed as a competitor, challenging various learning panels in which they learn and are motivated to advance their learning intrinsically. When playing the dynamic games the teacher assigns, each of them puts all their interest and focus into achieving objectives that lead them to reach higher and higher levels (Pérez & Gómez, 2023). At the same time, this indicates that they have the correct autonomy of knowledge where they can express themselves and interact with each other, challenging the different teaching statuses.

However, this analysis will focus on one of the four language skills, namely writing, since through gamification, 14-year-old students learn and develop different grammatical structures, which are extremely important when writing any paragraph on any topic. To summarize, the importance of gamification in English language teaching is that it allows different activities or tools, such as Duolingo, Quizizz, and Kahoot, to adjust learning to each student's real-time needs, allowing them to learn outside the classroom or learn vocabulary through clue games or by downloading apps to their phones that encourage grammar reinforcement and better cohesion in English learning (Gangaiamaran & Pasupathi, 2017). One of the important things is that different cultural contexts are related, such as including students who have problems learning, such as dyslexia, anxiety, or depression, since in these situations, it is tough to make significant progress in education. However, with the help of this methodology and

technology, favorable changes will be achieved in the environments they live in, thus offering accessible and personalized environments (Aziz & Zakaria, 2019).

1.3 Behaviorism

Behaviorism is an approach to studying student behavior, in which environmental stimuli can modify their attitudes during educational activities within the institution (González & Quezada, 2021). At the beginning of the 20th century, authors such as John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner viewed behaviorism as a transformation in behavior, as it seeks to obtain results through the inclusion of responses and stimuli. Another way to address negative behavior students may exhibit is through reinforcement, either positive or negative. In addition, one of the key elements is punishment, which these authors indicate is fundamental for adapting the behavior required of students and may lead to a change in the future for each of them, depending on the actions that may occur during the educational day influencing the undesirable behavior not to be repeated on other occasions because this theory indicates that punishment helps to reduce these actions, leading to appropriate behavior in the educational society (Gunnars, 2021).

Pavlov conducted a study with dogs that demonstrated the concept of a conditioned stimulus, and Skinner conducted a study with rats and pigeons that led to operant conditioning, emphasizing stimulus-response. (González & Quezada, 2021). Gamification in relation to behaviorist theory indicates that in the education system, when teaching a new language, teachers look for different ways to influence this learning enjoyably and productively, where different recreational games and entertainment are incorporated into the learning process differently so that students have fun and play without the pressure of memorizing a topic exactly, and where students receive rewards, extra points, level up, or even earn medals in these games. It is seen as a reward for them, creating a stimulus-response pattern with behaviorism. In contrast, when students are unable to level up or earn one of these rewards in each game, a mild punishment is introduced: not earning the same points or remaining at the same level, and not continuing to advance. It seeks to correct this type of behavior and instill in students who may not be concentrating enough the need to put more emphasis and effort into these situations.

It means that behaviorism leads students to understand that if they put more effort into achieving a goal and behave appropriately in these situations, they will receive valuable rewards for their performance. Otherwise, if they do not have the same interests, they will obviously receive low rewards, which are seen as punishments. However, this theory seeks to correct this type of behavior, which students often see as monotonous and of no use to them in the future. Sometimes they do not see the point of learning another language, and this theory seeks to indirectly instill in students an interest in the subject and achieve great goals (Gunnars, 2021). Behaviorism is one of the sciences that focuses on improving learning through student participation, as it had an important methodological focus during the 20th century, leading these decades to be considered a

behaviorist tool that seeks to obtain different results in student learning, now considered by scientists as different perspectives to encourage students to learn well by changing their behavior (Gunnars,2021).

Constructivism

Jean Piaget is considered one of the founders of constructivism, which is based on learning through the integration or assimilation of new material, as this allows students to relate learning to their environment, providing a balance for new learning (The Fountain Magazine,2004). This theoretical foundation aligns perfectly with gamification, as both prioritize a more interactive learning experience for students, both with each other and with the English language. At the same time, it seeks to motivate each student in an educational environment that they often find uninteresting, especially when it comes to learning English, which they see as tedious and dull.

Constructivism, on the other hand, applies to students who are highly motivated to learn through the experiences they gain each day in the classroom, making fundamental changes through play and social interaction that they practice, helping them improve their language skills and future practices. One of the situations that prompted teachers to teach in a different and improved way was the Industrial Revolution, which forced these changes. It should be noted that it depends on the characteristics of the students, as each learns according to their skill type. Gamification helps young people understand subject matter more easily through a constructivist lens, using a qualitative approach (Rohman & Fauziati, 2022). The main objective of the study is to develop a model integrating constructivism and gamification to improve students' self-regulation in learning through diverse study designs. It has been fruitful, as motivation and commitment to learning combine to form a powerful fusion in the educational environment (Machmud et al.,2023).

When educational games are integrated, and a fun, dynamic environment is created during teaching, students feel more confident spending time with the teacher, as they are given the confidence to carry out the activities. If they sometimes make mistakes, they will take it as an opportunity to improve and move forward, not give up, and learn from them (Rohman & Fauziati, 2022). It is thanks to the constructivist approach, which emphasizes continuous and formative assessment, that students receive immediate feedback. When performing technological activities, students can know right away when they have made a mistake and ask for help to reinforce their learning, thus creating rewards for progress and improving their self-esteem every day, knowing that making mistakes is an opportunity to ask for help and improve their knowledge (Machmud et al., 2023). In conclusion, constructivism is a fundamental part of gamification, prioritizing student learning as it makes it a more social and active process, incorporating motivating dynamics so that students feel that learning is a time of opportunity to create a treasure trove of knowledge within themselves, which is the main objective for everyone, ultimately turning the classroom into a place of

transformation and affection in the educational environment (The Fountain Magazine, 2004).

1.4 Flow theory

This theory was developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who proposes that teachers emphasize students' cognitive-emotional states, maintaining a balance between the challenge and the skills they need to develop through the activities they are asked to perform during the teaching process. The purpose is for the teacher to ask questions and for the students to respond affirmatively, for example, with the phrase. Teacher, today's class was perfect. He or she did not realize it was already over (Abio,2006).

A psychology of happiness delves into activities that involve and seek a balance between challenge and ability, fostering intrinsic motivation, reflection, and self-discipline (Gutierrez,2024). This theory describes how students enter a state of concentration in an educational setting, even though some students sometimes find it challenging to pay attention (Abio, 2006). It implies that flow theory is a psychological state in which students lose track of time when they are engaged in activities inside or outside the classroom, learning and acquiring knowledge without realizing it, completing the exercises given by the teacher, and feeling fully satisfied with what they have accomplished (Pamplona Gutierrez, 2024). As teachers, we sometimes hear comments from students who did not feel that the class was over or who say, "The hour ended so quickly." It is when the teacher feels satisfied with what has been accomplished, when the students are very focused in class, and when, without worry or nostalgia, the objective of the student reaching that state of concentration has been achieved by applying gamification, which helps students learn through games or dynamic activities.

To ensure effective English language learning, games are used to help maintain a balance between the challenge of performing the different activities and the skills demonstrated in each (Abio, 2006). There are programs for practicing English-language skills, such as Quizizz/Kahoot, Wordwall, and Duolingo. These help students see learning in a different light, as a way to achieve goals and progress through levels, encouraging and motivating concentration and the achievement of healthy goals (Delgado, 2023). It means that English classes are no longer a source of torment or concern for students, as gamification injects intrinsic motivation, encouraging them to practice speaking in order to achieve communicative fluency and retain the grammar and vocabulary they have learned during class hours, but this time in a more dynamic and fun way (Sari, 2021).

The flow theory in education has conditions of utmost importance for the development of students' knowledge to be fruitful and for them to understand, analyze, and apply each topic presented by the teacher (Abio, 2006). Among these conditions is that the tasks should be challenging enough so that students do not get bored while performing the activities, but not so challenging that they cause anxiety, which is something to be avoided during the learning process. In addition, the objective is for students to know that they will achieve the activity no

matter what. It means they must have a clear goal to achieve and do well, since the teacher can then provide feedback based on their performance. They should not have external distractions, such as classmates from another class or the same class, as this can affect their emotional learning.

To conclude the topic, flow theory in relation to gamification in English language teaching is presented as a pedagogical approach that helps promote motivation, academic performance, and student participation by incorporating dynamic game elements into classes, including rewards, challenges, feedback, and levels that engage students in enjoying the activity while experiencing optimal concentration. This approach not only helps students learn grammar and vocabulary but also enables them to learn more independently and effectively, as its objective is to innovate across English language teaching methods, making classes more motivating, dynamic, and effective (Abio, 2006; Pérez & Gómez, 2023).

1.5 Impact on student motivation and engagement

Gamification in the student learning process provides motivation and engagement with each task set by teachers, reflecting growth in interactive participation, such as tasks or exercises to be done in class, ensuring that students can enjoy an interactive learning process (Begmatov, 2024). Many studies show that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are linked to the use of dynamic games, thereby creating a more effective environment for learning a foreign language (Anisa et al., 2020). Each person feels more involved and attracted to challenges and rewards, which encourages students to improve their knowledge and develop a mindset that they will succeed. Gamification reduces anxiety about making mistakes during an exercise or about not being able to complete an activity (Alshammari, 2021). On the contrary, it makes mistakes part of the game, so that if he makes one, he can correct it and continue the entertaining process. It means that students become more involved in these types of activities, such as group dynamics, because they perceive them as more fun and challenging. Over time, they become part of their daily lives, creating external stimuli that encourage them to participate more and more in these types of sequences (Sari, 2021).

Regarding the commitment sought from students, it makes them more involved in class, encouraging them to answer the teacher's questions and collaborate more in group activities. It promotes social cohesion and teamwork, helping students learn to handle these types of situations. In some cases, students develop the ability to lead in group work as they achieve clear goals and receive feedback from their peers, taking on learning roles (Machmud et al., 2023).

1.6 Online platforms

1.6.1 Duolingo

It is an application that anyone of any age can use. When the students create an account, they start earning points, and by doing exercises, they can accumulate points. To do this, when he fills in his details, the app asks questions to determine

his learning level, then starts the game from there (Liang, 2018). It involves game mechanics in which he earns points, rewards, rankings, and badges, and gradually moves up levels. Just like when he downloads a game and the more he wants to win and get rewards, this app is the same, with the difference that it starts from a learning point and, more than that, a foreign language that helps the educational environment, intending to motivate students to participate in this area of the English language (Gangaiamaran & Pasupathi, 2017). These technological products are reliable for students as they help improve their knowledge (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). Over time, many of these people have come to trust these applications that promote foreign learning fully (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). Nowadays, learning a language is becoming easier for people because they can find several online applications that improve how they learn. These applications are gaining greater prominence worldwide because they are not just games but are sometimes considered a waste of time. On the contrary, these special applications are seen as a way to develop English language skills, making learning more fun, as the learning method shows that gamification is an excellent way to learn English (Gangaiamaran & Pasupathi, 2017).

According to Liang (2018), the Duolingo app is considered the best app for learning English because it offers a variety of games and activities, is easy to use, and is fun. It is important to develop intrinsic motivation in students' lives, as it transforms the traditional into something fun and daring, enabling vocabulary and grammar to be learned through interactive exercises. It means that instant feedback can be provided during these exercises. Another phase is listening, reading, speaking, and writing comprehension. This analysis shows that this application helps improve the development of the four English language skills by focusing on game mechanics and ensuring that students are highly motivated to complete these activities.

Figure 1

Duolingo, Inc. (2024)



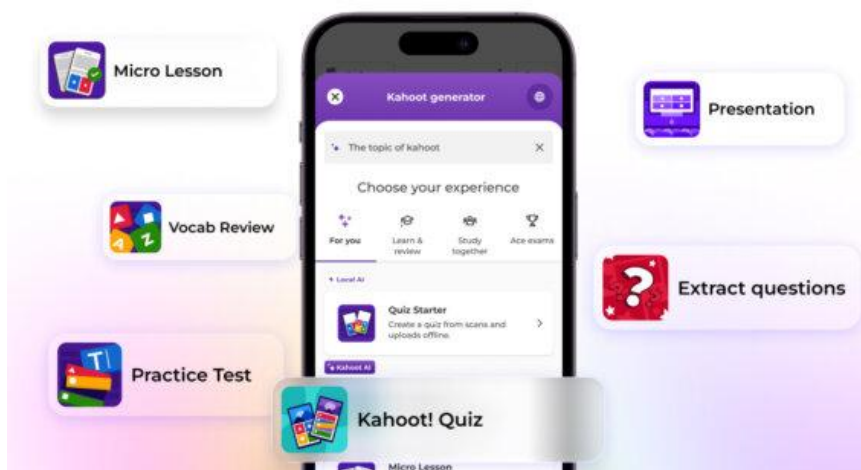
1.6.2 Kahoot/Quizziz

These are online platforms that help teachers incorporate different activities in a more fun way in the classroom. It is based entirely on gamification, which aims to help students learn through play, as these websites offer interactive quizzes. It represents a significant departure from traditional methods most people are used to, and it completely transforms the learning experience for students. During the global pandemic, these platforms surprisingly helped each student learn English, as they significantly impacted the use of these resources. It enhances the learning process by motivating students intrinsically and integrating each resource into teaching excellence (Delgado, J. A., 2023).

It has been discovered that implementing this aspect of games in the classroom offers more than traditional teaching methods, as various studies have shown that students love this type of activity. Using Kahoot or Quizizz has made students feel more motivated than in previous studies, making the learning environment more enjoyable for the educational community (Sari & Pratiwi, 2023). Kahoot or Quizizz also allows students to learn at their own pace, which prioritizes learning and reduces stress caused by time constraints in many cases. It would be one less thing to worry about, allowing teachers to integrate this platform into various educational contexts. This application has yielded favorable results in class, with students showing improved concentration and motivation (Chaiyo & Nokham, R, 2017).

Figure 2

Kahoot!(2013)



1.6.3 Wordwall

One of the learning methods that needs to be implemented during research is gamification, especially when using these types of applications, as it leads to a key transformation in English language teaching, such as word searches, crossword puzzles, roulette wheels, and true or false activities, which allow teachers to obtain educational and interactive games (Putra, 2022). Transforming content by all teachers into interactive, accessible formats improves English

language teaching. The use of gamification in education has led to visible results (Shabrina & Taufiq, 2023). For example, the website called Wordwall allows teachers to carry out these personalized and unique activities, contributing to the inclusion of each of them and to diversity inside and outside the classroom (Janadah & Ana Ahsana, 2024).

Traditionally teaching English, such as having students sit at their desks while the teacher stands at the blackboard trying to explain a topic, leads to students becoming bored, talking to their classmates, joking around, and not paying attention. This type of platform establishes learning techniques and a better environment, as students feel more engaged and interact more with the game the teacher has created (Shabrina, F. B., & Taufiq, W, 2023). The main objective is for students to master the four language skills. In the linguistic component, there are five elements: pronunciation, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and vocabulary. For this reason, it has been important that through this Wordwall platform, students have achieved excellent performance and improvement in these areas (Putra, I. M. A, 2022). According to Janadah, C., & Ana Ahsana, E.-S. (2024). Students provided positive feedback, viewing it as an effective tool that improves various language skills, and appreciated it, recommending it.

Figure 3

Wordwall, Exercises



2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This research employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the impact of gamification strategies on motivation and performance of 14-year-old students in English language learning. The design was descriptive explanatory, allowing the identification of relationships between the use of gamified tools and improvement in linguistic skills.

2.2. Participants

The sample consisted of 14-year-old students from secondary level, selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria were: regular students enrolled in English as a Foreign Language course, with access to technological devices to participate in gamified activities, and informed consent from parents or legal guardians.

2.3. Instruments and Tools

Various educational gamification platforms were used, including Kahoot, Quizizz, Wordwall, and mobile applications for vocabulary learning. Pre and post-intervention questionnaires were applied to measure students' motivation levels and academic performance. Additionally, classroom observations and focus groups were conducted to collect qualitative data on students' perceptions regarding gamified activities.

2.4. Procedure

The intervention was carried out over a 12-week academic period. In the initial phase, a pre-test was applied to assess the level of motivation and linguistic competence of students. During the implementation phase, gamified activities were systematically integrated into class sessions, including vocabulary games, grammar competitions, and oral and written comprehension challenges. At the end of the intervention, a post-test was applied and group interviews were conducted to evaluate the observed changes.

2.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, calculating means, standard deviations, and applying Student's t-tests to compare pre and post-intervention results. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns in students' perceptions and experiences with gamified strategies.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from the corresponding institutional authorities and informed consent from parents or legal guardians of the participants. The confidentiality of the collected information and the anonymity of participants were guaranteed. Students had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence for their regular academic evaluation.

3. Results

3.1. Impact on Student Motivation

The study results revealed a significant increase in student motivation levels after implementing gamified strategies. The pre-test analysis showed that 58% of students expressed low interest in traditional English classes, while the post-test evidenced that 82% of participants reported high levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation after participating in gamified activities. Students expressed that elements of competition, immediate rewards, and constant feedback allowed them to maintain a higher level of commitment to language learning.

3.2. Improvement in Academic Performance

Students' academic performance showed notable improvements in the four linguistic skills evaluated: oral comprehension, written comprehension, oral expression, and written expression. Post-intervention evaluations indicated an average increase of 23% in overall English grades. Specifically, vocabulary comprehension increased by 31%, grammar by 18%, and oral communication skills by 27%. These results suggest that gamification not only increases motivation but also translates into tangible improvements in English language proficiency.

3.3. Perception of Gamified Tools

Qualitative data collected through focus groups revealed that students perceived gamified tools as more dynamic, interactive, and attractive compared to traditional methods. Kahoot and Quizizz were identified as the most popular platforms due to their real-time competition format. Wordwall was valued positively for its variety of activities and ease of use. Students highlighted that these tools allowed them to learn more autonomously and at their own pace, reducing anxiety associated with learning a foreign language.

3.4. Participation and Collaboration

Classroom observations documented a significant increase in students' active participation during gamified sessions. Students who previously showed reluctance to participate orally in traditional classes demonstrated greater willingness to engage in collaborative game activities. Teamwork was strengthened, with 76% of students expressing preference for gamified group activities over traditional individual work. This dynamic fostered a more inclusive learning environment where students with different levels of linguistic competence could contribute and learn from each other.

3.5. Observed Challenges and Limitations

Despite the positive results, some challenges in implementation were identified. Approximately 15% of students reported technical difficulties related to internet connectivity or limited access to appropriate devices. Some teachers expressed concern about the time needed to prepare and manage effective gamified activities. Additionally, it was observed that a small percentage of students (8%) stated that the competitive aspect of some games generated stress, suggesting the need to balance competitive activities with more collaborative ones.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm and expand existing evidence on the effectiveness of gamification in foreign language teaching. The results obtained are consistent with previous research that has documented the positive impact of gamified strategies on student motivation (Huseinović, 2023; Wang, 2023). The 82% increase in motivation levels observed in this study exceeds those reported in some previous research, which could be attributed to the systematic and sustained implementation of gamified strategies over an extended period, in contrast to shorter or sporadic interventions.

The 23% improvement in overall academic performance and specific increases in vocabulary (31%), grammar (18%), and oral expression (27%) demonstrate that gamification transcends mere entertainment to become an effective pedagogical tool. These results support the constructivist theory of learning, according to which students construct knowledge more effectively when they actively participate in meaningful and contextually relevant experiences (Rohman & Fauziati, 2022). The interactive and experiential nature of gamification provides precisely these types of enriched learning contexts.

Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory (Abio, 2006) offers a useful theoretical framework for understanding why gamified activities were so effective. When students are in a flow state, characterized by an optimal balance between task challenge and their abilities, they experience deep engagement and intrinsic enjoyment. The gamified tools used in this study, particularly Kahoot and Quizizz, appear to have facilitated this flow state by providing immediate feedback, gradual challenges, and a sense of constant progress.

The strengthening of collaborative work observed in this study is particularly significant in light of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The zone of proximal development, a central concept in this theory, suggests that students learn more effectively when working with more capable peers or with teacher guidance (Machmud et al., 2023). Group gamified activities created natural opportunities for this type of peer scaffolding, where students with different linguistic strengths could support each other. This dynamic not only improved language learning but also developed social and teamwork skills valuable for the 21st century.

The reduction in linguistic anxiety reported by students represents an important benefit of gamification. Research in second language acquisition has established that anxiety is one of the main obstacles to effective language learning (Alshammari, 2021). The playful and low-pressure environment created by gamified activities seems to have mitigated this affective barrier, allowing students to experiment with the language more freely and riskily, essential elements for the development of communicative competence.

The technological challenges identified in this study reflect common realities in Latin American educational contexts, where the digital divide remains a significant concern. Kaimara et al. (2021) have documented similar barriers in the implementation of digital game-based learning. These findings underscore the need to carefully consider the technological and socioeconomic context when designing gamified interventions. Educational institutions must strive to ensure equitable access to devices and connectivity to maximize the benefits of these innovative pedagogical strategies.

The concern expressed by some students regarding the competitive aspect of certain gamified activities deserves special attention. While competition can be a powerful motivator for many students, the literature suggests that excessive emphasis on competition can be counterproductive for some learners (Limniou & Mansfield, 2018). This suggests the importance of designing diversified gamified

experiences that include both competitive and collaborative elements, allowing students with different motivational profiles to benefit equitably.

The time and effort required by teachers to effectively implement gamification represents an important practical consideration. Although the initial investment in learning to use gamified tools and designing appropriate activities can be substantial, the long-term benefits in terms of student motivation and learning outcomes justify this effort. It is essential that educational institutions provide adequate training and ongoing support to teachers who wish to incorporate gamified strategies into their pedagogical practice.

A limitation of this study is the focus on students of a specific age range (14 years). Future research could examine the effectiveness of similar gamified strategies in different age groups and levels of linguistic competence. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore the long-term impact of gamification, beyond the 12-week intervention period, to determine if the observed benefits are sustained over time.

5. Conclusiones

This study demonstrates that gamification strategies constitute an effective pedagogical tool to promote motivation and improve academic performance in English learning among 14-year-old students. The results reveal significant increases in student motivation (82% reporting high levels after intervention) and academic performance (23% average improvement), with particularly notable gains in vocabulary comprehension (31%), grammar (18%), and oral communication skills (27%).

The findings confirm that gamification transcends mere entertainment to become a grounded pedagogical strategy that facilitates meaningful learning. The reduction of linguistic anxiety and the increase in active participation represent important achievements with long-term implications for students' development as competent intercultural communicators. Students who previously showed reluctance to participate orally in traditional classes demonstrated greater willingness to engage in gamified collaborative activities, with 76% expressing preference for group gamified tasks.

However, successful implementation requires careful consideration of contextual factors, including technological access and teacher training. The study identified challenges such as internet connectivity issues (15% of students) and stress from competitive elements (8% of students), underscoring the need for balanced activity design that includes both competitive and collaborative elements.

Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting the digital transformation of language education. When implemented reflectively and systematically, gamification strategies have the potential to revolutionize English teaching, making language learning a more accessible, motivating, and effective experience for all students.

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