

## EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF GAMIFICATION IN GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION ON BEGINNER EFL STUDENTS' GRAMMATICAL UNDERSTANDING AND LEARNING MOTIVATION

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### ABSTRACT

Gamification has gained increasing attention in EFL learning because it can create more engaging and interactive classroom environments. However, beginner EFL students often experience difficulties in understanding grammar and maintaining learning motivation through traditional instructional methods. This study aimed to explore the effects of gamification on beginner EFL students' grammatical understanding and learning motivation through the use of Quizizz and Wordwall in grammar instruction. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design involving 20 first-year university students enrolled in a Basic English Grammar course. Data were collected through close-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with eight selected participants. The findings revealed that gamification positively supported students' grammatical understanding through interactive practice, repeated exposure, and immediate feedback. In addition, gamified activities increased students' motivation, engagement, confidence, and participation during grammar lessons. Students perceived grammar learning as more enjoyable and less monotonous when using gamified platforms. The study suggests that gamification can serve as an effective instructional approach to support grammatical understanding and learning motivation among beginner EFL students.

**Keywords:** *Gamification, grammatical understanding, learning motivation, beginner EFL students, grammar instruction*

### INTRODUCTION

The landscape of modern education has changed significantly, driven by the need to adapt teaching methods to digital-era students. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, teachers are moving away from traditional, passive learning toward student-centered methods. Gamification has become a popular strategy in this shift. By applying game elements such as points, rewards, and

challenges into the classroom, educators can turn abstract language lessons into more interactive and enjoyable learning experiences (Deterding et al., 2011; Hamari et al., 2014).

However, traditional methods are still widely used, causing challenges in teaching language structures. Grammar is the foundation of language learning, but students often find it boring and difficult to apply in real communication. Conventional teaching often focuses too much on memorizing abstract formulas, which leads to low student motivation and disinterest (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2019). When students lose interest early in the process, their language skills stagnate, creating long-term barriers to fluency.

This problem is particularly severe for beginner EFL students. Beginners often experience high anxiety and fear of making mistakes in front of others. Gamification can help reduce these emotional and cognitive barriers (Plass et al., 2015). By creating a supportive and low-pressure environment, games turn mistakes into opportunities for practice rather than academic failures. Additionally, gamification provides instant, positive feedback, allowing beginners to self-correct in real-time, build confidence, and develop genuine learning motivation (Su & Cheng, 2015).

Although many studies discuss the benefits of gamified learning, there is still a clear gap in the literature. Most existing research focuses on intermediate or advanced learners, or only measures general language outcomes rather than specific grammar acquisition (Flores, 2015). As a result, few studies look at how gamification affects the grammatical understanding and motivation of absolute beginners (Zainuddin et al., 2020). This study aims to address this gap by investigating the effects of gamification on beginner EFL students, providing practical insights for language teachers to improve early-stage language learning.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Gamification in English Language Learning**

Gamification has become an increasingly popular approach in educational settings, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.

Gamification refers to the integration of game elements such as points, badges, rewards, leaderboards, and immediate feedback into non-game learning contexts to increase learner engagement and participation (Deterding et al., 2011). In EFL classrooms, gamification is commonly implemented through digital learning platforms such as Quizizz, Kahoot!, and Wordwall to create more interactive and enjoyable learning experiences.

Recent studies suggest that gamification positively influences students' classroom engagement and participation. According to Dehghanzadeh et al. (2019), gamified learning environments encourage learners to become more actively involved in classroom activities and reduce negative perceptions toward language learning. Similarly, Su and Cheng (2015) found that mobile gamification systems significantly improved students' learning motivation and academic achievement through interactive and reward-based learning activities.

In grammar instruction, gamification is considered particularly useful because grammar learning is often perceived as difficult and monotonous by beginner learners. The integration of game-like activities may help students participate more actively and maintain attention during grammar lessons. Research conducted by Flores (2015) revealed that gamified grammar instruction improved EFL students' motivation and supported better understanding of grammatical concepts. The study emphasized that interactive learning activities and immediate feedback enabled students to engage more deeply with grammar exercises.

### **Gamification and Grammatical Understanding**

Research has shown that gamification can significantly improve grammatical understanding among EFL learners. For instance, Tsay et al. (2018) discovered that students in gamified environments exhibited higher grammatical accuracy and structural mastery compared to those in traditional settings. The incorporation of game elements, such as immediate feedback and rewards, encourages students to engage more deeply with grammatical concepts, thereby enhancing their understanding.

Additionally, Reynolds and Kao (2019) found that gamification not only

improved motivation but also led to greater retention of grammatical structures. Their study highlighted that when students were actively involved in gamified learning, they were better able to apply grammatical rules in context, which is crucial for language acquisition. This suggests that the interactive nature of gamification may facilitate a more profound comprehension of grammar than traditional rote memorization methods.

Furthermore, research by Perry (2018) supports the idea that gamified contexts can lead to improved learning outcomes. This study indicated that the use of game mechanics could help students develop a more nuanced understanding of complex grammatical structures. By presenting grammar in a context that feels relevant and engaging, students are more likely to internalize rules and apply them effectively in their writing and speaking.

### **Gamification and Learning Motivation**

Motivation plays a critical role in language learning, particularly for beginner EFL students who may face anxiety and self-doubt (Zainuddin et al., 2020). Gamification has been shown to significantly enhance motivation levels across various educational contexts. Hamari et al. (2014) conducted a comprehensive review revealing a strong positive relationship between gamification and student motivation, indicating that the incorporation of game elements can lead to increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning.

In the context of EFL, the motivational benefits of gamification are particularly pronounced. For example, a study by Plass et al. (2015) highlighted that gamified learning experiences lead to increased learner engagement, which is crucial for language acquisition. Beginner students, who may feel overwhelmed by the complexities of grammar, can benefit from the supportive environment that gamification creates. The playful nature of gamified learning can reduce anxiety and foster a more positive attitude toward language study.

Moreover, research by Dichev and Dicheva (2017) found that students who engaged in gamified learning reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation. This intrinsic motivation is vital for beginner EFL students, as it encourages them to explore grammatical structures independently and take risks in their language use.

Their study emphasized that gamification could transform the often daunting task of learning grammar into an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions and experiences regarding gamified grammar instruction. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of how gamification influences students' grammatical understanding and learning motivation in a natural classroom setting. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research enables researchers to interpret participants' experiences and understand meanings constructed through social interaction and learning experiences.

The gamified grammar instruction was conducted over six classroom meetings in a Basic English Grammar course. The materials covered basic grammar topics, including Simple Present Tense, Subject–Verb Agreement, To-be Forms, Pronouns, and Simple Past Tense. During the learning process, the lecturer integrated gamification elements such as points, rankings, time-based challenges, and immediate feedback through Quizizz and Wordwall. Quizizz was mainly used for interactive grammar quizzes and formative assessments, while Wordwall was used for game-based grammar exercises such as matching tasks and sentence arrangement activities. Before the activities, the lecturer briefly explained the grammar material, after which students participated in individual and group-based gamified exercises. These activities were designed to increase students' engagement, motivation, and understanding of grammar through interactive and repeated practice.

Although this study primarily focused on qualitative exploration, quantitative data obtained from Likert-scale questionnaires were also used to support and strengthen the qualitative findings. The questionnaire results were not intended for statistical generalization but rather to provide descriptive information regarding students' responses toward gamified grammar instruction. Therefore, the quantitative data functioned as supporting evidence for the interpretation of

qualitative data derived from interviews and students' comments.

The participants of this study were first-year university students enrolled in a Basic English Grammar course. The participants were categorized as beginner EFL learners based on their English proficiency level and course placement. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who had experienced grammar instruction through gamified learning activities using Quizizz and Wordwall.

A total of 20 students participated in completing the questionnaire. Subsequently, 8 students were selected for follow-up semi-structured interviews to obtain more detailed information regarding their learning experiences, perceptions of grammatical understanding, and learning motivation during gamified grammar instruction. The interview participants were selected based on their willingness to participate and the richness of their questionnaire responses.

The data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews after the implementation of gamified grammar instruction. The questionnaire consisted of 20 close-ended items with comment sections designed to explore students' perceptions of grammatical understanding and learning motivation. The learning motivation items were adapted from Keller's ARCS Motivation Model, including Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction, while the grammatical understanding items focused on grammar comprehension, repeated practice, error recognition, and grammar application. A five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" was used to measure participants' responses.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' learning experiences, engagement, motivation, grammatical understanding, and challenges encountered during gamified grammar activities. The interviews were conducted flexibly to encourage participants to express their opinions and experiences openly.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Gamification and Students' Grammatical Understanding

The findings revealed that gamification positively influenced students' grammatical understanding. Most participants reported that gamified grammar activities helped them understand grammar rules more clearly and practice grammar more effectively. Questionnaire data showed that 17 out of 20 students agreed that gamified activities helped them understand grammar rules better. Furthermore, 15 students stated that grammar explanations became easier to understand through games, while 16 students agreed that gamified activities provided more opportunities to practice grammar repeatedly.

The interview findings strengthened these results. Several students explained that Quizizz and Wordwall enabled them to learn grammar through repetition and immediate feedback, which helped them recognize grammatical patterns and correct mistakes more effectively. One participant stated:

*"The games helped me understand grammar because we practiced many times and directly knew the correct answer."*

Another participant commented:

*"I could remember grammar rules more easily because the activities were interactive and not monotonous."*

These findings indicate that gamified learning environments support grammatical understanding by creating opportunities for active participation and repeated exposure to grammar exercises. Immediate corrective feedback also appeared to help students identify their mistakes and improve their comprehension of grammar concepts.

The findings align with Reynolds and Kao (2019), who found that gamification improved EFL students' grammatical understanding through interactive and feedback-oriented activities. Similarly, Göksün and Gürsoy (2019) reported that gamified learning using platforms like Quizizz and Kahoot! positively influenced language learners' academic achievement and classroom participation. Furthermore, Dehghanzadeh et al. (2019) explained that gamification in language

classrooms enhances student engagement by encouraging active participation and sustained focus during complex language activities.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Flow Theory proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), which suggests that learners become more engaged when learning activities are enjoyable, appropriately challenging, and interactive. Gamified grammar activities appeared to create such conditions, enabling students to focus more actively on grammar learning tasks. The findings also suggest that gamification can transform grammar learning from a passive activity into a more meaningful and enjoyable learning experience. Instead of relying solely on memorization, students engaged directly with grammar exercises through interactive quizzes and challenges.

### **Gamification and Students' Learning Motivation**

The findings also demonstrated that gamification significantly enhanced students' learning motivation. Most students reported that gamified grammar instruction made learning more interesting, enjoyable, and less stressful. The questionnaire results showed that 18 students agreed or strongly agreed that gamified activities made grammar learning more interesting. Additionally, 19 students stated that gamified grammar practice was more enjoyable than traditional learning activities. Sixteen students also expressed their willingness to use gamified learning again in future grammar classes.

Interview findings further revealed that students became more enthusiastic and actively involved during classroom activities because the gamified platforms created competitive yet enjoyable learning environments.

One student explained:

*“Learning grammar through Quizizz was exciting because it felt like playing games while learning.”*

Another participant stated:

*“The scores and rankings motivated me to answer questions more seriously.”*

These findings indicate that gamification increased students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation during grammar learning. Elements such as points, rankings, time-based challenges, and rewards encouraged students to participate more

actively and maintain attention during classroom activities. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the motivational benefits of gamification in EFL learning contexts. For instance, Buckley and Doyle (2016) found that gamification positively influences student motivation, engagement, and learning performance by transforming traditional educational tasks into dynamic experiences.

Similarly, Zainuddin et al. (2020) reported that gamification improved students' motivation and achievement in English learning environments. The findings also support Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes that motivation increases when learners experience competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, students appeared more motivated because gamified activities allowed them to practice independently (autonomy), receive immediate feedback (competence), and interact competitively with peers (relatedness).

Moreover, the findings align with Dewaele et al. (2018), who found that digital, interactive contexts improve foreign language enjoyment and lower anxiety among EFL learners. The increased motivation observed in this study also supports recent findings by Dichev and Dicheva (2017), suggesting that gamified learning environments reduce boredom and create more emotionally engaging classroom experiences. Gamified activities may therefore help beginner EFL students develop more positive attitudes toward grammar learning.

### **Students' Engagement and Confidence during Gamified Learning**

Another important finding of this study relates to students' engagement and confidence during grammar learning activities. The findings revealed that gamification encouraged students to participate more actively and reduced their fear of making grammar mistakes. Questionnaire data indicated that 13 students agreed that gamified instruction increased their confidence in learning grammar. Several students also reported that immediate feedback helped them recognize mistakes without feeling embarrassed.

The interview findings demonstrated that students felt more relaxed during grammar learning because gamified activities created supportive and enjoyable

learning environments. One participant stated:

*“I was not afraid to answer because if my answer was wrong, I could try again.”*

Another participant explained:

*“The games made the classroom atmosphere more relaxed and interactive.”*

These findings suggest that gamification may reduce learning anxiety among beginner EFL learners. The opportunity to repeat exercises and receive immediate feedback appeared to encourage students to participate more confidently during grammar activities. The findings are consistent with recent studies emphasizing the relationship between gamification and learner engagement. Suartama et al. (2024) found that gamification significantly increased student engagement and participation in online learning environments.

Likewise, Rahmah (2026) reported that digital game-based learning environments enhanced students' classroom motivation and active participation in EFL learning. These findings indicate that gamification not only supports grammatical understanding but also creates psychologically supportive learning environments that encourage beginner learners to become more active and confident.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the effects of gamification on beginner EFL students' grammatical understanding and learning motivation through the use of Quizizz and Wordwall in grammar learning activities. The findings revealed that gamification positively influenced students' understanding of grammar by providing interactive practice, repeated exposure, and immediate feedback. Most students reported that gamified activities helped them understand grammar rules more clearly and made grammar learning less monotonous.

The study also found that gamification enhanced students' learning motivation. Game elements such as points, rankings, and interactive quizzes increased students' interest, participation, and enthusiasm during grammar lessons. In addition, gamified activities helped students feel more confident and less anxious when participating in grammar exercises. Overall, the findings

suggest that gamification can create more engaging and supportive grammar learning environments for beginner EFL students. Therefore, integrating gamified platforms such as Quizizz and Wordwall may serve as an effective strategy to support students' grammatical understanding and motivation in EFL classrooms.

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