

A Real Game-Changer in ESL Classroom? Boosting Vietnamese Learner Engagement with Gamification

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Abstract

The significance of gamification has been robust in educational contexts as gamification provides a greater engagement and empowerment among ESL language learners. This research aims to reconsider the role of gamification beyond its conventional use as gamified classroom activities, incorporating it into the whole journey of an ESL blended learning course. The study was conducted in a Vietnamese private university with a total of 50 learners for 12 weeks. E-journal and interviews were employed to explore learners' deep thoughts of gamification. Each week, five learners voluntarily submitted their journals through a link by Google Form. Additionally, interviews were also conducted in the middle of the course, week 7, and at the end of the course, week 12. Data was analyzed into 3 main themes: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. The result indicated that ESL learners achieved a deeper engagement in a gamified blended classroom, behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively. To be more specific, learners attained a higher level of participation, effort-making, and contribution to learning. Moreover, participants showed their interest and confirmed the decrease of language anxiety. Finally, students developed a sense of social connection and investment in their learning, which was regarded as the expressions of cognitive engagement.

Keywords: gamification, blended learning, ESL classroom, learner engagement

Introduction

After being coined in 2008 by Deterding et al. (2011), gamification has spread its recognition in various domains of knowledge such as customer service (Streukens et al., 2019), cognitive behavioral therapy (Shtern et al., 2012), education (Attali & Attali, 2015), and other fields. It is considered an ideal means to satisfy different human desires including but not limited to status, achievement, self-expression, competition, and altruism (Bunchball, 2010). Thus, it can empower intrinsic motivation, boost learner engagement, enhance learning outcomes, create collaborative learning and promote positive behaviors (Landers & Landers, 2014; Lee & Hammer, 2011; Moncada & Moncada, 2014).

However, through a systematic review of gamification, there is not yet a conclusive consensus on the effectiveness of gamification in educative contexts, especially regarding the application in learning a language as a second language (Dehghanzadeh et al, 2019). In