

Gamification in English Learning: Strategies to Increase Student Motivation and Engagement in the Digital Age

Hasna Fitri Labibah^{1✉}

¹English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam An Nur Lampung, Lampung, Indonesia

✉Email: canachan77@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze the application of gamification in English learning as a strategy to increase student motivation and engagement in the digital era. The research method used is a qualitative approach with data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that gamification has a significant positive impact on the classroom atmosphere, learning motivation, and student participation. Through the implementation of game elements such as points, levels, badges, leaderboards, and quiz-based challenges, the learning atmosphere becomes more lively, fun, and interactive. Observations found that students were more enthusiastic in participating in learning activities, showed courage to speak English, and were more focused when facing mission-based challenges. Interviews with teachers revealed that gamification made it easier to monitor student progress while encouraging them to be more diligent in learning vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills. Interviews with students also confirmed that they felt more motivated because the learning was similar to a familiar digital game. Documentation in the form of grade notes and activity reports showed an increase in student engagement and an increase in the average class score, especially in vocabulary mastery. Thus, it can be concluded that gamification is an innovative strategy that is effective in increasing student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes in English learning in the digital era.

Keywords: Gamification; English Learning; Motivation; Engagement; Digital Age.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought major changes in the world of education, including in English language learning which is now increasingly oriented towards the use of digital media.(Noor 2019)The current generation, known as digital natives, grew up in a technology-rich environment, so they tend to be more attracted to interactive, visual, and technology-based media than to conventional, teacher-centered methods. This situation demands that teachers be more creative in designing learning processes that not only deliver material but also create engaging, interactive learning experiences that align with the characteristics of the digital generation.(Sahnan 2024)If teachers rely solely on monotonous traditional methods, students can potentially experience boredom, decreased motivation, and a lack of

active engagement in class. In this context, innovative learning strategies are needed that can integrate technology with students' learning needs. One approach that is starting to be widely developed is gamification, which is the application of game elements such as points, levels, badges, leaderboards, and missions into the learning process.(Permana, Hazizah, and Herlambang 2024)This concept doesn't make learning activities merely a game, but rather creates a more enjoyable and challenging learning environment, encouraging students to participate more actively. Through gamification, students not only gain English language skills but also experience a meaningful, motivating learning process, providing them with opportunities to develop 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. Thus, gamification can serve as a bridge for teachers in integrating the demands of technological developments with the needs of more effective and relevant English learning in the digital age.(Hasni, nd).

Although English is an important subject in schools and plays a strategic role as an international language, many students still face various obstacles in their learning process. These difficulties are not only related to understanding the material but also include low motivation to learn and minimal active involvement in class.(Khoirotunnisa and Retnawati 2025)This is further exacerbated by the use of traditional teacher-centered teaching methods, such as lectures and written exercises, which are often monotonous and less able to capture students' attention. As a result, many students feel bored, passive, and unmotivated in participating in lessons.(HARAHAP and Harahap 2024)This situation directly impacts students' low participation in discussions, their lack of courage to try communicating in English, and their weak mastery of language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are crucial for equipping students to face global challenges. This situation demonstrates a gap between the expected goals of English learning and the reality on the ground.(Yumarni et al. 2025)Therefore, a learning strategy is needed that not only focuses on delivering material but also fosters intrinsic motivation, increases active student engagement, and creates a more engaging, interactive, and meaningful learning environment.

Several previous studies have shown that the application of gamification in language learning can have a positive impact on improving the quality of student learning. Gamification is considered an innovative approach because it combines game elements with educational objectives. By presenting challenges, rewards, and a healthy competitive atmosphere, gamification has been shown to foster student interest and engagement in the learning process. This is important considering that one of the biggest obstacles to English learning is low student motivation and active participation. Studies have found that gamification has a significant impact on increasing student engagement, motivation, and learning satisfaction. Through the implementation of a points, levels, and reward system, students are encouraged to be more consistent in completing teacher-assigned assignments.(Dinihari, Rafli, and Boeriswati 2024)This study shows that when the learning environment is packaged in a fun way, students feel more challenged and entertained, so that the learning process is no longer seen as a boring obligation, but rather as an interesting activity to participate in. Other studies have confirmed that the use of game elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards can not only increase motivation but also trigger healthy competition and collaboration among students.(Gani et al. 2025)Healthy competition can inspire students to strive for excellence, while collaboration trains them to work together to solve challenges. Thus, gamification not only benefits

cognitive aspects but also supports the development of social skills essential for language learning, such as communication, cooperation, and self-confidence.(Agustian and Sanusi 2024).

In addition to international research, studies conducted in Indonesia also provide concrete evidence of the effectiveness of gamification. The results show that this strategy can improve students' vocabulary mastery, strengthen their understanding of grammar, and encourage them to communicate verbally in English.(Kusumawati, Solihati, and Sari 2025)For example, the use of game-based applications in vocabulary learning has been shown to make it easier for students to remember new words, while point-based challenges encourage them to be more active in speaking in class. In other words, gamification can provide a contextual learning experience that is tailored to the needs of Indonesian students. These findings confirm that gamification is a relevant and adaptive strategy to the demands of education in the digital age. The successful implementation of gamification in various studies proves that this method is not just a trend, but a real solution to addressing low student motivation and engagement in English learning.(Billah 2024)By providing space for students to learn actively, creatively, and enjoyably, gamification can be a bridge for teachers to improve the quality of learning while helping students achieve more optimal learning goals.

Based on these problems, this study aims to analyze in depth the application of gamification strategies in English learning as an effort to increase student motivation and engagement in the digital era. Through this analysis, it is hoped that a clear picture will be obtained regarding the effectiveness of game elements, such as points, levels, badges, leaderboards, and learning missions in encouraging students to participate more actively in English classes. This study also aims to identify the extent to which gamification is able to overcome problems that often arise in traditional learning, such as low intrinsic motivation, minimal student engagement, and a lack of courage in communicating in English. In addition, this study is expected to provide a real contribution to teachers in developing innovative learning models that are appropriate to the characteristics of the digital generation who tend to prefer interactive, competitive, and technology-based things. With the results of this study, teachers are expected to have alternative strategies that are not only oriented towards cognitive achievement, but also on the affective and psychomotor aspects of students, so that English learning can be more enjoyable and meaningful. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for education practitioners, curriculum designers, and policymakers in designing language learning that is adaptive to technological developments. A more interactive, collaborative, and challenging learning environment is believed to improve students' English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Therefore, this research not only contributes theoretically to the development of educational science but also has practical benefits in improving the quality of English language learning in schools in the digital age.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the application of gamification strategies in English learning and its impact on student motivation and engagement. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study places more emphasis on the process, meaning, and learning experiences experienced by students in a gamification-based classroom

context, rather than solely on quantitative results in the form of scores or grades.(Kusumastuti and Khoiron 2019)The subjects of this study were eighth-grade students of Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) Ma'arif NU 7 Purbalinggo who were taking English. Subject selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely determining samples based on certain considerations, in this case schools that have begun implementing technology-based learning models. The number of participants in this study consisted of 30 students and 1 English teacher who was directly involved in the learning process. Data collection was carried out using several techniques, namely: (1) participatory observation to directly observe student activities during the gamification-based English learning process, especially regarding student involvement, classroom interactions, and responses to game elements; (2) in-depth interviews with teachers and several students to explore their perceptions, experiences, and challenges they faced during the implementation of gamification; and (3) documentation, in the form of teacher notes, learning tools, and student assignment results using gamification applications or platforms.(IN Sari et al. 2022)The data obtained were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model of qualitative data analysis techniques, which include three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting relevant information related to student motivation and engagement, then the data was presented in a descriptive narrative form to facilitate understanding. The final stage was drawing conclusions, which were carried out inductively based on field findings. To ensure the validity of the data, this study used triangulation techniques, both source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data from students and teachers, while method triangulation was carried out by combining the results of observations, interviews, and documentation.(Abdussamad and Sik 2021). Thus, it is hoped that the results of this study can provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of gamification in increasing student motivation and engagement in English learning in the digital era.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, the implementation of gamification in English learning has been shown to significantly increase student motivation and engagement in learning activities. During the learning process, clear changes in student attitudes and participation were observed compared to conventional teacher-centered methods. While previously many students tended to be passive, inattentive, or even reluctant to participate in class activities, with the implementation of gamification, they demonstrated greater enthusiasm and more active participation. One indicator of gamification's success is seen in the level of student engagement in class activities. Game elements such as a point system, levels, badges, and leaderboards can attract students' attention and encourage them to focus more on the lesson. For example, when the teacher challenged them with a vocabulary quiz presented in a digital game format, almost all students showed interest in participating. They were encouraged to complete the questions quickly and correctly because each correct answer automatically awarded additional points. The accumulation of these points then placed students in certain positions on the leaderboard, which in turn fostered a sense of competition and encouraged other students to work harder to improve their rankings. Furthermore, observations indicate that providing digital rewards, such as badges or virtual certificates, also contributes to students' sense of pride and self-confidence. Many students expressed joy when they

received recognition in the form of tokens of achievement from their teachers or the application system they use. This not only increased students' extrinsic motivation but also boosted their intrinsic motivation, as they began to see learning English as a fun and rewarding activity. Teachers also noted positive behavioral changes, such as students who were usually reluctant to answer questions now being more willing to try, even if their answers weren't perfect.

Table 1.
Gamification Research Results in English Language Learning

Data source	Key Findings	Impact on Students
Observation	Students are more enthusiastic and actively participate with points, levels, badges, and leaderboards.	Motivation increases, self-confidence grows, class participation is higher.
Teacher Interview	The classroom atmosphere is more lively and interactive; passive students become active; it is easy to monitor student progress.	Students are more diligent in learning vocabulary, grammar, and speaking through competitions.
Student Interview	Students find learning more enjoyable, similar to a digital game; they are more confident in speaking.	Focus increases, courage to speak increases, more motivated to learn.
Documentation	Grades and activity records show increased student engagement and learning outcomes.	The average vocabulary score increased, students asked and answered questions more often.

Interviews with students supported these findings. Most students stated that they felt more challenged and less bored when learning was integrated with game elements. They felt a significant difference compared to traditional learning, which typically consisted of theoretical explanations and written exercises. Students also reported being more enthusiastic about completing assignments because each achievement received a reward that was immediately visible to their peers. This fostered a healthy competitive spirit, as students competed to be the best while also learning to work collaboratively to complete group missions. Furthermore, documentation in the form of assignment notes and activity reports demonstrated a marked improvement in student performance. The class average score on formative evaluations increased compared to before the gamification strategy was implemented. More students actively asked questions and offered opinions, creating a more interactive classroom atmosphere. Teachers noted that gamification facilitated the process of monitoring student progress because every activity was automatically recorded in the system, allowing teachers to assess who was actively engaged and who needed more intensive guidance. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that gamification not only increases student enthusiasm and engagement in the short term but also has the potential to build positive attitudes toward English learning. By providing a fun, competitive, and challenging learning atmosphere, gamification can

motivate students to study harder, dare to try communicating in English, and be more confident in developing their language skills.

Discussion

Interviews with teachers indicate that implementing gamification strategies in English learning can create a more lively, interactive, and conducive classroom atmosphere. Teachers reported that students who previously tended to be passive, reluctant to ask questions, and rarely responded, are now starting to dare to answer questions. In fact, some students who usually only listened have begun to show initiative and actively participate in group discussions and presentations. According to teachers, this change in attitude occurs because the learning atmosphere, packaged with game elements, feels more fun and challenging, so students feel compelled to participate voluntarily. Furthermore, teachers also emphasized that the point system, levels, and leaderboards in gamification have a significant impact on student motivation. The healthy competition created among students encourages them to work harder in learning the material, whether it be new vocabulary, grammar comprehension, or speaking skills. For example, students who want to earn higher points will work harder to memorize vocabulary, while others who want to maintain their position on the leaderboard are encouraged to actively practice speaking. Thus, the reward system provided in gamification not only motivates students to achieve individual goals but also creates a sense of togetherness when they have to work together to complete group challenges.

Teachers also added that gamification not only impacts student motivation but also simplifies the teaching process. One of the most significant benefits is the ease of monitoring student learning progress. Through gamification applications or platforms, every student activity, from assignment completion and quiz results to active participation in discussions, is automatically recorded. This significantly helps teachers understand the extent of each student's engagement, who is making rapid progress, and who still needs special attention. With structured data, teachers can conduct more objective evaluations and design follow-up learning strategies tailored to student needs. Beyond the technical aspects, teachers also believe that implementing gamification improves the quality of classroom interactions. Students are more enthusiastic about communicating with both teachers and classmates because each contribution is rewarded with points or badges. This makes students more confident in using English, even if it's still basic. Teachers emphasize that this change is a key indicator of gamification's success, as one of the main obstacles in learning English is students' lack of confidence in using the language in real-life contexts. Interviews with teachers thus demonstrate that gamification not only positively impacts student motivation and engagement but also the overall effectiveness of teaching. Teachers found this method helpful because it created a more enjoyable learning environment, boosted student motivation, and provided a more practical and measurable tool for monitoring learning progress. These findings further confirm that gamification is a relevant and effective strategy for English language learning in the digital age.

Based on interviews with students, most of them stated that the application of gamification in English learning provides a much more enjoyable and motivating learning experience than conventional methods. Students found this approach appealing because it shares similarities with the digital games they commonly play on their phones and computers. Game elements such as missions, challenges, interactive quizzes, points, and award badges make the learning process feel like an adventure to

be completed, rather than just a burdensome academic task. This fosters a high level of enthusiasm, so students don't get bored easily even when the material is quite difficult. Furthermore, students also reported that gamification makes them more confident in using English, especially in speaking skills. They feel more courageous in trying to speak, even when using simple sentences, because the rewards and recognition from teachers and peers provide a significant morale boost. Several students said that when they successfully earn points or badges for speaking in English, they feel appreciated and proud of their achievements.

These positive feelings then serve as additional motivation to continue practicing and improving their skills. Thus, digital rewards and social recognition have proven effective in building student self-confidence. Furthermore, students reported that the implementation of gamification helped them improve their focus and concentration during the learning process.(Safitri and Tari 2024)This is because challenges in the form of game-based missions or quizzes always spark curiosity and a desire to complete each task well. For example, in a leveled game, students strive to solve problems to advance to the next level. This intrinsic motivation to complete challenges significantly impacts their engagement in class. They not only work harder on assignments but also become more active in discussions and group work because they want to gain mutual benefits in the form of additional points. Beyond motivation and engagement, several students also revealed thatStudents found that gamification helped them understand English material more easily. Presenting material linked to games made lessons feel more contextual and applicable. For example, in game-based quizzes, students not only answered vocabulary questions in writing but were also asked to use them in spoken sentences. This kind of activity made them feel that learning English was not just about memorizing but also about practicing its use in real-life situations. Thus, interviews with students showed that gamification was able to increase their learning motivation, self-confidence, focus, and understanding of English material. The game elements implemented not only created a fun learning atmosphere but also fostered positive attitudes in students towards learning, such as courage, perseverance, and cooperation. These findings confirm that, from the students' perspective, gamification is an effective strategy for improving the quality of English learning in the digital age.

Based on documentation obtained from grade notes and class activity reports, there was a significant increase in student engagement at each meeting after the implementation of gamification. Data showed that the number of students actively asking questions and providing answers increased compared to the period before gamification was used. While previously only a small number of students dared to ask questions, after the implementation of this strategy, more students were encouraged to participate actively. This phenomenon indicates a change in learning patterns, where students are no longer passive recipients of material, but instead take the initiative to engage in discussions and interactions. In addition to participation, documentation of formative evaluation scores also shows an increase in student vocabulary mastery. This is reflected in the increase in the class' average score on the vocabulary test given periodically. Before the implementation of gamification, the average student score tended to be in the adequate category, with a limited level of vocabulary mastery.(DN Sari and Alfian 2023)However, after several sessions using a game-based approach, average scores consistently increased. This improvement was not limited to previously high-achieving students but also among students with medium to low abilities. This

indicates that gamification can reach all levels of students and provide equal opportunities for development.

Teacher activity reports also support these findings. Teachers noted that students were more disciplined in participating in learning activities, primarily due to the motivation of earning points, badges, or leveling up within the gamification system. For example, when teachers presented interactive quizzes, almost all students actively participated, eager to receive digital rewards and peer recognition. This strategy not only increased participation but also fostered a culture of healthy competition that encouraged students to study harder. Overall, the documentation obtained demonstrated that the implementation of gamification had a significant impact on student engagement and improved learning outcomes, particularly in vocabulary mastery. Quantitative data, including improved evaluation scores, and qualitative data, including classroom activity reports, demonstrated consistency among the findings from observations, interviews, and documentation. (Suparmini, Suwindia, and Winangun 2024) This reinforces the conclusion that gamification is an effective strategy for improving the quality of English learning in the digital age. Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that gamification is effective in increasing students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and creating higher engagement in English learning. This strategy not only provides a fun learning experience but also contributes to a significant improvement in students' English language competency.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation, it can be concluded that the application of gamification in English learning has a significant impact on increasing student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. During the learning process, positive changes were observed in student attitudes and behavior compared to conventional methods, which tend to be monotonous. Gamification elements such as points, levels, badges, leaderboards, and game-based challenges successfully created a more enjoyable, interactive, and challenging learning atmosphere. Observations showed that students showed greater enthusiasm in participating in learning activities. They were encouraged to actively participate because each achievement was rewarded, which indirectly increased their self-confidence and learning satisfaction. Meanwhile, interviews with teachers reinforced these findings by emphasizing that the classroom atmosphere became more lively, students who were usually passive began to speak up, and healthy competition among students spurred enthusiasm for learning. Teachers also felt helped because the gamification system allowed them to monitor students' learning progress in a more structured manner through the digital platform used. Furthermore, interviews with students revealed that the majority felt more motivated to learn English because the gamification method was perceived as similar to the games they usually play every day. This made them more focused, braver in trying to speak English, and enjoyed every aspect of the learning process. Documentation in the form of grades and activity records also shows an increase in student engagement, both in asking questions, answering questions, and in formative evaluation results, especially in the aspect of vocabulary mastery. Overall, it can be concluded that gamification strategies are not only able to increase student motivation and engagement but also have a positive impact on learning outcomes. Therefore, the implementation of gamification is worth considering as an innovative strategy in

English learning in the digital era, especially to address the challenges of the millennial and Gen Z generations who are accustomed to the digital world and games.

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