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Gamification Boosts Motivation and Language Skills in Young English Learners

Rotua Tresia Siringo Ringo[1], Bobur Sabirov[2], Khaerunnisa Tayibu[3], Andi Aztrid Fitrayani Alam[4*]

[1]Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia
[2]University of Economics, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
[3,4]STKIP Andi Matappa, Pangkajene, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author's Email: aztri@stkip-andi-matappa.ac.id

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Abstract

General Background: Gamification has emerged as an innovative pedagogical tool to enhance student engagement in education, particularly in language learning. **Specific Background:** By incorporating game elements such as rewards, competition, and interactive challenges, gamification has demonstrated its potential in improving motivation and knowledge retention among young English learners. However, its long-term effectiveness and practical implementation remain underexplored. **Knowledge Gap:** Limited research examines the sustained impact of gamification on language acquisition, particularly across diverse educational contexts in Asia. Additionally, challenges such as technological constraints, budget limitations, and integration into traditional curricula hinder its widespread adoption. **Aims:** This study systematically reviews 25 studies published between 2019 and 2024 to evaluate gamification's impact on English language learning for young learners. **Results:** The findings indicate that gamification enhances motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and language proficiency while fostering immersive, anxiety-free learning environments that encourage autonomous learning. **Novelty:** This study provides new insights into the long-term effectiveness of gamification and offers a structured framework for integrating it into formal language education. **Implications:** The study highlights the need for sustainable gamification strategies, teacher training, and accessible technology to ensure equitable learning opportunities. These findings serve as a foundation for future research on effective gamification-based language learning.

Keywords: gamification, english language learning, young learners

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Introduction

English language competency equips young learners with essential tools for navigating the global scape in an increasingly interconnected world (Copland et al., 2014). The significance of early English language acquisition is multifaceted and profound. Primarily, English fluency unlocks vast repositories of knowledge and learning opportunities, as English remains the dominant language for prestigious academic publications, scientific research, and educational resources worldwide. This linguistic access transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, empowering young learners to become self-directed and autonomous in their educational pursuits (Hockly, 2012). Thus, early acquisition of English fundamentally transforms educational possibilities for young learners, enabling lifelong access to global knowledge systems.

Second, English proficiency facilitates communication across diverse cultural contexts. In today's multicultural societies, fluent English enables young learners to engage meaningfully with individuals from varied backgrounds (Li et al., 2019), fostering cross-cultural empathy, understanding, and a more expansive global perspective. This intercultural competence prepares students to thrive in increasingly diverse academic and professional environments (Pérez et al., 2014). Consequently, English language skills serve as a crucial bridge for developing the intercultural awareness and communication abilities essential for success in our pluralistic global society.

Furthermore, English language mastery provides young learners with significant academic and career advantages. As higher education programs and employment opportunities increasingly operate in English-dominant environments, strong language proficiency prepares students for success in demanding academic settings and broadens access to international career pathways (Jong, 2020; Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). In this way, early English language proficiency functions as a powerful catalyst for expanding future academic prospects and professional mobility in the global marketplace.

Research consistently demonstrates that English acquisition is more effective when initiated during early childhood development stages. This phenomenon stems from children's natural cognitive plasticity and their inherent predisposition toward dynamic learning processes (Nikolov & Djigunović, 2019). Young learners exhibit heightened engagement with language acquisition compared to adults, facilitating more seamless comprehension and assimilation of linguistic elements (Oktavia et al., 2022). This enhanced receptivity to language learning during formative years creates an optimal window for introducing English education through innovative pedagogical approaches.

The evolution of gaming technologies has transformed traditional perspectives on educational games. Contemporary educational paradigms recognize games not merely as entertainment vehicles but as sophisticated platforms for disseminating complex educational concepts (Plass et al., 2020). Numerous educators and institutions now strategically integrate gaming elements into academic curricula, particularly for language instruction, recognizing their potential to create immersive, contextually rich learning environments (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2019). This pedagogical shift represents a fundamental reconceptualization of educational games as powerful cognitive tools that facilitate deep learning through engaging, interactive experiences.

Special education environments have experienced technological innovations that advance the development of a variety of skills. Gamification is increasingly being used to improve the skills of individuals with special needs. Gamification is the technique of integrating game aspects and ideas into non-game environments, such as education, to improve engagement, motivation, and

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learning results. It entails using components such as points, badges, leaderboards, and awards to make learning more engaging and pleasurable. The conceptual framework of gamification encompasses the strategic application of game mechanics and dynamics to stimulate game-like interactions and behaviors within non-gaming contexts (Deterding et al., 2011; Kapp, 2012). When implemented thoughtfully, gamification strategies enhance learning experiences by engaging learners in socially-oriented and contextually-rich decision-making processes for problem-solving within educational tasks (Hamari et al., 2016). Designing effective gamification initiatives necessitates comprehensive understanding of learners' gaming preferences, social interaction patterns, and both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers (Landers, 2015). This multifaceted approach to gamification design ultimately creates inclusive learning environments that address the diverse needs of all learners, particularly those with special educational requirements.

The potential of gamification for enhancing English language learning among young learners has garnered significant scholarly interest (Faiella & Ricciardi, 2015; Flores, 2015). However, several critical research gaps persist in the existing literature. Most notably, there is insufficient research examining the longitudinal effects of gamified learning approaches (Dichev et al., 2020). While numerous studies highlight immediate benefits related to motivation and engagement, comprehensive understanding of gamification's sustained impact on core English language competencies—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—remains limited (Huang et al., 2020). These knowledge gaps highlight the urgent need for robust longitudinal research that systematically evaluates the lasting effects of gamification on holistic language development among young English learners.

Additionally, there exists a paucity of research investigating effective integration methodologies for incorporating gamified elements into standardized curricula to maximize learning outcomes in conventional classroom settings (Zainuddin et al., 2020). This integration challenge represents a significant barrier to widespread implementation of gamification in formal educational contexts. Such methodological gaps underscore the critical need for developing systematic implementation frameworks that effectively bridge gamification theory with everyday classroom practices.

Furthermore, research exploring the differential effects of specific game design elements (e.g., point systems, badges, leaderboards) on English language learners of varying ages and learning preferences remains underdeveloped (Roy & Zaman, 2018). Addressing these knowledge gaps is essential for developing comprehensive frameworks that optimize gamification implementation across diverse learning environments. This research deficiency prevents educators from making evidence-based decisions about which gamification elements best serve particular student populations and linguistic objectives.

The current literature reveals additional gaps concerning gamification effectiveness specifically in Early Years Learning (EYL) contexts. A significant disconnect exists between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, with much applied research lacking robust theoretical grounding (Dichev et al., 2020). This theory-practice divide underscores the need for empirically-based research that utilizes established gamification frameworks. This theoretical-practical disconnect significantly limits the development of pedagogically sound gamification approaches specifically tailored for young language learners.

Moreover, the context-dependent nature of gamification effects necessitates targeted studies examining implementation outcomes in specific EYL settings (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). The lack of standardized assessment tools and inconsistent research findings regarding

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gamification's impact on learning outcomes further complicates comparative analysis across studies (Majuri et al., 2018). These methodological inconsistencies create substantial barriers to establishing reliable, generalizable conclusions about gamification efficacy in early language education settings.

Additional research gaps include limited understanding of how gamification motivates cooperative learning behaviors in young learners (Shi & Cristea, 2016), and insufficient investigation into EFL/ESL teachers' digital literacy capabilities for effectively implementing gamified approaches (Çetin & Solmaz, 2020). These knowledge gaps collectively highlight the need for comprehensive research addressing the effectiveness of gamification specifically within early years learning contexts. Addressing these multifaceted research gaps requires coordinated investigation efforts that examine both technological and pedagogical dimensions of gamification implementation in early language education.

The integration of game elements into non-game contexts—gamification—represents an expanding trend in educational practices, particularly in early English language instruction. Understanding gamification's role in initial English language mastery is crucial for several compelling reasons: it enhances learner motivation, fosters learner autonomy and active participation, develops critical thinking skills, creates engaging learning environments, and promotes active, creative learning behaviors (Huang et al., 2020; Zainuddin et al., 2020). These multidimensional benefits position gamification as a potentially transformative approach for revolutionizing traditional early English language instruction methodologies.

In contemporary educational settings, gamification significantly impacts English learning outcomes for young learners across multiple dimensions of their educational experience. Most notably, gamification increases student motivation and engagement. Implementation of gamified elements such as badges, points, and achievement systems during instruction significantly enhances student enthusiasm and willingness to participate actively in learning activities (Facey-Shaw et al., 2017; Sanmugam et al., 2016). This motivational enhancement represents a fundamental shift in young learners' relationships with language acquisition, transforming potentially challenging linguistic tasks into intrinsically rewarding experiences.

Beyond standard educational applications, gamification media can enhance social skills and independence for children with special needs. Through structured gameplay, children interact with virtual characters and peer players, developing crucial social competencies including cooperation, communication, and empathy (Abbas & Marwa, 2023). Additionally, gamification platforms facilitate independent learning by providing opportunities for time management, task organization, and autonomous decision-making (Hassan & Hamari, 2019). These developmental benefits extend gamification's value beyond mere academic achievement to encompass critical life skills essential for holistic development among diverse learner populations.

When educators discuss gamification, they typically refer to the application of game design elements within educational contexts to enhance learning engagement (Deterding et al., 2011). The concept of "game" encompasses diverse design elements that can be challenging to categorize comprehensively due to their variability. This conceptual complexity necessitates nuanced understanding of gamification's multifaceted nature when developing pedagogically effective implementations.

Progress indicators serve as powerful motivational tools for students. Educators can more effectively encourage self-awareness by establishing clearly defined, achievable goals. Rather than presenting single, potentially overwhelming objectives, gamification promotes incremental

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achievements that sustain motivation through continuous positive reinforcement (Bozkurt & Durak, 2018). This structured progression approach fundamentally aligns with established principles of effective language acquisition, creating psychological scaffolding that supports sustained learning engagement.

Educational gamification additionally facilitates social learning processes, which function as significant motivational factors. Numerous digital platforms enable connections with peers, fostering healthy competition through score comparisons and collaborative challenges that incentivize enhanced learning outcomes (Sun-Lin & Chiou, 2019). These social dimensions of gamified learning capitalize on young learners' natural tendencies toward social comparison and collaborative problem-solving, creating powerful communal learning environments.

Despite gamification's numerous benefits for English language instruction among young learners, implementation faces substantial challenges that educators must address. Technological limitations represent a primary obstacle; while technology has become increasingly integral to educational environments, many schools—particularly in remote or under-resourced areas—lack adequate technological infrastructure and reliable internet connectivity (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2019). This digital divide creates implementation barriers for teaching staff in technologically disadvantaged settings. These infrastructural inequities threaten to exacerbate educational disparities by limiting gamification access to privileged educational environments with sufficient technological resources.

Financial constraints pose additional challenges for gamification implementation. Budgetary considerations fundamentally influence the development and sustainability of gamified learning initiatives in educational institutions (Toda et al., 2019). Resource limitations can significantly restrict opportunities for gamification integration within formal curricula. These economic barriers highlight the urgent need for cost-effective gamification solutions that remain pedagogically sound while minimizing implementation expenses.

Design complexity and implementation methodology present further obstacles. Effective implementation requires thoughtful design that aligns with pedagogical objectives. However, not all educators possess the technical expertise and creative design capabilities necessary for developing engaging, educationally sound gamified experiences (Zainuddin et al., 2020). This skill gap necessitates targeted professional development to support widespread implementation. Addressing this expertise deficit demands comprehensive teacher training initiatives that develop both technological competencies and gamification design principles tailored specifically for language education contexts.

Gamification offers substantial potential for enhancing motivation, engagement, and learning retention, making it a valuable tool for English language acquisition, particularly among young learners. However, maximizing effectiveness requires addressing challenges related to technology access, educator skills, and content design considerations (Huang et al., 2020). Meanwhile, traditional instructional methods maintain relevance, especially in resource-constrained environments (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2019). An optimal approach likely involves integrating the most effective elements from both methodologies—leveraging gamification's engagement potential while maintaining the structural benefits of traditional pedagogical approaches (Plass et al., 2020). This balanced integration strategy ultimately creates pedagogically robust learning environments that harness gamification's motivational power while preserving the systematic linguistic development afforded by established language teaching methodologies.

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Method

This research uses a systematic review methodology to assess the impact of gamification on English language learning among students in Asian countries. The systematic review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines Figure 1 illustrates the entire process. (Hamuddin et al., 2020).

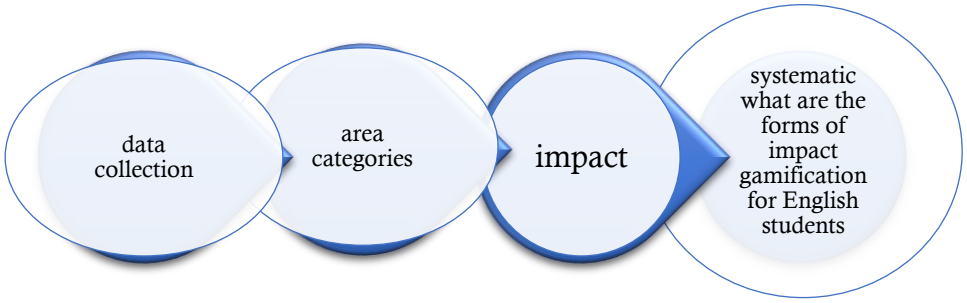

Figure 1. Methodology of Research

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria in the Data Search Process

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studies published from 2019 to 2024	Non-original studies, i.e., editorials, commentaries, lecturenotes, spotlights, erratum, research notes, corrections, short communications, and rapid communications
Studies published in the English language (dueto lack of translation capability)	Studies without available full-text
Studies that focus on impact gamification for Young Learners	Studies reported not in the English language

Next, the researchers employed a rigorous selection process by establishing and applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, as presented in Table 1. To extract complete research texts and exclude non-original research papers, data obtained from the Publish or Perish program underwent thorough screening and evaluation. Figure 2 illustrates the systematic elimination process through the PRISMA workflow.

This research utilizes artificial intelligence tools, specifically Chat GPT and Gemini AI, to facilitate efficient analysis of the collected data. Following the initial data retrieval through Publish or Perish, the researchers systematically selected relevant PDF documents based on title relevance and content applicability to the research focus. These materials were subsequently categorized into appropriate disciplinary "fields" to enable a more granular analysis of gamification's impact across different educational domains. This methodological approach provides a structured framework for comprehensively examining the multifaceted impacts of gamification on English language learning among young learners.

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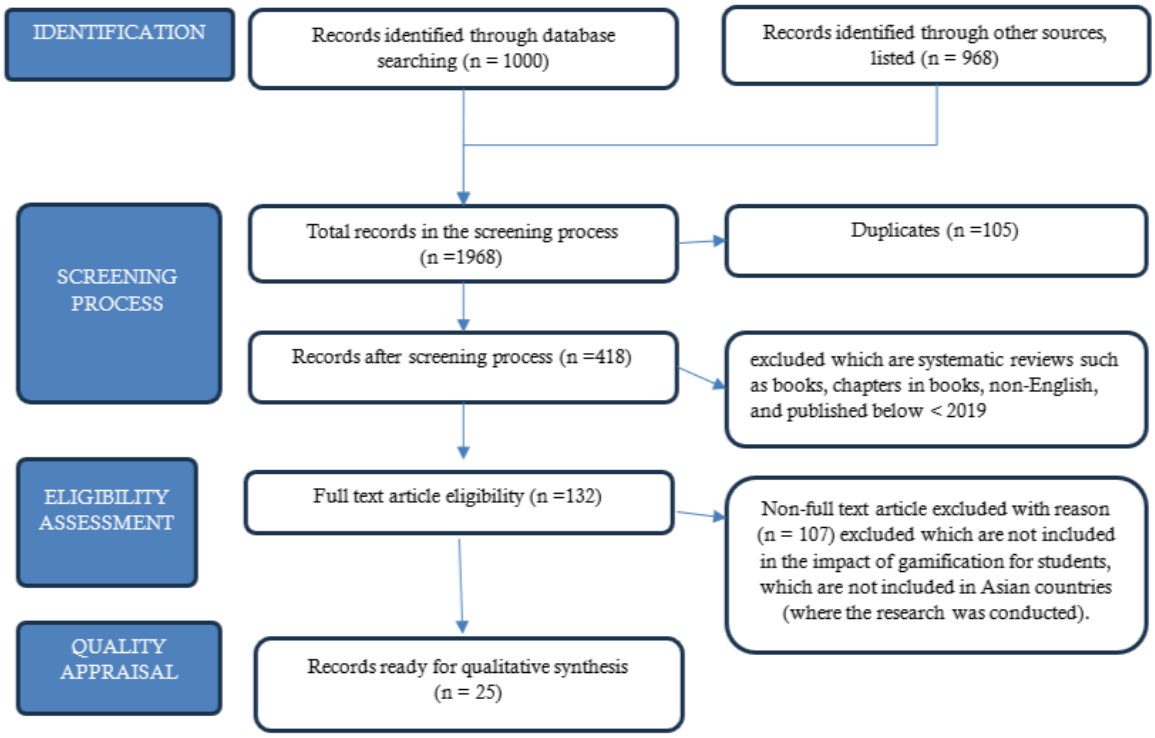

Figure 2. The flow Diagram of the Study. (Adapted from Moher et al. (2009).

Result and Discussion

A. Results

Table 2. List of Scientific Articles on Gamification

No	Author	Title	Journal	Year
1.	Fogarty	A description of gamification in teaching second language pharmacy technician students	Pharmacy Education	2019
2.	Jannah Wardah	An analysis on learning strategies of successful English	Journal of English Education Program	2022
3.	Azman	A review of data analysis for gamification: Challenges, motivations, recommendations and methodological aspects	Mathematics Education	2022
4.	Alfred YongA, Rudolph	A review of Quizizz – a gamified student response system	Journal of Applied Learning and Teaching	2022

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5.	Florence Martin, Vanessa P. Denn,Curtis J. Bonk	A synthesis of systematic review research on emerging learning environments and technologies	Educational Technology Research and Technology	2020
6.	Ida Grace A. ,Dr. Nageswari R.	Advantages of mobile gamification in learning English language	Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education	2021
7.	Punyawee Anunpattana Et Al.	Capturing potential impact of challenge-based gamification	Heliyon	2021
8.	Alkinoos-Ioannis Zourmpakis, Michail Kalogiannakis Stamatios Papadakis	Adaptive gamification in science education: An analysis of the impact of implementation and adapted game elements on students' motivation	Computers	2023
9.	Devasena R	Artificial intelligence in education: An alternative to traditional learning	Journal of English Language Teaching	2024
10.	Nurul Annisa Saraswati, Syafi'ul Anam, Oikurema Purwati	Autonomous mobile-assisted language learning for young learners using duolingo	English Language Teaching	2021
11.	Raquel Menendez-Ferreira, Antonio Gonzalez-Pardo, Roberto Ruíz Barquín, Antonio Maldonado, David Camacho	Design of a software system to support value education in sports through gamification techniques	Vietnam Journal	2019
12.	Vimala Judy Kamalodeen, Nalini Ramsawak-Jodha, Sandra Figaro-Henry, Sharon J. Jaggernauth, Zhanna Dedovets	Designing gamification for geometry in elementary schools: insights from the designers	Smart Learning	2021
13.	Sehar Shahzad Farooq, Hameedur Rahman, Syed Ali Naqi Raza, Muhammad Raees,Soon Ki Jung	Designing gamified application: An effective integration of augmented reality to support learning	IEEE Access	2022

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14.	Nadia Azzouz Boudadi, Mar Gutiérrez-Colón	Effect of gamification on students' motivation and learning achievement in second language acquisition within higher education: a literature review 2011-2019	The Euro CALL Review	2020
15.	Nirma Sadamali Jayawardena, Mitchell Ros, Sara Quach	Effective online engagement strategies through gamification: A systematic literature review and a future research agenda	Journal of Global	2021
16.	Kuo-Wei Lee	Effectiveness of gamification and selection of appropriate teaching methods of creativity: Students' perspectives	Heliyon	2023
17.	Ting-Chia Hsu, Ching Chang, Long-Kai Wu, Chee-Kit Looi	Effects of a pair programming educational robot-based approach on students' interdisciplinary learning of computational thinking and language learning	Frontiers in psychology	2022
18.	Edwin Alfonso Simbaña-Simbaña, Diego Abelardo Sarabia-Guevara, Franklin Raúl García-Vilema, Josselyn Paulina Pico-Poma	Gamification for improving oral communication skills in English as a foreign language learners	CIENCIAMATRIA	2023
19.	Durham Centre, Kunming	Affective factors and pedagogical implications in young learners' English learning	English Language Teaching and Linguistics Studies	2023
20.	Ella Aprilia Tiana, Khoirul Anwar, Ulfatul Marifah	Applying online gamification as the media in online learning for enhancing learners' vocabulary	Journal of English Teaching, Literature, and Applied Linguistics	2022
21.	Silvia Ade Yusfika	Effective English learning and character education for young learners through animated video of Indonesian folklore	COMSERVA Indonesian Journal of Community Services and Development	2022

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22.	Amirhossein Naderiheshi	Review of literature on teaching English vocabularies through games to young language learners	Journal of Language Teaching and Research	2022
23.	Rabea Ali, Mohammed Abdalgane	The impact of gamification "Kahoot App" in teaching English for academic purposes	World Journal of English Language	2022
24.	Nina Inayati, Alimin Adi Waloyo	The influence of Quizizz-online gamification on learning engagement and outcomes in online English language teaching	Journal on English as a Foreign Language	2022
25.	Nur Aeni, Sunarlia Limbong	The investigation of constrains faced by parents for introducing English to young learner	ENGLISH FRANCA: Academic Journal of English Language and Education	2023

1. Thematic Analysis on Impact Gamification in Language Learning for Students in Asia Countries

a. Increased Motivation and Engagement

Affective factors significantly influence young learners' English education. Research suggests three evidence-based teaching strategies to enhance student involvement: game-based learning, cooperative learning, and scaffolding (Guo, 2023). Game-based learning demonstrates particular effectiveness in boosting motivation and reducing language anxiety among young learners. Meanwhile, cooperative learning approaches foster learner autonomy and positive interdependence, creating supportive peer-learning environments (Zainuddin et al., 2020). These complementary approaches offer powerful methodological frameworks for creating emotionally supportive language learning environments that address both cognitive and affective dimensions of early language acquisition.

However, implementation challenges persist, including difficulties in calibrating appropriate difficulty levels for diverse learner groups and ensuring equitable participation across the classroom (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2019). Addressing these challenges requires thoughtful instructional design that accounts for individual learning differences while maintaining pedagogical alignment with curricular objectives (Plass et al., 2020). Overcoming these implementation barriers demands ongoing professional development that equips educators with differentiation strategies and assessment techniques to continuously refine their practice and maximize learning outcomes for all students.

b. Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition

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Gamification strategies have demonstrated particular effectiveness in vocabulary acquisition among young English language learners. Research by Tiana et al. (2021) highlights how online gamification platforms significantly enhance vocabulary retention and retrieval compared to traditional learning methods. The interactive, repetitive nature of gamified learning activities provides multiple exposure points to target vocabulary within meaningful contexts (Naderiheshi, 2022). These digital approaches fundamentally transform vocabulary instruction by leveraging cognitive principles of spaced repetition and contextual learning within motivationally compelling environments.

Digital applications like Quizizz and Kahoot create engaging vocabulary practice environments through competitive elements, immediate feedback mechanisms, and achievement systems that motivate continued practice (Ali & Abdalgane, 2022; Inayati & Waloyo, 2022). These platforms transform routine vocabulary drills into stimulating learning experiences that maintain high engagement levels while reinforcing lexical knowledge. This technological evolution of vocabulary instruction represents a significant pedagogical advancement that aligns learning activities with young learners' digital preferences while simultaneously enhancing critical word acquisition processes.

Moreover, mobile gamification approaches offer additional benefits through increased accessibility and learning opportunities beyond traditional classroom settings. Research by Nageswari (2021) found that mobile gamification applications support incidental vocabulary learning through frequent, brief engagement sessions that accommodate young learners' attention patterns. This ubiquitous learning approach enables vocabulary development to continue seamlessly across various contexts and time periods. This spatiotemporal flexibility transcends traditional educational boundaries, creating continuous learning ecosystems that maximize vocabulary exposure and practice opportunities throughout young learners' daily experiences.

c. Development of Oral Communication Skills

Gamification approaches demonstrate significant potential for enhancing oral communication proficiency among English language learners. Simbaña-Simbaña et al. (2023) found that gamified speaking activities substantially reduce communication anxiety while increasing willingness to communicate in the target language. The playful context created through game mechanics provides a psychological safety net that encourages experimentation with language structures and pronunciation patterns. As a result, learners feel more comfortable taking risks in their spoken interactions, leading to greater fluency over time. This supportive environment fosters both confidence and linguistic competence in real-world communication.

Role-playing games and simulation activities incorporated into language instruction create authentic communication scenarios that require meaningful language production. These contextualized practice opportunities develop pragmatic competence alongside grammatical accuracy, preparing learners for real-world communication challenges (Hsu et al., 2022). By engaging in these interactive scenarios, learners enhance their ability to use language naturally in diverse contexts. This practical experience equips them with the necessary skills to navigate real-life conversations effectively.

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Furthermore, gamified feedback systems provide immediate, non-threatening correction opportunities that support pronunciation improvement and syntactic development. This continuous feedback loop accelerates skill development while maintaining engagement through achievement recognition (Anunpattana et al., 2021). With instant and constructive feedback, learners can make real-time adjustments to their speech, reinforcing correct usage and pronunciation. This process ensures steady improvement while keeping learners motivated and actively engaged.

d. Technological Challenges and Implementation Barriers

Despite its proven benefits, gamification implementation faces significant technological barriers, particularly in resource-constrained educational environments. Limited access to hardware, software, and reliable internet connectivity creates implementation disparities across different socioeconomic contexts (Tek et al., 2021). These infrastructure limitations necessitate flexible implementation approaches that accommodate varying technological capabilities. To ensure equitable access, educators and institutions must adopt adaptable strategies that work within existing technological constraints. This approach promotes inclusivity and maximizes the potential benefits of gamification in diverse learning environments.

Additionally, educator technical proficiency represents a substantial implementation challenge. Many teachers lack sufficient training in digital gamification platforms, limiting their ability to effectively design and implement gamified learning experiences (Fogarty, 2019). Professional development programs focusing on technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) are essential for addressing this skills gap. By equipping educators with the necessary digital skills, professional development initiatives can enhance the effective integration of gamification in classrooms. Continuous training and support ensure that teachers can confidently utilize gamified tools to enrich learning experiences.

Cost considerations further complicate widespread implementation. Premium gamification platforms, content development expenses, and ongoing maintenance requirements create financial barriers for many educational institutions. Sustainable implementation requires strategic resource allocation and consideration of cost-effective alternatives that maintain educational quality while minimizing financial burden (Zourmpakis et al., 2023). To overcome financial constraints, institutions must explore open-access platforms and scalable solutions that balance affordability with pedagogical effectiveness. Thoughtful planning and investment in cost-efficient resources can facilitate long-term gamification adoption.

B. Discussion

This systematic review reveals the multifaceted impact of gamification on English language learning among young learners in Asian educational contexts. The findings demonstrate that gamification significantly enhances learner motivation, engagement, and specific language competencies, while simultaneously presenting implementation challenges that must be strategically addressed. A comprehensive approach that maximizes benefits while mitigating challenges is essential for effective gamification adoption in diverse educational

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settings. Future research and policy efforts should focus on balancing pedagogical innovation with practical implementation strategies.

The motivation and engagement benefits identified align with self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core motivational drivers. Gamification elements effectively satisfy these psychological needs through choice provision (autonomy), achievement recognition (competence), and collaborative challenges (relatedness). This theoretical alignment explains the consistent motivational improvements observed across multiple studies (Guo, 2023; Tiana et al., 2021). By leveraging these motivational principles, gamification fosters a learning environment where students actively participate and develop confidence in language acquisition. This engagement-driven approach enhances sustained learning outcomes over time.

Vocabulary acquisition benefits appear particularly pronounced, supporting previous research by (Li et al., 2019), who found that gamified vocabulary learning produced significant retention advantages compared to traditional approaches. The present findings extend this understanding by highlighting how gamification elements create multiple retrieval pathways for vocabulary items through varied contexts and repeated exposure—a process that strengthens lexical connections in line with Schmitt's (2008) vocabulary acquisition theories. The effectiveness of specific platforms like Quizizz and Kahoot suggests that immediate feedback mechanisms play crucial roles in reinforcing vocabulary retention (Inayati & Waloyo, 2022). These findings underscore the importance of structured gamification strategies in vocabulary instruction. Incorporating diverse retrieval methods and real-time feedback optimizes retention and deepens learners' lexical knowledge.

The development of oral communication competencies through gamification aligns with communicative language teaching principles, which emphasize authentic, meaningful communication for language development (Richards, 2006). Gamification creates low-anxiety environments that encourage language production—addressing the affective filter concerns highlighted by Krashen's (1982) acquisition theories. Role-playing and simulation activities provide contextualized practice opportunities that develop pragmatic competence alongside linguistic accuracy, preparing learners for real-world communication challenges (Hsu et al., 2022; Simbaña-Simbaña et al., 2023). By integrating gamified speaking activities, educators can enhance learners' fluency and confidence in real-world interactions. This approach bridges the gap between theoretical language knowledge and practical communicative competence.

However, the identified implementation challenges reveal significant barriers to equitable gamification access. The technological disparities noted by (Guo, 2023) reflect broader digital divide concerns in educational technology implementation (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). These infrastructure limitations create implementation inconsistencies that may exacerbate educational inequalities if not strategically addressed. The educator proficiency gaps identified by Fogarty (2019) highlight the need for comprehensive professional development programs focusing on technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) to support effective implementation (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Addressing these disparities requires targeted policy interventions and capacity-building initiatives. Sustainable integration of gamification depends on both infrastructural improvements and continuous teacher training.

Financial constraints represent another substantial implementation barrier, particularly in resource-limited educational environments. The cost considerations noted by Zourmpakis et al. (2023) necessitate strategic resource allocation and exploration of cost-effective alternatives

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that maintain educational quality while minimizing financial burden. Open educational resources and community-developed gamification tools may provide sustainable alternatives to premium commercial platforms (Huang et al., 2020). Educational institutions must explore affordable yet effective gamification solutions to ensure accessibility. Collaborative efforts between educators, policymakers, and developers can facilitate cost-efficient and scalable implementation.

The findings extend current understanding of gamification's impact on language learning by providing contextually specific insights into Asian educational environments. Previous research by Deterding et al. (2011) established gamification's general educational benefits, while Dehghanzadeh et al. (2019) explored its language learning applications. The present review contributes additional knowledge regarding implementation considerations unique to Asian educational contexts, including cultural factors influencing gamification reception and structural elements affecting implementation feasibility. Recognizing these contextual variables enables more effective and culturally responsive gamification practices. Tailored approaches can optimize engagement and learning outcomes in specific educational environments.

This research addresses several gaps identified in previous literature. The systematic analysis of implementation challenges responds to Dichev et al. (2020) call for more pragmatic implementation research. The examination of specific language skill development (particularly vocabulary and oral communication) addresses Huang et al. (2020) identified need for skill-specific gamification research. Additionally, the contextual focus on Asian educational environments provides valuable cultural insights previously underrepresented in gamification literature (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). By filling these research gaps, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of gamification’s role in language learning. Its findings offer practical implications for future research and instructional design.

Despite these contributions, several limitations warrant consideration. The review's exclusive focus on English-language publications may exclude valuable insights from research published in other languages. Additionally, the relatively short timeframe (2019-2024) limits historical perspective on gamification evolution. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of gamification on language development, investigate culturally responsive implementation approaches, and examine potential integration methodologies for incorporating gamified elements into standardized curricula. Expanding the scope of future studies can provide a more comprehensive picture of gamification’s long-term effectiveness. Addressing these limitations will further refine best practices for integrating gamification into language education.

Practical implications for educators include the importance of thoughtful instructional design that aligns gamification elements with specific learning objectives, consideration of technological accessibility when selecting implementation approaches, and recognition of gamification as a complementary rather than replacement approach to traditional language pedagogy. Professional development opportunities focusing on gamification design and implementation represent essential support mechanisms for effective adoption. Educators should strategically implement gamification to enhance learning rather than rely on it as a standalone solution. Ongoing training and reflection will ensure that gamification is used to its fullest potential in language instruction.

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Conclusion

This systematic review has comprehensively examined the impact of gamification on English language learning among young learners, addressing significant research gaps regarding implementation effectiveness and contextual considerations in Asian educational environments. The findings conclusively demonstrate that gamification, when thoughtfully implemented, significantly enhances learner motivation, engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and oral communication skills through its inherent elements of competition, rewards, and interactive challenges. By synthesizing these insights, this study underscores gamification's transformative potential in language learning. Its effectiveness depends on strategic implementation that maximizes engagement while addressing contextual challenges.

The research makes several novel contributions to the field of language education. First, it provides contextually specific insights into gamification implementation within Asian educational settings, highlighting both opportunities and challenges unique to these environments. Second, it establishes clear connections between specific gamification elements and language skill development, offering a more nuanced understanding of effective design principles. Finally, it identifies implementation barriers and potential mitigation strategies, providing a pragmatic framework for educational practitioners. These contributions offer valuable guidance for educators and researchers seeking to optimize gamification in diverse learning environments. A balanced approach that integrates best practices with contextual adaptability is essential for success.

These findings have significant implications for language teaching pedagogy. Educators should consider gamification as a valuable complementary approach to traditional instruction, with particular attention to technological accessibility, cultural responsiveness, and alignment with specific learning objectives. Educational institutions would benefit from investing in professional development programs that enhance teacher proficiency in gamification design and implementation, while policymakers should address infrastructure limitations that create implementation disparities across different socioeconomic contexts. A collaborative effort among educators, institutions, and policymakers is crucial to overcoming challenges and ensuring equitable access to gamified learning opportunities. Proper support structures will enable more effective and sustainable integration of gamification into language education.

Future research directions should include longitudinal studies examining sustained impacts of gamification on language proficiency, investigations of culturally responsive implementation approaches, and development of cost-effective gamification alternatives for resource-constrained environments. Additionally, exploration of effective integration methodologies for incorporating gamified elements into standardized curricula represents an essential next step in maximizing educational outcomes. Expanding research in these areas will refine our understanding of gamification's long-term benefits and practical applications. A forward-thinking approach will help bridge current knowledge gaps and inform future pedagogical innovations.

In conclusion, gamification offers substantial potential for transforming English language learning experiences for young learners by creating engaging, interactive learning environments that stimulate intrinsic motivation while developing essential language competencies. Realizing this potential requires thoughtful implementation that addresses technological, financial, and pedagogical considerations while maintaining focus on substantive educational outcomes. When carefully designed, gamification can serve as a powerful tool in language education, making learning more dynamic and effective. A well-structured approach will ensure that its benefits are maximized while minimizing possible challenges.

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Originality Statement

The author[s] declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the published of any other published materials, except where due acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom author[s] have work, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author[s] declare that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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