



## **GAMIFICATION AND SPEAKING SKILLS: ENHANCING LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY**

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### **Abstract:**

This study examines the impact of gamification on students' speaking skills in ESL/EFL classrooms. Through a survey of 30 university-speaking teachers, the research explores whether game-based learning improves oral proficiency, confidence, and participation. Findings reveal that gamification enhances student engagement, with 62.5% of teachers observing confidence growth and 75% reporting increased participation. However, challenges such as time-consuming preparation and unequal student involvement were noted. The study concludes that gamification should supplement, rather than replace, traditional speaking exercises. By integrating structured lessons with interactive activities, educators can increase learning outcomes and create a more dynamic language-learning environment.

**Keywords:** Gamification, speaking skills, ESL/EFL classrooms, student engagement, second language acquisition (SLA), educational technology, digital learning.

### **Introduction**

Language acquisition is not just memorising vocabulary and grammatical rules but also achieving effective communication in a target language. Speaking is a direct and practical way to use the language in real-life situations among four main language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Linguistics like **Stephen Krashen** (1982) and **Lev Vygotsky** (1978) noted that communication plays a crucial role in second language acquisition (SLA). According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, learners acquire language when they receive clear input, but speaking provides output, which is necessary for reinforcing and refining language skills. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory states that interaction is key to language



development. Communicating with one another improves students' assimilation of language structures and enhances cognitive processing. Thus, the more learners speak in a target language, the more they feel confident using it.

However, many learners hesitate to speak due to the fear of making mistakes, a lack of practice, and pronunciation problems. To solve these challenges, educators have explored innovative methods to enhance speaking skills, one of which is gamification. Gamification in education is the process of integrating game elements, dynamics, and mechanics in non-game contexts to increase engagement, motivation, and performance.

Although the idea of relying on games in education has existed for decades, the modern term “gamification” was first coined by Nick Pelling (2002) and later expanded further by Karl Kapp (2012) in the context of learning [4]. In his book, (2012) Karl Kapp surveys how combining game elements into educational contexts can improve learner engagement and motivation. He defines gamification as the application of game mechanics in non-game settings to influence student behaviour, improve enthusiasm, and enhance learning. Today, platforms like Duolingo and classroom-based gamified activities prove their potential in language education.

While gamification has advantages, it also causes several challenges. Some students may focus primarily on external rewards like collecting points, badges, and leaderboards and ignore enhancing their language skills. This results in superficial learning where learners engage just to collect rewards instead of truly understanding the language. This raises an important question: Does gamification truly enhance speaking skills in language learning?

Therefore, this research paper aims to explore the impact of gamification on students' speaking skills, analyzing whether game-based learning methods improve oral proficiency and how students perceive their effectiveness. It also reviews past research by analyzing practical applications and evaluating student perceptions.

## **Literature Review**

Gamification in education, especially in language teaching has gained considerable attention as an efficient tool for increasing student participation and learning outcomes. Particularly, in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, integrating games has been considered a



useful method for achieving speaking proficiency. Traditional teaching methods often emphasize grammatical rules and vocabulary, ignoring enough oral practices. Consequently, it raises certain problems like a lack of confidence, a fear of making mistakes, and low motivation among students. This literature review discusses three important studies on the role of communicative and digital games in advancing students' speaking skills, highlighting their effectiveness in strengthening fluency, accuracy, and active participation.

In traditional speaking instructions, a teacher becomes the center of learning, students acquire the language through repetition, memorization, and structured dialogues. Their active participation in authentic communicative activities and language practices is often ignored, limiting their ability to express themselves naturally in the target language.

In contrast, game-based learning provides students with an interactive communication environment where they can practice a language without being judged or the fear of making mistakes. According to Al-Jamili et al. (2024), computer game-based learning encourages real-time engagement, immediate feedback, and mutual speaking practice, showing greater benefits than traditional methods [1]. Their study, conducted on ESL students at the University of Utara Malaysia, explored that an experimental group of students who used digital games indicated a higher improvement in speaking skills in comparison with those taught through conventional ways. These findings show that mixing games into language teaching can eliminate key barriers such as hesitation, low motivation, and L1 interference.

Practicing speaking by playing games has huge benefits for learners. Game-based learning environment creates the chance to communicate in a target language freely. Pham et al. (2024) examined the effects of using communicative games within the Presentation-Practice-Production (P-P-P) model in a Vietnamese university setting [6]. The results demonstrated that students in the experimental group, who engaged in game-based learning, showed remarkable improvements in fluency and accuracy than the control group, which used traditional methods. Because learning via gaming was encouraging, it provided consistent speech production, reducing learners' overreliance on scripted responses and improving their ability to make sentences naturally.



One of the most significant difficulties in speaking skill acquisition is student reluctance to participate. The research done by Dewi et al. (2017) suggests that communicative games increase student motivation and engagement considerably in Indonesian junior high school classrooms [2]. Their Classroom Action Research (CAR) found that students' speaking test scores improved from 60.42 (pre-test) to 78.77 (post-test 2), indicating that game-based learning creates a positive classroom atmosphere. During the experiment students who initially did not want to speak because of speaking fear and worrying about making mistakes became more active when games were incorporated. This means that when students' focus is shifted from punctuality to communication through gamification, they can improve oral activeness significantly.

Speaking in a foreign language could be intimidating for many learners. Al-Jamili and his group's (2024) experiment found that digital games provide a low-stakes environment that reduces anxiety and increases students' willingness to speak. Based on their study computer-based games allowed students to experiment with the language in a stress-free setting, improving their confidence over time. Moreover, Dewi et al. (2017) noted that students who were initially hesitant to speak gradually became more comfortable through repeated exposure to communicative games. These findings suggest that gamification can serve as an effective tool for overcoming psychological barriers to speaking.

## **Methodology.**

### **Setting & Participants**

This study uses a **quantitative research design** to examine university-speaking teachers' perceptions of gamification in their lessons. A **survey-based approach** was chosen to collect measurable data efficiently, allowing for statistical analysis of trends and patterns. The primary reason for preferring quantitative research is to enable a structured assessment of teachers' views through numerical data rather than subjective opinions.

The participants included 30 university-speaking teachers from the English Philology Faculty at UzSWLU, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 7 years. Convenience sampling was used to select participants who were readily available and willing to complete the survey.



## Procedure

Data was collected using a self-created Google Forms survey distributed through university networks. The survey included 10 questions designed to evaluate teachers' opinions about the effectiveness of using gamification in their lessons. It included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions to gauge the frequency of gamification use, challenges faced in implementation, and opinions on whether gamification should replace or supplement traditional speaking exercises. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and organized in Microsoft Excel.

## Results

The survey findings indicate that gamification is widely implemented among teachers, with 100% reporting frequent use of gamification techniques in language classes. Approximately 62.5% of teachers observed considerable improvement in students' speaking skills, while 25% noted some improvement. Only 12.5% stated that gamification had no noticeable effect on speaking abilities. Confidence was identified as the primary area of improvement by 62.5% of respondents, while 75% agreed that gamification promotes more active participation in speaking activities. Regarding student participation, **75%** of teachers agreed that gamification encourages active involvement in speaking activities, whereas **25%** believed its impact was only moderate. When assessing the effectiveness of gamification, the majority (**63%**) identified classroom participation as the key indicator of improvement. Additionally, **25%** measured progress based on fluency development, while **12%** relied on students' test scores.

Despite the benefits, teachers reported challenges in implementing gamification, with 37.5% noting that preparation is time-consuming and another 37.5% highlighting unequal student engagement. Qualitative insights revealed that all teachers preferred using gamification as a supplementary tool rather than a complete replacement for traditional methods.

In addition to survey responses, teachers provided qualitative insights through open-ended questions. When asked whether gamification should replace traditional speaking exercises, all teachers agreed that it should be used as a supplementary tool rather than a complete replacement. In other words, teachers preferred balancing conventional learning with games to achieve optimal results.

The Table Shows the Results of the Survey.

<b>Findings</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Teachers using gamification frequently	100%
Improvement in speaking skills	87.5%
Main improvement area: Confidence	62.5%
Increased student participation	75%
Effectiveness measured via participation	63%
Effectiveness measured via fluency	25%
Effectiveness measured via test scores	12%
Challenge: Time-consuming preparation	37.5%
Challenge: Unequal student engagement	37.5%
Challenge: Lack of resources	25%
Gamification as a supplementary tool	100%

## **Discussion**

This study highlights the positive impact of gamification on speaking skills, as reported by participating teachers. Gamified activities reduce the pressure of formal speaking exercises, allowing students to practice language naturally and enhancing their confidence. However, it is essential to consider how gamification is implemented. While most teachers observed improvements, a small percentage reported no noticeable change, potentially due to the overuse of gamification or misalignment with students' proficiency levels.



To maximize the benefits, teachers should select appropriate games that cater to diverse learning styles and personalities, fostering an inclusive environment. Additionally, addressing the challenge of unequal participation is crucial; balancing competitive and cooperative games can help engage all students.

The study also identified the time-consuming nature of preparing gamified lessons as a barrier. Solutions like using pre-designed game templates or involving students in creating challenges can alleviate this issue.

While this research provides valuable insights, its limitations include a small sample size and reliance on self-reported data. Future studies should explore gamification's effectiveness for advanced learners and investigate teachers' experiences with these methods.

## Conclusion

Gamification is a powerful tool that can enhance speaking practice in language learning by creating engaging and supportive environments. While it presents challenges, such as unequal participation and preparation demands, it should be used to complement traditional teaching methods. A balanced approach that combines structured lessons with interactive games can effectively address diverse learning styles and maintain student motivation. Future research should focus on its impact on advanced learners and further explore teachers' experiences with gamification in the classroom.

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