

GAMIFICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION IN UNIVERSITY STUDENT

Gamificación en el aprendizaje del inglés: mejora del compromiso y la motivación en estudiantes universitarios

Gamificação na aprendizagem da língua inglesa: aumentando o envolvimento e a motivação em estudantes universitários

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Gamification, as a learning technique that transfers the mechanics and roles of games to the educational field to achieve favorable results for university academic performance. Higher education faces challenges when assessing the motivation of these students, especially with regard to the teaching-learning process of second languages such as English. Therefore, this work proposes gamification as an innovative and interesting strategy to enhance student motivation and engagement in learning key vocabulary for the acquisition of English as a second language. Materials and methods: This study was developed under a mixed approach, emphasizing and prioritizing the characteristics and elements of a qualitative approach. According to the research scope, this work is classified as a descriptive study. Taking into account its nature, which seeks to describe the effects obtained in the learning of English vocabulary in higher education students at the Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo, Orellana campus, the descriptive scope is perceived as appropriate. The population consisted of 100 students, and the selected sample was 65. Results: The results indicate that gamification in educational settings addresses the teaching and learning of second languages, such as English, more effectively. It is an inclusive and motivating higher education strategy that integrates ICTs. Discussion: Considering the specialized literature on the topic, this study confirms that gamification, as a pedagogical resource, allows students to capture their attention. Once this is achieved, it leads to the production of knowledge through individual challenges and, in some cases, through teamwork. This unconsciously motivates the desire to learn a second language such as English, leading students to view it as a necessity rather than an imposition. Conclusions: It is concluded that chess is an effective tool for developing complex cognitive skills. It is essential to adapt methodologies to maximize its impact on students with disabilities, thus contributing to the improvement of the educational process in inclusive contexts.

Keywords: gamification; English; advanced level; educational strategies.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La gamificación, como técnica de aprendizaje que traslada la mecánica y los roles de los juegos al ámbito educativo para conseguir resultados favorable para el rendimiento académico universitario. La educación superior enfrenta desafíos a la hora de evaluar la motivación de estos educandos, sobre todo en lo que respecta al proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de segundas lenguas como el inglés. Por lo tanto, en el presente trabajo se propone la gamificación

como estrategia innovadora y de interés para potenciar la motivación y el compromiso estudiantil en el aprendizaje de vocabulario clave para la adquisición del inglés como segunda lengua. Materiales y métodos: Este estudio se desarrolló bajo un enfoque mixto haciendo énfasis y priorizando las características y elementos de un enfoque cualitativo. Según el alcance investigativo el presente trabajo se cataloga como una investigación de tipo descriptivo. Si se tiene en cuenta su naturaleza, la cual busca describir los efectos obtenidos en el aprendizaje de vocabulario en inglés en estudiantes de nivel superior en la Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo sede Orellana, el alcance descriptivo se percibe como el indicado. La población la constituyeron 100 estudiantes y la muestra seleccionada fueron 65. Resultados: Los resultados indican que la gamificación en entornos educativos aborda la enseñanza-aprendizaje de segundas lenguas, como el idioma inglés, de una manera más efectiva. Es una estrategia de enseñanza superior inclusiva y motivadora que integra las Tics. Discusión: Si se considera la literatura especializada sobre el tema, se confirma con este estudio que la gamificación, como un recurso pedagógico, permite captar la atención de los estudiantes, y una vez logrado esto, llega a producir el conocimiento a través de los respectivos retos, de forma individual y en algunas otras oportunidades, con el trabajo en equipo, donde se logra motivar de forma inconsciente el querer aprender una segunda lengua como lo es el inglés, haciendo que los estudiantes lleguen a ver este idioma como una necesidad y no una imposición. Conclusiones: Se concluye que el ajedrez es una herramienta eficaz para desarrollar destrezas cognitivas complejas, es esencial adaptar las metodologías para maximizar su impacto en estudiantes con discapacidad, contribuyendo así al mejoramiento del proceso educativo en contextos inclusivos.

Palabras clave: gamificación; inglés; nivel superior; estrategias educativas.

RESUMO

Introdução: Gamificação, como técnica de aprendizagem que transfere a mecânica e os papéis dos jogos para o ambiente educacional para alcançar resultados favoráveis ao desempenho acadêmico universitário. O ensino superior enfrenta desafios na hora de avaliar a motivação desses estudantes, principalmente no que se refere ao processo de ensino-aprendizagem de segundas línguas, como o inglês. Portanto, este artigo propõe a gamificação como uma estratégia inovadora e interessante para aumentar a motivação e o engajamento dos alunos na aprendizagem de vocabulário-chave para a aquisição do inglês como segunda língua. Materiais e métodos: Este estudo foi desenvolvido sob uma abordagem mista enfatizando e priorizando as características e elementos de uma abordagem qualitativa. De acordo com o escopo da pesquisa, este trabalho é classificado como um tipo de pesquisa descritiva. Considerando sua natureza, que busca descrever os efeitos obtidos na aprendizagem do vocabulário inglês em estudantes do ensino superior da Escola Politécnica de Chimborazo, campus Orellana, o escopo descritivo é percebido como adequado. A população foi composta por 100 alunos e a amostra selecionada foi de 65. Resultados: Os resultados indicam que a gamificação em ambientes educacionais aborda o ensino-aprendizagem de segundas línguas, como o inglês, de forma mais efetiva. É uma estratégia de ensino superior inclusiva e motivadora que integra as TIC. Discussão: Considerando a literatura especializada sobre o tema, este estudo confirma que a gamificação, como recurso pedagógico, permite ao aluno captar sua atenção e, uma vez alcançada, produzir conhecimento por meio dos respectivos desafios, individualmente e, em algumas outras oportunidades, com trabalho em equipe, onde consegue motivar inconscientemente o desejo de aprender uma segunda língua como o inglês, fazendo com que o aluno veja esta língua como uma necessidade e não uma imposição. Conclusões: Conclui-se que o xadrez é uma ferramenta eficaz para o desenvolvimento de habilidades cognitivas complexas; é essencial adaptar metodologias para maximizar seu impacto em alunos com deficiência, contribuindo assim para a melhoria do processo educacional em contextos inclusivos.

Palavras-chave: gamificação; Inglês; nível superior; estratégias educacionais.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Gamification, as a learning technique that brings the mechanics and roles of games to the educational environment to achieve favorable results, is at an auspicious moment for university academic performance. Higher education faces challenges when assessing the motivation of these students, especially with regard to the teaching and learning process of second languages such as English.

The challenge of encouraging these students to choose meaningful language training becomes a daily concern for teachers. Therefore, efforts are made to merge motivation with pedagogical strategies to train competent professionals in line with the current needs of society (Vera et al., 2023). The importance of the English language in contributing to Ecuador's bilingual status has been integrated into educational projects for some years. However, the need for progress in this area requires contemporary educational strategies tailored to the needs and motivations of students. It is in this context that gamification emerges as a teaching strategy and dynamic tool that adapts to the current context, increasing the possibilities for learning English at the higher education level. The authors who preceded this study call it an "attractive and innovative strategy" because through games, it is possible to have fun and learn (Ramírez et al., 2023).

Gamification has been recognized not only as a form of play, but also as a way to address the difficulty in expressing ideas, the lack of practice in the classroom, often due to fear or shyness in expressing oneself in another language, and the exploration of a variety of games that generate continuous challenges in learning and gain more knowledge. Therefore, gamification is a successful tool that creates an engaging and participatory environment, favoring the acquisition of words and expressions in another language. (Cerón et al. 2024)

According to Dichev (2017), there is no single definition of gamification in the educational field; the various conceptualizations agree on immersing students in learning, adapting the principles of traditional education to new approaches based on motivation and social identification, applying game mechanisms, with the aim of making the pedagogical process attractive and as effective as possible.

Therefore, this paper proposes gamification as an innovative and interesting strategy to enhance student motivation and engagement in learning key vocabulary for acquiring English as a second language.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was developed using a mixed-methods approach, emphasizing and prioritizing the characteristics and elements of a qualitative approach. Núñez (2017) presents mixed research methods as: "those methods that combine quantitative and qualitative perspectives in a single investigation with a view to carrying out the empirical phase of the study" (p. 632). Furthermore, Tigua et al. (2022) establish that the mixed approach opens the possibility for the researcher to collect qualitative and quantitative information, which can broaden the researcher's vision and enable greater veracity in the study's findings. Similarly, Cedeño (2012) proposes that the mixed approach is an option to the dilemma of qualitative and quantitative approaches, promoting a broader vision of the phenomena studied. Furthermore, Hernández-Sampieri et al. (2014) state that the implementation of mixed research approaches provides benefits such as a broader vision of the phenomenon studied, as well as greater clarity in the statement of the problem and greater diversity in the sources of information to be used.

The integration of both approaches provides a more complete view of the phenomena under study, greater breadth of data collection, and greater credibility in the results. For this study, the mixed method was selected, emphasizing the prioritization of the characteristics of the qualitative approach, given that the approach fully meets the inherent needs of the research process being developed and is also directed toward the study objectives. Due to its nature, this mixed approach offers more tools for data collection and triangulation, providing variety in the description of the phenomena studied and reliability in the results obtained. Given all the above, the selection of this approach is considered entirely appropriate.

According to the research scope, this work is classified as a descriptive study. Considering its nature, which seeks to describe the effects obtained on English vocabulary learning among higher education students at the Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo, Orellana campus, the descriptive scope is perceived as appropriate. The population consisted of 100 students, and the selected sample was 65. This type of research allows for the collection of information from the participants and the phenomenon under study, that is, measuring vocabulary knowledge, as well as students' motivation to learn English before implementing the strategy, and presenting the improvements obtained through gamification as an educational strategy. In this way, the aim is to show how gamification enhances motivation and commitment to English vocabulary learning among these students. Research Model Since the study was carried out using a mixed-methods research design, which included both approaches throughout the entire research process. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed simultaneously, allowing for interactions between the two approaches throughout the research.

Gamification was selected as the pedagogical strategy to be used in this study. The advantages of using gamification as a learning facilitation strategy in education are supported by a variety of studies conducted on these topics.

Gómez (2019) establish that the use of gamification methodology promotes a high level of participation on the part of students, which directly impacts the improvement of their learning, especially when referring to the learning of English vocabulary. Bettin Arrieta et al. (2021) affirm that the benefits of gamification are represented by an increase in the number of English words that students master when solving the activities.

RESULTS

Gamification is a very useful teaching-learning method for encouraging interest in studying and also strengthens motivation. This technique is not only applicable to children but can also be implemented in adult education, as games are enjoyed at all stages of life and have been proven to increase dopamine levels, which, in turn, intensifies our motivation and interest (Yang, 2018). Consequently, this same author presents some of the benefits that can be achieved through the practice of gamification:

- Greater Motivation. The fact that language learning is fun reduces fear of public speaking, helps improve learning, and overcome anxiety. Gamification is currently a novelty and generates a willingness to learn compared to traditional learning.
- It fosters competitiveness, but also cooperation. Competitiveness always generates learning, although it must be healthy and organized. Likewise, when working in groups, games multiply individual abilities and skills.
- It benefits concentration. Achieving a goal requires concentration. Greater concentration leads to better learning outcomes.
- Improves Interpersonal Relationships in the Classroom. Gamification in language teaching requires group work. For this reason, students must learn to communicate with each other regarding subject vocabulary in a group setting. Strong teamwork fosters participation and helps overcome the fear of participating and making mistakes in a foreign language.
- Helps Assimilate Theory and Practice. It's important to practice each piece of language content in an everyday situation when learning a language. Playing games helps you apply theory in a real-life context, streamlining your practice (Yang, 2018).
- Impact of gamification on motivation. Gamification leverages a reward system, providing students with immediate feedback and rewards for their efforts. By awarding students points for completing tasks or earning badges, the brain produces dopamine, which strengthens actions and creates incentives to persist. Scientific research has indicated that gamification improves student motivation and engagement, leading to improved academic performance (Puntillo, 2023).

Gamification significantly influences student motivation and learning, especially when integrated with other tactics and additional components, such as the use of badges, points, and leaderboards (Huamani and Vega, 2023). Furthermore, gamification fosters skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration. Puntillo (2023) demonstrated that the application of game elements increases motivation and a sense of success among students. Similarly, it can be an effective tactic for boosting student enthusiasm and engagement in the learning process, especially in higher education (Sailer, 2017). Gamification promotes an active connection between students and the content being studied, shifting their focus toward improving knowledge, mastering specific skills, or rewarding specific actions, among other diverse purposes (Restrepo, 2023). It is therefore a matter of being aware and understanding that there are new ways of teaching, guiding students in acquiring knowledge through new methodologies that allow them to achieve more meaningful learning.

DISCUSSION

To gamify learning, it is necessary to change educational materials, adapting them to the new experiences and forms of digital society; the learning approach is altered by developing educational materials based on online games (Fu, 2019). Pérez-Manzano and Almela-Baeza, (2018, cited by Fu, 2019, p. 75) state that, "This change in learning will not be strange to students since new technologies make up a significant part of the

transmedia world of young people and are part of their culture.”

Authors such as Bettin et al. (2021) state that: Gamification in education can help develop engagement skills in students, generating more interest in what they are learning, problem-solving skills and mental flexibility, competition and collaboration. Therefore, Orihuela (2019, cited in Lara Alcívar et al., 2021) points out that: “one of the learning strategies that can contribute to improving the motivation, concentration, and involvement that students need in learning a foreign language is gamification” (p. 1641). Considering the specialized literature consulted, this study confirms that gamification, as a pedagogical resource, allows students to capture their attention. Once this is achieved, it produces knowledge through the respective challenges, both individually and, in some cases, through teamwork. This unconsciously motivates the desire to learn a second language such as English, making students see this language as a necessity and not an imposition. Gamified tools to achieve motivation. It is important to gamify a learning activity, without forgetting that there are a large number of digital resources that facilitate the task. According to Connolly (2012), the following are some options that work positively in the language classroom:

- Kahoot allows you to create quizzes and also allows you to use some pre-made games, available for different levels. Students will need their cell phones to participate. They will compete against each other, earning points for speed and correct answers, and each student is automatically placed on the podium.
- Cerebriti is a platform for creating and sharing free games, increasing motivation through challenges, rewards, and rankings. It also offers a more advanced educational version, called Cerebriti EDU, designed for educational centers, providing private spaces containing report generators, statistics, academic progress trackers, and more.
- Educaplay. This is a free resource that allows you to create and share multimedia activities, such as crossword puzzles, riddles, word searches, word wheels, and interactive maps.
- Escape rooms. Creating experiences through overcoming challenges and puzzles encourages teamwork. Students must overcome these obstacles to gain entry to the room. The puzzles are closely related to the language they are studying, so cultural, lexical, and grammatical concepts can emerge, while simultaneously leveraging language learning to progress.
- Super Teacher Tools. This website allows you to create various online contests using original television program formats. It includes various tools, such as timers, counters, and data, among others (Connolly, 2012).

This author refers that, according to the studies taken into account in his research, he concluded that the use of gamification mediated with ICT, presents multiple advantages for the subject of English, since it fosters the interest and motivation of students, while generating knowledge in digital learning, as well as improves the acquisition of vocabulary in English as evidenced in the results obtained by this study. In addition, Connolly (2012) refers that gamification is the cause of generating motivation in students, as well as awakening learning in English vocabulary, since after the application of gamified practices, the results were relevant and enjoyable, and therefore the objective of said study was achieved. In the aforementioned research, as well as in this one, unconscious learning can be more effective, since when carrying out a gamified practice, a game environment is perceived but not a study environment, for this reason students generate a better training process if they interact with gamification.

Based on the observations made in the field diary for both groups, it is possible to infer that it generated greater interest in participating and taking an active role because the strategy proposed small competitions that depended solely on the student's performance and on the knowledge previously studied and acquired with this same tool, and with which they could advance from one challenge to the next. On the other hand, it was visible that they wanted to do and pay attention to what was presented because, depending on this, the development time of the challenges and the scores that could be achieved could fluctuate. In other words, gamification generated an environment of competitiveness, which in turn motivated them to achieve the different challenges. As mentioned by Deterding (2011), through these techniques, students involved in a gamified educational process may increase their desire to progress, establish individual rankings and group competition points, perceive that they have made the most of their learning time, and be encouraged to seek improvement.

According to this author, the results obtained through the completion of gamified challenges reveal the potential of gamification as an emerging learning strategy that increases motivation. This is why most of

the studies analyzed in this review have been considered positive, since the results obtained have improved learning outcomes, as was the case with the current study.

Ratifying what was proposed by Dichev and Dicheva (2017), where gamification in education is a perspective that encourages the commitment and motivation of students, through the integration of game design in the learning environment. Which generates interest in students, since it maintains motivation, since this area has always been a challenge in education. This expresses the relevance that gamification has obtained in the educational scene, for this statement it is defined as a success what was achieved in this study and seeks to promote this type of strategy as a driving and innovative agent in any type of class that is intended to be taught. (Fu et al. 2019)

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the gamified strategy was successful due to the interest it generated among students, who found it a much more dynamic and engaging tool for learning vocabulary. Furthermore, it sparked their interest in paying more attention, taking care not to make mistakes, and thus improving their skills in each of the spaces and games designed. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that gamification allowed for the development of classes or sessions with engaging content, eliminating the monotony of notebooks and pens. Gamification fostered and renewed interest in learning a second language (English) and strengthened knowledge. Finally, the results obtained indicate that the implementation of gamification had a positive impact on all three aspects evaluated. First, a significant increase in the motivation and engagement of higher education students was observed. They showed greater interest and enthusiasm for learning. This was reflected in the results of the motivation and engagement questionnaires, which showed an increase in participants' favorable perceptions of developing gamified activities to strengthen their English language skills.

This increase in motivation was primarily due to the playful and competitive elements of gamification, which effectively captured and maintained students' attention, confirming that the motivation generated by gamified strategies significantly improves English language learning (Díaz, 2023). It is also important to note that the observations recorded in the field diary showed a desire to learn in a motivated way, as participants felt they were playing while expanding their vocabulary.

Regarding engagement, the data reflect that students were actively involved in learning activities, participating more frequently and devoting more time to vocabulary practice, as observed during the implementation of the pedagogical intervention process. Field diary records support a greater commitment to strengthening vocabulary acquisition and are associated with the data obtained from the motivation and engagement questionnaire.

Similarly, it is stated that gamification, which included clear objectives, rewards, and continuous feedback, was crucial for maintaining high levels of engagement and active participation. Regarding vocabulary learning, the main objective of the research was confirmed, as the evaluation carried out after the strategy's implementation reflected a significant increase in the number of words learned and in students' ability to use them correctly in diverse contexts. This contrasts with the diagnostic phase, where the initial vocabulary was low-level and had limited applicability, and where students showed little interest in developing traditional activities, as evidenced in the English and motivation and engagement questionnaires. This suggests that gamification not only motivated and engaged students but also facilitated more effective and lasting learning of this important language, which is highly relevant in today's globalized environment (Gallardo et al., 2022). The use of technological resources was a subcategory of essential importance in this research, since it demarcates the use of ICT tools that pave the way for the use of gamification focused on English learning. Therefore, by employing technology, it can be concluded that it is the base platform upon which the digital educational resources that energized the pedagogical intervention process of this research are built. In conclusion, this research not only contributes to the theoretical field of digital education and gamification, but also offers valuable practical implications for teachers and educators seeking to innovate and improve their teaching methods, since the adoption of gamified strategies in the classroom can significantly transform the learning experience, making it more engaging, dynamic, and effective for students.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of responsibility of authorship

We, the authors of the aforementioned manuscript, DECLARE that we have directly contributed to its intellectual content, as well as to the genesis and analysis of its data; therefore, we are able to take public responsibility for it and accept that their names appear on the list of authors in the order indicated. Furthermore, we have complied with the ethical requirements of the aforementioned publication, having consulted the Declaration of Ethics and Publication Malpractice.

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