GAMIFICATION AND GAME-BASED LEARNING: ENHANCING MOTIVATION AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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ANNOTATION: Motivation is a central factor in successful English language learning, especially in high school contexts where learners often experience anxiety, disengagement, and declining interest. To address these challenges, educational strategies such as gamification and game-based learning have gained attention for their potential to enhance learner engagement and motivation. This conceptual literature review examines how these approaches can support motivation in English language education. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory and research on language learning motivation, the article explores the use of game elements and educational games in high school classrooms. It also distinguishes between gamification and game-based learning and discusses practical implications for English teachers and mentors. The review concludes that these approaches, when applied thoughtfully, can foster learner autonomy, increase participation, and promote sustained motivation in learning English.

Key words: gamification, game-based learning, motivation, English language teaching, high school students.

Motivation is widely acknowledged as a crucial factor in second and foreign language learning, influencing students' effort, persistence, and achievement. High school learners, however, often struggle to maintain interest in English due to exam pressures, limited opportunities for authentic communication, and fear of making mistakes. According to Dörnyei (2001), motivation is not static; it can be nurtured or diminished by instructional methods and classroom environments.

Traditional teacher-centered instruction may fail to meet adolescents' affective and cognitive needs, often resulting in passive learning. Consequently, educators have turned to learner-centered and technology-enhanced approaches that create interactive and engaging learning experiences. Gamification and game-based learning have emerged as promising strategies that integrate elements of play into language learning, transforming routine activities into motivating and meaningful experiences (Kapp, 2012).

This article reviews key literature on motivation, gamification, and game-based learning in the context of high school English education. The purpose is to provide English teachers and mentors with theoretical insights and practical guidance on using these approaches to enhance student motivation.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a widely used framework for understanding motivation in education. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), motivation can be intrinsic—driven by interest and enjoyment—or extrinsic—driven by external rewards such as grades or praise. SDT emphasizes that learners are most motivated when three basic psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

In English classrooms, autonomy can be supported by allowing learners to choose topics or activities. Competence can be enhanced through clear objectives, progress indicators, and feedback, while relatedness involves fostering supportive peer interactions. Meeting these needs helps students engage more deeply with learning tasks and persist in challenging activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

High school learners often experience decreased motivation due to exam-oriented instruction and limited meaningful practice. Dörnyei (2001) notes that adolescents' motivation can fluctuate dramatically and is sensitive to classroom experiences. High levels of anxiety, fear of failure, and lack of interest may reduce participation in speaking, writing, and interactive tasks. Therefore, instructional strategies that create enjoyable, low-stress learning experiences are critical for sustaining motivation.

Gamification is defined as the integration of game elements into non-game contexts with the aim of increasing learner engagement and motivation (Deterding et al., 2011). In educational settings, gamification commonly incorporates elements such as points, badges, levels, leaderboards, challenges, and rewards into traditional learning tasks. These elements are not games in themselves but are used to enhance existing instructional activities by making them more interactive and motivating for learners.

Kapp (2012) emphasizes that gamification is most effective when game elements are intentionally aligned with learning objectives rather than being applied solely for entertainment purposes. In English language classrooms, gamification can transform routine exercises—such as vocabulary drills, grammar practice, and reading comprehension tasks—into engaging learning experiences that encourage active participation. For example, students may earn points for correct language use, progress through levels as their proficiency improves, or collaborate in teams to complete language challenges, all of which can increase motivation and sustained effort.

Gamification supports both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivators, such as points, badges, and rewards, provide immediate feedback and recognition, enhancing learners' sense of achievement and progress. At the same time, well-designed gamified tasks can foster intrinsic motivation by making learning activities meaningful, stimulating curiosity, and offering opportunities for mastery and self-improvement. According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation is strengthened when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness—needs that can be supported through appropriately designed gamified learning environments (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In high school classrooms, gamification has been shown to encourage participation, reduce anxiety and fear of failure, and create a more positive learning atmosphere. By presenting language exercises as challenges or friendly competitions rather than traditional tests, students may feel more comfortable taking risks and using the target language. This increased engagement can lead to sustained motivation and greater persistence in language learning, which is particularly important during adolescence (Dörnyei, 2001).

In contrast to gamification, game-based learning (GBL) involves the use of complete games as the primary medium for instruction rather than simply adding game elements to existing activities. According to Gee (2007), games create immersive learning environments that promote problem-solving, exploration, and meaningful interaction. Through game-based

learning, students engage with language in authentic contexts, allowing them to develop linguistic skills alongside critical thinking, collaboration, and communicative competence.

In English language education, GBL can include digital language games, storytelling activities, role-playing, and collaborative problem-solving tasks that require meaningful communication in English. Games offer authentic contexts in which learners can practice language skills while staying engaged.

Game-based learning promotes intrinsic motivation by allowing learners to learn through doing and experience, rather than through rote memorization. Gee (2007) highlights that games enable students to take risks in a safe environment, reducing anxiety and supporting language production. This experiential approach encourages persistence, focus, and meaningful engagement, which are essential for adolescent learners in high school.

While both gamification and game-based learning aim to enhance learner motivation, they differ in scope, instructional focus, and application within the classroom. Gamification involves the integration of game elements—such as points, badges, leaderboards, or levels—into existing instructional tasks, whereas game-based learning (GBL) uses games themselves as the primary vehicle for teaching content and skills (Deterding et al., 2011). As a result, gamification is often more flexible and easier for teachers to implement, making it particularly suitable for increasing short-term engagement and motivation in routine language-learning activities such as grammar practice or vocabulary review. In contrast, GBL offers deeper cognitive and emotional immersion by situating learning within meaningful game contexts, but it requires more extensive planning, time, and instructional preparation.

For English teachers and mentors, employing a balanced combination of both strategies can effectively address diverse learning objectives and motivational needs in high school classrooms. Short, gamified activities can help sustain student interest and participation during repetitive or challenging tasks, while full-scale game-based learning experiences can support in-depth language practice, communicative competence, and collaborative learning. Through role-playing games, simulations, or problem-solving scenarios, students are encouraged to use English authentically and interactively, thereby enhancing both linguistic skills and motivation (Kapp, 2012).

The successful implementation of gamification and game-based learning depends largely on thoughtful instructional design. Teachers must ensure that game elements are meaningfully aligned with learning goals and contribute to language development rather than serving as mere entertainment. Furthermore, an excessive emphasis on external rewards may undermine intrinsic motivation if students become overly focused on points or prizes instead of the learning process itself. According to Self-Determination Theory, motivation is most effectively sustained when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness; therefore, game-based strategies should be designed to support these psychological needs rather than replace them with superficial incentives (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Mentors and teacher trainers play a crucial role in supporting educators as they integrate gamification and game-based learning into English language instruction. Through targeted professional development programs, mentors can guide teachers in designing gamified lessons that align with learning objectives while maintaining student engagement. This guidance may include modeling effective game-based activities such as vocabulary challenges, role-playing scenarios, digital quizzes, or storytelling games that promote collaboration and meaningful language use. In addition,

teacher trainers can encourage reflective practice by helping educators evaluate the impact of these strategies on student motivation and learning outcomes

By fostering ongoing professional development and facilitating the sharing of best practices, teachers become better equipped to implement motivational strategies in high school English classrooms. Such support enables educators to create learning environments that address students' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as emphasized in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

This literature review demonstrates that gamification and game-based learning are effective approaches for enhancing motivation among high school students learning English as a foreign language. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory and established research, including Dörnyei's (2001) work on second language motivation, the review highlights how game-based approaches increase learner engagement, persistence, and positive attitudes toward language learning. By incorporating elements such as competition, rewards, feedback, and collaboration, gamified instruction transforms traditional language learning into an interactive and motivating experience, ultimately supporting improved language acquisition and sustained learner motivation.

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