

UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GAMIFICATION IN ENGLISH TEACHING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY AT A UNIVERSITY IN HANOI

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Abstract: *This study explores Vietnamese teachers' perceptions and practices of gamification in teaching English to first-year English majors at Thang Long University. The goals of the research are to find out the impacts of gamification on EFL students' learning and some challenges when applying the approach. The participants of the study are five experienced EFL teachers with over 5 years of experience teaching university students. The research adapts qualitative method and uses semi-structured interviews as the main data collection instrument. The findings show that gamification can boost engagement, create an enjoyable learning environment, foster collaboration and competition, and enhance short-term learning outcomes. However, it can be time-consuming and sometimes perceived as childish. It is most effective for teaching vocabulary, reading, and speaking but less suitable for writing. Recommendations include effective time management, planning, simplicity, fairness, and appropriate tool selection. The study also discusses implications for educators and suggests future research directions.*

Keywords: *Gamification, applied linguistics, tertiary education, teachers' perception, teaching practices.*

I. Introduction

As technology continues to evolve and the demand for innovative teaching methods grows, gamification has become a popular way to boost student motivation and engagement. Unlike traditional lectures, which focus on passive learning, gamification creates a more student-centered experience that makes learning more interactive and enjoyable (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2019; Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen-Viet, 2023). Research has shown that gamification

works well for younger students, improving their motivation, engagement, and overall learning outcomes. But when it comes to university students-especially in Vietnam-there's still a lot we don't know. This study explores how Vietnamese university teachers perceive and use gamification in their English classes. By looking at their experiences, we can see whether the same benefits that younger students enjoy also apply to higher education and how local factors might shape these effects. Understanding this will not only help fill an important

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research gap but also offer useful insights for educators looking to bring gamification into their classrooms. To dig deeper into this topic, the study will focus on the following research questions:

Main research questions:

- *What do teachers think of the usefulness of gamification to their students' learning?*

- *What do teachers think of the challenge of gamification to their students' learning?*

Sub-research questions:

- *What skills do teachers think are suitable for using gamification?*

- *What recommendations do teachers have to improve the implementation of gamification?*

II. Literature review

2.1. Gamification

The definition of gamification varies among scholars. According to Alsawaier (2018, p. 11), gamification was described as incorporating “game elements, mechanics, features, design, and structure into non-game contexts”. A more straightforward definition from Landers (2014) characterized gamification as applying game attributes in non-game settings to improve learning outcomes. Other scholars such as Kingsley and Grabners (2015) offered a distinct perspective, emphasizing the pedagogical applications of gamification. They defined it as a combination of “content area instruction, literacy, and 21st-century learning skills” within an exceptionally engaging learning environment (Kingsley & Grabners, 2015, p. 51). Furthermore, it is crucial to differentiate between the terms gamification, game-based learning (GBL), and serious games, as they can often be confused. Gamification involves gamifying the learning environment (non-game context) with game elements to

enhance engagement and motivation. In contrast, GBL uses games as the primary learning content. Serious games or serious gaming, on the other hand, refers to games designed for specific purposes, such as education and business (Alsawaier, 2018).

2.2. Gamification in teaching English as foreign language (EFL)

Gamification has been used in English as foreign language (EFL) classes as a teaching strategy to draw students' attention and create a pleasant learning environment. However, with the ongoing shift in education from lecture-based and teacher-centered to student-centered, gamification has gained significant attention as a new teaching approach. Many studies have recognized the positive impacts of gamification in education, especially in teaching English. On the one hand, gamification has the potential to enhance student engagement, motivation, learning outcomes, problem-solving skills, and collaborative learning in EFL environments. The self-determination theory (SDT) is the most commonly used theory related to gamification because it emphasizes both motivation and engagement (Alsawaier, 2018). Underlying self-determination theory are three principles:

- **Autonomy:** the will and ability to make choices in pursuing and taking responsibility for one's actions

- **Competence:** the drive to tackle obstacles and attain success

- **Relatedness:** a sense of social standing and connection with others founded on mutual respect and interdependence

Based on this theory, when the three factors are fulfilled, students become highly motivated, ultimately leading to improved academic performance. On the contrary, if these factors are not met, students may become demotivated, negatively impacting their learning

efficiency (Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen-Viet, 2023). Moreover, research has shown that incorporating gamification in language learning can reduce students' fear of speaking, increase their attention, and encourage their willingness to communicate (Arnold, 2014). This can be attributed to the enjoyment learners experience, which gives them a sense of freedom and reduces their fear of making mistakes. Well-designed gamification activities also enhance learners' productivity and creativity by providing a sense of progression and empowering learners to take control of their learning.

On the other hand, Bogost (2011) characterized gamification as a process that extracts the least engaging elements from games, like points and rewards, which he saw as symbols of extrinsic and peripheral motivation. He argued that the most captivating aspects of video games lie in the connectivity and cooperation among players within game environments, rather than in points or rewards. Additionally, occasional failures of gamification in specific contexts may stem from inadequate design and a lack of comprehension regarding how video games impact player psychology to cultivate motivation, diligence, and learning (Hughes & Lacy, 2016). Similarly, Zichermann (2010) attributed the occasional failure of gamification in various educational contexts primarily to the absence of game thinking in its implementation.

Effectively utilizing gamification can be challenging; therefore, to transcend basic implementation, one must consider various game elements such as storyline, challenges, a sense of control, decision-making, and achieving mastery.

2.3. Teachers' perception of applying gamification in teaching English

Regarding teachers' perception of gamification in EFL teaching, Demirbilek,

Talan, and Alzouebi (2022) conducted a study involving 16 teachers from public and private schools in Ukraine and Turkey, revealing that the teachers exhibited a favorable attitude toward gamification. These teachers emphasized the positive impact of games on language learning, including increased class participation, enjoyment, and learning effectiveness. However, challenges such as irregularities, objections, time constraints, and the potential for negative competitive environments were identified as barriers to gamification. Technical issues, limited access to technology, concerns about screen time and game addiction, and health/psychological considerations were cited as primary reasons for teachers' reluctance to use gamification in EFL teaching.

Similarly, Ho's (2019) study on how to motivate Chinese ESL students revealed that the students liked the gamified group game task more than the group discussion task. This game-based learning approach helped create a positive classroom environment, served as a useful review for exams, and made students less nervous about using English. Moreover, the findings also showed that different game elements contributed to the increase in learners' behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement. Ho's research used different ways to collect information and was well-organized. The study also offered useful teaching suggestions for English teachers, which are helpful resources for educators.

Another study conducted by Pham and Pham (2022) explored teachers' perceptions of gamification, yielding positive results. The research, which surveyed 20 teachers from a vocational college in Vietnam, revealed that the majority of teachers held positive views regarding the pedagogical benefits of gamification in English grammar instruction. However, approximately 30% of the teachers indicated that they did not actively

incorporate as many games as possible into their grammar lessons. The study suggested that more attention should be given to the allocation of time for gamification and the selection of suitable games for each aspect of grammar instruction.

III. Research methodology

3.1. Participants

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for the study. As noted by Maxwell (2012), purposive sampling involves deliberately choosing specific individuals, locations, or events to obtain critical information that other methods might not provide.

This approach was particularly relevant to the study, as the researcher aimed to understand the attitudes and teaching strategies within a particular context rather than generalizing findings to a broader population (Alexander & Winne, 2006).

Five teachers agreed to participate in the interviews. Of these, three were selected as formal participants, while the remaining two contributed during the pilot phase. To ensure confidentiality, the formal participants (refer to Table 3.1) are identified by pseudonyms. All participants are employed at a private university in Hanoi, hold a master's degree in TESOL, and have over five years of teaching experience.

Table 3.1. Description of participants

Participants	Age	Qualification	Teaching experience
Teacher 1	38	Master of TESOL and ELT	16 years
Teacher 2	34	Master of TESOL and ELT	12 years
Teacher 3	30	Master of TESOL and ELT	7 years
Teacher 4	26	Master of TESOL and ELT	6 years
Teacher 5	26	Master of TESOL and ELT	6 years

3.2. Research methodology

A qualitative research method is chosen due to its key role in applied linguistics, which explores pedagogical practices in real-world contexts like classrooms (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015). Aligned with Holliday's (2015) view, this approach provides in-depth insights into teachers' beliefs, motivations, and challenges with gamified instruction, going beyond surface-level observations.

3.3. Data collection instrument

A semi-structured interview is chosen for data collection. This method is highly effective for investigating complex phenomena like language attitudes, motivation, and proficiency (Talmy & Richards, 2011). The semi-structured format offers the flexibility needed to delve deeply into teachers' perspectives, yielding contextualized insights. By using an interview guide, the process ensures a systematic exploration of key themes

while remaining adaptable to probe emerging topics or unexpected responses.

3.4. Data collection procedure

To refine the interview questions for clarity and relevance, a pilot interview is conducted with 2 participants, prior to the actual interview. Formal consent is sent to each participant via e-mail before the interview. The interview is conducted online via Google Meet and is recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Each interview session is expected to be in 30 minutes.

3.5. Data management

The interview is transcribed using the website Speechnotes and then compiled into a Word sheet for subsequent analysis. The data management process is anticipated to be completed within one week.

3.6. Data analysis

The six-phased thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) will be employed to analyze the

qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a widely recognized and robust method for analyzing qualitative data, particularly interviews, as it facilitates the identification

of meaningful patterns and themes within the data. The analysis procedures are summarized in Table 3.2 with an example of the initial codebook in Table 3.3.

Table 3.2. Summary of analysis procedures

Phases	Description of the process	Result
Familiarization with the data	Transcribing data, reading and rereading data, noting down initial ideas	Preliminary codes and detailed notes
Generation of initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code, making inferences about meanings of codes	Comprehensive codes of how data answers research question(s)
Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme	List of candidate themes for further analysis
Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes make sense and account for all the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map	Coherent recognition of how themes are patterned to tell an accurate story about the data
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis for refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story that the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme	A comprehensive analysis of what the themes contribute to understanding the data
Producing final report	Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the research question and literature, producing a report of the analysis	Description of the findings

Table 3.3. Example of initial codebook

Data extract	Description of code	Initial code	Possible theme/sub-theme
No, because game elements are something I use all the time and it's easy to choose, but um... the only problem I can think of is to choose the suitable games because my students are adult learners and not children, so you would want to avoid child-like games	The teacher said choosing suitable games is difficult	Difficulty in choosing games	Drawbacks of gamification

3.7. Anticipated results

The study expects to identify both benefits (e.g., increased engagement) and challenges (e.g., technological limitations) of gamification, revealing diverse implementation approaches and contextual factors influencing effectiveness in Vietnamese universities.

IV. Findings and discussion

4.1. Teachers' perception of the benefits of using gamification in teaching English to English-majored students

Gamification Boosts Learner Engagement

Gamification significantly enhances student engagement by making lessons more interactive and enjoyable. Teacher 1

emphasized its effectiveness in warming up activities, summarizing lessons, and encouraging class participation. Teacher 2 pointed out that game elements like points and rewards make learning more appealing, increasing student interest and motivation. Similarly, Teacher 3 observed that using quests and team-based challenges ensures active involvement, with rewards further boosting enthusiasm. By incorporating these elements, gamification not only fosters excitement in learning but also encourages students to participate more actively in class. These observations align with Ho's (2019) and Nguyen-Viet and Nguyen-Viet's (2023) research. Ho (2019) asserted that gamification can improve students' behavioral, cognitive, and motivational engagement through

collaborative tasks and digital platforms. Similarly, Nguyen-Viet and Nguyen-Viet (2023) stated that the challenging and joyful nature of game elements can increase student learning engagement.

Gamification Creates a Challenging and Joyful Environment

Gamification helps create a more engaging and stimulating learning environment by turning traditional lessons into interactive and competitive experiences. Teacher 1 explained that incorporating tools like Kahoot in reading activities prevents boredom and increases student participation by adding an element of competition. Similarly, Teacher 2 noted that students find gamified activities both entertaining and challenging, as they resemble online games, which naturally appeal to them. The combination of fun, challenge, and competition keeps students motivated and focused, making learning more energetic and enjoyable. By applying these game-like elements, teachers can foster a more interactive and immersive classroom experience. These insights support Demirbilek, Talan, and Alzouebi's (2022) study, which stated that gamification can make learning more enjoyable, thus making the learning process more effective and efficient.

Gamification Promotes Collaboration and Competition Among Students

Gamification not only encourages competition but also fosters collaboration among students. Teacher 2 pointed out that team-based activities make it easier for teachers to track points while also motivating students to complete tasks quickly and enthusiastically. This competitive element keeps students engaged and driven. Likewise, Teacher 3 highlighted that teamwork plays a crucial role in speaking lessons, as it allows students to interact, practice, and improve their communication skills in a supportive environment. By integrating

both competition and collaboration, gamification enhances students' academic performance while also strengthening their social skills. These findings align with Pham and Pham's (2022) research, which suggests that gamification stimulates a sense of competition, motivating students to learn while enjoying the process.

Gamification Improves Students' Short-Term Learning Outcomes

Gamification can enhance students' short-term learning outcomes by increasing participation and engagement. Teacher 1 explained that incorporating game elements into lessons encourages students to be more involved, which in turn positively influences their learning progress. Teacher 2 added that while students recognize the long-term benefits of language learning, mastering a language can feel overwhelming. Gamification helps by breaking down broader learning goals into smaller, achievable objectives within each lesson, making the process more manageable and motivating.

However, all three teachers acknowledged that while gamification supports short-term learning goals, its effects are mostly limited to the duration of the lesson and may not lead to lasting improvements. This aligns with the findings of Nguyen-Viet and Nguyen-Viet (2023), who noted that while gamification enhances student engagement and learning experiences, its impact on long-term retention remains uncertain. Similarly, Dehghanzadeh et al. (2019) found that although gamification generally yields positive outcomes, studies have yet to pinpoint which specific game elements contribute most to these improvements.

4.2. Teachers' perception of the drawbacks of using gamification in teaching English to English-major students

Gamification is time-consuming

One challenge of using gamification in the classroom is its time-consuming

nature. Teacher 1 pointed out that while gamification is useful, it requires extra preparation, making it difficult to incorporate into every lesson. Teacher 2 resonated with this concern, explaining that students can become too involved in the activities, leading to time management issues and incomplete lesson plans. This suggests that, despite its advantages, gamification can sometimes disrupt lesson pacing and require careful oversight.

These concerns are supported by Pham and Pham (2022), who found that time constraints are a major reason teachers hesitate to use gamification frequently. Likewise, research by Demirbilek, Talan, and Alzouebi (2022) identified time limitations as a key barrier to implementation, as lengthy game-based activities can interfere with lesson completion.

Gamification is childish

Gamification is sometimes seen as childish, but its effectiveness depends on how it's applied. Teacher 1 noted that while game elements are useful, selecting suitable activities for adult learners is key. Similarly, Teacher 3 pointed out that while gamification can create a fun learning environment, not all lessons or university students respond well to it. However, both teachers emphasized that gamification may seem childish to university students, as they are young adults, and its playful nature can sometimes feel misaligned with higher education settings. Research by Pham and Pham (2022) and Alsawaier (2018) supports this, emphasizing the need to tailor gamified activities to the maturity and context of higher education.

4.3. Teachers' perception of using gamification in teaching English skill

Skills that are suitable to use gamification

All three teachers agreed that gamification is particularly effective

for teaching vocabulary and speaking. Teacher 1 highlighted that while it can be used for various skills, it is easily integrated into reading, vocabulary, and speaking lessons, using tools like Kahoot for reading comprehension and interactive quests for speaking practice. Teacher 2 emphasized that gamification enhances vocabulary retention and makes learning more enjoyable. Teacher 3 supported this, noting that platforms like Gimkit reinforce vocabulary through repetition and that gamified speaking activities encourage interaction and collaboration. Overall, gamification boosts engagement and learning, especially in these areas.

The findings support Demirbilek, Talan, and Alzouebi's (2022) assertion that games enhance student language skills and make learning more enjoyable by making lessons more engaging. Additionally, Pham and Pham (2022) demonstrated that the implementation of gamification in English language teaching not only improves students' grammar but also supports the development of other language skills.

Skills that are not suitable to use gamification

All three teachers agreed that gamification may not be the best approach for teaching writing. Teacher 1 acknowledged its benefits across various skills but pointed out that writing requires individual focus and extended time, making it difficult to incorporate interactive game elements effectively. Teacher 2 preferred traditional discussions over gamification, emphasizing that writing involves deep thinking and debate rather than quick, game-based interactions. Similarly, Teacher 3 questioned how a writing lesson could be made interactive, highlighting that writing tasks demand concentration and are often time-consuming.

Despite these concerns, Alsawaier (2018) suggested that gamification can

support literacy development, including writing, indicating that its effectiveness may depend on how it is implemented.

4.4. Teachers' recommendation to improve the use of gamification in teaching English

All three teachers offered practical recommendations for effectively using gamification in the classroom. Teacher 1 stressed the need for time management and fairness, ensuring that game elements enhance rather than distract from the lesson. Teacher 2 resonated with this concern, advising against overly complex activities that could disrupt lesson flow. Teacher 3 emphasized selecting appropriate platforms and conducting trial runs to prevent technical issues. Overall, they highlighted the importance of careful planning, simplicity, fairness, and the right tools, which are the key factors supported by research from Alsawaier (2018), Demirbilek, Talan, & Alzouebi (2022), and Pham and Pham (2022).

V. Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

The study reveals several key findings regarding the use of gamification in English language teaching. The benefits of gamification include its ability to significantly boost learner engagement, create a challenging and enjoyable learning environment, foster collaboration and competition among students, and improve short-term learning outcomes. However, drawbacks such as its time-consuming nature and occasional perception as childish were noted. Gamification is particularly effective for teaching vocabulary, reading, and speaking but is less suited for writing due to its solitary and time-intensive requirements. Recommendations for successful gamification include meticulous time management, careful planning,

maintaining simplicity in activities, ensuring fairness in implementation, and selecting appropriate tools and platforms. By addressing these factors, educators can enhance the effectiveness of gamification, leveraging its strengths while mitigating potential drawbacks.

5.2. Implications

Educators should focus on incorporating gamification in skills that enhance interaction and engagement, such as vocabulary and speaking. For writing, a more traditional approach may be necessary, complemented by targeted gamified elements if suitable. Teachers should also ensure that gamification activities are well-planned, easy to manage, and appropriate for the learners' maturity level. Additionally, selecting the right digital tools and conducting trial runs can help mitigate potential issues and improve the overall effectiveness of gamified lessons.

For future researchers, the study highlights several key areas for exploration. Long-term impact studies should assess whether gamification's short-term benefits persist over time. Research should also broaden to include diverse educational contexts and subjects, beyond English language teaching. Developing comprehensive frameworks for implementing gamification, understanding students' perceptions, and integrating new technologies are essential. Additionally, investigating gamification's effectiveness across various skills and cultural settings can provide valuable insights for refining and adapting gamification strategies to different educational environments.

5.3. Limitations

Given the small sample size (n=5), findings may not be generalizable to all Vietnamese university contexts. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews may introduce potential biases. Future research could

address these limitations by expanding the sample size and incorporating additional data sources (e.g., student surveys, classroom observations).

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QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN ĐẠI HỌC VỀ VIỆC ÁP DỤNG PHƯƠNG PHÁP SỬ DỤNG TRÒ CHƠI TRONG GIẢNG DẠY TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU ĐỊNH TÍNH TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC Ở HÀ NỘI

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu tìm hiểu về quan điểm của giảng viên và hướng áp dụng phương pháp sử dụng trò chơi trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh cho sinh viên năm nhất chuyên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại trường Đại học Thăng Long. Mục đích của nghiên cứu là tìm hiểu tác động của phương pháp học thông qua trò chơi đối với việc học tiếng Anh của sinh viên, cũng như một số thách thức khi áp dụng phương pháp giảng dạy này. Đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu là năm giảng viên của trường với hơn 5 năm giảng dạy sinh viên đại học. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính thông qua phỏng vấn để thu thập dữ liệu. Kết quả cho thấy, phương pháp dạy học này có khả năng kích thích sự tham gia của sinh viên vào bài học, tạo môi trường học tập thú vị, thúc đẩy sự hợp tác và cạnh tranh, đồng thời cải thiện kết quả học tập trong thời gian ngắn. Tuy nhiên, phương pháp này có thể tốn nhiều thời gian khi thực hiện và có thể bị xem là “trẻ con” khi dùng trong giảng dạy sinh viên. Ngoài ra, các thầy cô cho biết phương pháp này có thể có hiệu quả trong giảng dạy từ vựng, kỹ năng đọc hiểu và kỹ năng nói, nhưng có thể không phù hợp để giảng dạy kỹ năng viết. Nhà nghiên cứu đề xuất một số khuyến nghị bao gồm quản lý thời gian, lập kế hoạch kỹ lưỡng, đơn giản hóa hoạt động, đảm bảo tính công bằng và lựa chọn công cụ phù hợp. Nghiên cứu cũng đề xuất một số ứng dụng của phương pháp này đối với giáo viên và các nhà giáo dục, đồng thời gợi ý hướng nghiên cứu trong tương lai.

Từ khóa: Phương pháp sử dụng trò chơi trong giảng dạy, ngôn ngữ học ứng dụng, giáo dục đại học, quan điểm của giáo viên, thực hành giảng dạy.

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