THE IMPACT OF GAMIFICATION ON YOUNG LEARNERS' MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH CLASSES

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Abstract. This article examines how gamification influences motivation among young learners in English language classes. Drawing on recent empirical studies and theoretical frameworks-especially Self-Determination Theory, Flow Theory, and Behaviourist principles-it investigates which game elements (e.g., rewards, points, leaderboards, feedback, challenge) are most effective for boosting intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The findings show that when properly designed and implemented, gamification increases engagement, attention span, confidence, and willingness to participate, particularly in vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and listening tasks. However, challenges include teacher training, resource constraints, and risks of overreliance on extrinsic rewards. Recommendations are offered for designing balanced gamified experiences that support long-term motivation and language proficiency.

Keywords: gamification; young learners; English classes; motivational theory; educational technology; engagement

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается влияние геймификации на мотивацию учащихся младшего возраста на занятиях по английскому языку. Опираясь на недавние эмпирические исследования и теоретические подходы, в частности, теорию самодетерминации, теорию потока и принципы бихевиоризма, авторы исследуют, какие игровые элементы (например, награды, баллы, таблицы лидеров, обратная связь, задачи) наиболее эффективны для повышения внутренней и внешней мотивации. Результаты показывают, что при правильном проектировании и внедрении геймификация повышает вовлеченность, концентрацию внимания, уверенность в себе и готовность к участию, особенно в заданиях по лексике, грамматике, говорению и аудированию. Однако существуют и другие сложности, включая подготовку учителей, ограниченность ресурсов и риск чрезмерной зависимости от внешних вознаграждений. Предлагаются рекомендации по разработке сбалансированного игрового опыта, способствующего долгосрочной мотивации и овладению языком.

Ключевые слова: геймификация; учащиеся младшего возраста; занятия по английскому языку; теория мотивации; образовательные технологии; вовлеченность

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola ingliz tili darslarida yosh o‘quvchilarning motivatsiyasiga qanday ta’sir qilishini o‘rganadi. So‘nggi empirik tadqiqotlar va nazariy asoslarga, xususan, o‘z-o‘zini aniqlash nazariyasi, oqim nazariyasi va xulq-atvor tamoyillariga tayanib, qaysi o'yin elementlari (masalan, mukofotlar, ballar, yetakchilar jadvali, fikr-mulohazalar, chaqiruvlar) ichki va tashqi motivatsiyani oshirish uchun eng samarali ekanligini o'rganadi. Topilmalar shuni ko‘rsatadiki, agar to‘g‘ri ishlab chiqilgan va amalga oshirilsa, o‘yinlashtirish faollikni, diqqatni jamlashni, ishonchni va ishtirok etish istagini oshiradi, ayniqsa lug‘at, grammatika, nutq va tinglash vazifalarida. Biroq, qiyinchiliklar o‘qituvchilarni tayyorlash, resurslarning cheklanganligi va tashqi mukofotlarga haddan tashqari ishonish xavfini o‘z ichiga oladi. Uzoq muddatli motivatsiya va tilni bilishni qo‘llab-quvvatlaydigan muvozanatli o‘yin tajribasini yaratish bo‘yicha tavsiyalar taklif etiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: o‘yinlashtirish; yosh o‘quvchilar; Ingliz tili darslari; motivatsion nazariya; ta‘lim texnologiyasi; jalb qilish

In recent years, educators and researchers have increasingly turned to gamification-the integration of game-like elements into non-game contexts-to enhance student motivation

and engagement. Young learners, typically aged between 5 and 12, are considered especially receptive to playful and interactive learning and thus are ideal candidates for gamification in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. Motivation is widely recognized as a critical factor in successful language acquisition. Low motivation often leads to reduced classroom participation, anxiety, and higher dropout rates, especially among young learners. Integrating gamified strategies offers a promising way to address these challenges by making learning enjoyable, interactive, and responsive to learners' psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) posits that three basic psychological needs-autonomy, competence, and relatedness-must be met for intrinsic motivation to flourish. In gamified English classes: Autonomy is supported when learners have choices (which tasks, or how to earn points). Competence arises through clear, scaffolded challenges and feedback. Relatedness comes from social game elements like team challenges, leaderboards, or peer comparison.

Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) argues that motivation and deep engagement arise when tasks are balanced in difficulty (not too hard, not too easy), when clear goals are present, and when learners receive immediate feedback. Gamified systems often provide these conditions (e.g., levels of difficulty, visible progress bars).

A systematic literature review on gamification in ELT for children aged 5-12 found that tools like Kahoot! and Quizizz improved grammar acquisition and boosted motivation and engagement. journals.researchsynergypress.com

A case study with fifth-grade students (age 10-11) integrating game elements (rewards, challenge, tracking progress) showed measurable increases in both motivation and proficiency after intervention. mjsshonline.com

In another study, the use of a Game-Based Student Response (GBSR) system among eleventh-graders raised intrinsic motivation (through autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and extrinsic motivation (via reward and goal endorsement). jurnalnasional2.ump.ac.id

A study comparing gamified vs. non-gamified instruction on Moodle found that experiential rewards (badges, leaderboards) significantly increased learner motivation and engagement in EFL learners. journal2.uad.ac.id

Research on gamified formative assessment (using Quizizz) demonstrated that assessments with game-features led to not only higher engagement but also better accuracy and retention. SpringerLink

Key Game Elements and Their Motivational Effects

Based on the theoretical and empirical evidence, these are the most impactful game elements for young learners in English classes:

Game Element	Motivational Benefit	Practical Implementation
Rewards / Badges / Points	Boosts extrinsic motivation; promotes goal orientation. Useful for beginners.	Use badges for completing vocabulary sets; points for participation.
Leaderboard / Competition	Enhances relatedness and excitement; social comparison can motivate.	Friendly team contests; rotating leaderboards to keep fairness.
Challenges & Levels	Helps in maintaining flow; fosters a sense of competence.	Tiered grammar or reading challenges; increasing difficulty.
Immediate Feedback	Prevents confusion; reinforces correct usage; helps mistakes to be corrected quickly.	Quiz tools, interactive games with instant correction.

Game Element	Motivational Benefit	Practical Implementation
Choice & Autonomy	Encourages intrinsic motivation; learners feel ownership.	Let students choose which games / activities; optional bonus tasks.
Narrative / Storytelling	Makes learning meaningful; increases engagement.	Assign story-based tasks; embed English learning within adventures.

While gamification has strong potential, there are several challenges:

Overreliance on extrinsic rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation over time. If students do tasks only for points, not for learning, the deeper learning suffers.

Resource limitations: Access to technology, internet, teacher training, and infrastructure can limit what is feasible.

Design issues: Poorly designed gamified tasks (too easy, too repetitive, or irrelevant) can bore rather than motivate.

Equity concerns: Not all learners respond equally to competition or public leaderboards. Some may feel discouraged.

Design Recommendations for English Classes

To maximize the motivational impact of gamification for young learners, English teachers should:

Blend extrinsic and intrinsic motivators: Start with rewards, but gradually shift toward tasks that foster internal satisfaction (e.g., achievement, curiosity).

Align games with learning objectives: Game elements must support, not distract from, language goals (vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening).

Ensure scaffolding and progression: Learners should build skills gradually, with increasing challenges and support.

Provide regular, immediate feedback: Correction and praise should be timely to reinforce learning.

Foster social interaction: Include team games, peer challenges, or collaborative tasks to build relatedness and community.

Be mindful of fairness and transparency: Make sure competition is friendly, and all students have opportunities to succeed.

More longitudinal studies are needed: How does gamification affect motivation and learning over terms/years rather than weeks?

Research in diverse educational contexts (rural vs. urban, low-resource settings) to see how local factors (technology, culture) moderate effects.

Exploring which elements best support different skills (speaking vs. listening vs. writing), and whether gamification works differently for various age bands within “young learners”.

Investigating potential negative effects: burnout, competition stress, or dependency on rewards.

Gamification offers a compelling pathway for enhancing young learners’ motivation in English classes. When well-designed-with game elements that satisfy autonomy, competence, and relatedness-gamification increases engagement, confidence, and achievement. Yet, it must be used thoughtfully, balancing extrinsic rewards with intrinsic satisfaction, accounting for resource constraints, equity, and alignment with learning goals. For English teachers aiming to motivate young learners, gamification is a powerful tool-but like any tool, its effectiveness depends on how it is used.

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