

DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS OF STUDENTS VIA GAMIFICATION

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Abstract:

This article explores the role of gamification in developing students' speaking skills in the English language learning context. With the growing need for interactive and student-centered teaching methods, gamification has emerged as an effective pedagogical tool. The study examines various gamified activities and their influence on learners' oral fluency, accuracy, and motivation. Using qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including classroom observations, interviews, and speaking assessments, the research demonstrates that gamification significantly enhances students' speaking performance. Results indicate improved learner engagement, reduced speaking anxiety, and increased speaking time. The findings support integrating gamified methods into English language curricula to foster communicative competence.

Keywords: Gamification, speaking skills, language learning, student engagement, communicative competence, oral proficiency

Introduction

In the realm of language acquisition, speaking is regarded as one of the most essential and challenging skills to master. It serves as a primary means of communication and is often used as a benchmark for language proficiency. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, students frequently struggle with speaking due to limited exposure to real-life interaction, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes. Traditional methods, such as rote memorization, repetitive drills, and textbook-based dialogues, often fail to foster spontaneous communication or meaningful engagement (Richards, 2008).

To address these challenges, educators are increasingly turning to innovative and student-centered methodologies. Among these, gamification has gained

prominence for its potential to transform passive learning environments into interactive and motivating spaces. Gamification refers to the application of game design principles—such as points, levels, badges, and challenges—to non-game contexts, including education (Deterding et al., 2011). When effectively implemented, gamification enhances learner motivation, encourages active participation, and creates a supportive environment for language experimentation (Kapp, 2012).

In recent years, numerous studies have highlighted the cognitive and affective benefits of using gamified activities in the language classroom. These benefits include reduced foreign language anxiety, increased time-on-task, and improved learner autonomy (Su & Cheng, 2015). Specifically, in developing speaking skills, gamification provides learners with purposeful communication tasks that mimic real-world scenarios while maintaining an element of fun and competition. This not only promotes fluency but also builds students' confidence and willingness to communicate.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how gamification can be strategically used to enhance students' speaking skills. It examines the types of gamified activities that are most effective in developing oral proficiency, as well as the pedagogical implications of integrating game elements into the EFL speaking curriculum. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does gamification affect students' oral communication in the classroom?
2. What types of gamified activities are most effective in improving speaking skills?

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative and quantitative mixed-methods approach to explore the impact of gamification on developing students' speaking skills. The research was conducted during the spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year at the UTAS. The participants consisted of two academic groups, English Group 301 and Group 302, comprising a total of third-year undergraduate students.

Data collection methods included classroom observation, pre- and post-intervention speaking tests, and student feedback questionnaires. The primary objective was to determine the effectiveness of gamified speaking tasks in enhancing oral communication skills.

The intervention involved integrating a series of gamified activities over a six-week period. The following methods and tools were used:

- Role-playing games: Students participated in role-plays based on real-life scenarios (e.g., job interviews, shopping, making appointments).
- Language learning apps: Platforms such as Kahoot and Quizizz were used for vocabulary and sentence structure practice in a competitive format.
- Speaking board games: Custom-designed board games encouraged students to respond to prompts and questions using target vocabulary.
- Storytelling chains: Students formed small groups and collaboratively built stories in turns, enhancing fluency and coherence.
- Points and rewards system: A point-based incentive system was implemented to motivate participation, accuracy, and creativity in speaking tasks.

Classroom activities were video-recorded and assessed using a rubric that measured fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and interactive communication. Data analysis involved comparing the results of the speaking tests before and after the intervention, supported by descriptive statistics and student feedback analysis.

3. Results

The outcomes of the study clearly indicate that the use of gamified activities had a measurable and positive effect on the speaking abilities of the participating students from Groups 301 and 302. The data collected from pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, and student feedback revealed improvements in multiple dimensions of oral language proficiency.

Quantitatively, students demonstrated significant gains in four key areas: fluency, vocabulary usage, pronunciation, and interactive communication. Pre-intervention speaking assessments showed an average fluency score of 2.8 out of 5, while post-intervention results indicated a rise to 4.1. Vocabulary usage improved from an average of 3.0 to 4.2, while interactive communication – measured through students' ability to respond appropriately and maintain dialogue – increased from 2.9 to 4.3. Pronunciation accuracy showed a more modest but noticeable improvement, from 3.1 to 3.9.

Qualitatively, classroom observations suggested that students became increasingly confident and spontaneous in expressing themselves. Many participants were observed initiating conversations, asking questions, and using

new vocabulary introduced during gamified tasks. The collaborative nature of the games also encouraged peer correction and support, contributing to a more dynamic and communicative classroom environment.

Student feedback further supported these observations. In post-activity questionnaires, over 85% of students reported feeling more motivated to speak English when engaged in games, and 78% expressed that gamified speaking activities helped them remember and use new expressions more effectively. Several students specifically mentioned that they felt less anxious during speaking tasks when game elements were involved, supporting previous research on reduced affective filters in gamified environments (Krashen, 1982).

The analysis of each game type also showed varying degrees of effectiveness. Role-playing and storytelling chains were rated highest in terms of engagement and communicative benefit, while quiz-based apps like Kahoot were especially effective for vocabulary review and pronunciation drills.

These results affirm that a structured gamification strategy, when integrated thoughtfully into language lessons, can significantly support the development of students' speaking skills—especially in environments where traditional methods may not yield sufficient communicative practice.

4. Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that the integration of gamification into English language instruction significantly enhances students' speaking skills. The students from Groups 301 and 302 at UTAS responded positively to gamified tasks, demonstrating increased motivation, engagement, and confidence in oral communication. This aligns with prior research suggesting that gamification can reduce anxiety and foster a safe environment for practicing spoken language (Su & Cheng, 2015; Kapp, 2012).

The students showed marked improvement in key speaking components such as fluency, vocabulary usage, and interactive communication. Role-playing games, for instance, provided authentic contexts for language use, promoting spontaneity and improvisation. Meanwhile, storytelling chains helped students organize thoughts coherently while expanding their descriptive abilities. The combination of these task-based methods within a gamified framework seems to facilitate both linguistic and cognitive development.

One noteworthy outcome is that the point-based reward system positively influenced classroom participation. Students were more willing to volunteer, take risks in speaking, and correct each other constructively, suggesting that gamification can also foster collaborative learning and peer support. This confirms Dörnyei's (2001) assertion that motivation and classroom climate play crucial roles in second language acquisition.

However, some challenges were observed. For instance, while most students embraced the competitive elements, a few initially struggled with the pressure of timed tasks and feared judgment from peers. This suggests that gamification must be implemented thoughtfully, with flexibility and inclusivity in mind to ensure all learners benefit from the approach.

Overall, the results support the idea that gamification is not merely an entertaining tool, but a pedagogically sound strategy when aligned with communicative language teaching principles. It helps create a student-centered learning environment where learners are active participants rather than passive recipients.

5. Conclusion

This study reinforces the growing consensus that gamification is a powerful pedagogical tool for enhancing speaking skills in EFL contexts. The integration of interactive and goal-oriented tasks such as role-playing, storytelling, and digital quiz platforms led to measurable gains in fluency, vocabulary usage, pronunciation, and interactive communication among the participants.

More importantly, gamification contributed to a more inclusive and motivating classroom environment by lowering students' affective filters and encouraging peer collaboration. These findings align with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles and support the constructivist view that learners benefit most from authentic, meaningful interaction.

While the study demonstrated significant short-term benefits, it also faced limitations—such as the relatively small sample size, the short duration of intervention, and the subjective nature of self-reported feedback. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine the sustained impact of gamification, explore its efficacy across different cultural contexts, and investigate its application in digital or hybrid classrooms.

For educators, the results suggest that gamification should not merely serve as a classroom gimmick, but rather as a structured, purposeful strategy aligned with

specific learning outcomes. When integrated thoughtfully, gamification can foster deeper engagement, build communicative competence, and empower students to use language with greater confidence in both academic and real-life scenarios.

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