

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMIFICATION IN DEVELOPING
STUDENTS' ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS**

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Abstract. *This article examines the role of gamification in developing students' English-speaking skills. It discusses how points, challenges, role-play, teamwork, and immediate feedback can support speaking fluency, vocabulary use, confidence, and classroom participation. Particular attention is paid to the conditions under which gamification supports meaningful communication.*

Keywords: *gamification, English-speaking skills, EFL, speaking fluency, motivation, communicative competence, language teaching.*

Introduction. Speaking is one of the most demanding skills in foreign language learning because it requires learners to select appropriate vocabulary, construct grammatical sentences, pronounce words clearly, and respond to other speakers within a limited time. Unlike writing, speaking often takes place without an opportunity to revise every sentence. For this reason, students who understand English grammar and vocabulary may still struggle to express their ideas in conversation. This difficulty can be observed in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where learners sometimes hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes or being judged by their classmates. In teacher-centred lessons, speaking opportunities may also be limited when students spend most of their time listening to explanations, completing written exercises, or memorising rules.

Gamification offers one possible way to address these difficulties. It involves introducing game-design elements, such as points, challenges, levels, feedback, and rewards, into activities that are not originally games. Deterding et al. define gamification as the use of game-design elements in non-game contexts [1].

In English language teaching, these elements can be used to organise speaking practice around clear goals and meaningful communication. However, the purpose of gamification should not be simply to make lessons entertaining. Its educational value depends on whether students actually use English to exchange information, explain opinions, negotiate meaning, and solve problems. A classroom activity may be enjoyable without producing substantial language development. Therefore, the effectiveness of gamification must be considered in relation to learners' speaking performance rather than their enthusiasm alone.

Gamification can be examined through several established approaches to language learning and educational psychology. These perspectives help explain why game-based classroom elements may encourage students to speak and why their effectiveness depends on the way activities are organised. Deterding et al. [1] distinguish gamification from the use of complete games by focusing on the application of selected game-design elements. For example, a teacher does not need to turn an entire English lesson into a competitive game. A simple information-gap task can become more engaging when pairs receive a mission, work against a reasonable time limit, and earn recognition for communicating successfully.

Dichev and Dicheva [2] provide a more cautious perspective. Their review of educational gamification identifies the need to distinguish promising assumptions from conclusions supported by empirical research. In other words, introducing points or leaderboards does not automatically improve learning. The relationship between game elements and educational outcomes must be examined carefully.

Self-determination theory, developed by Deci and Ryan [3], provides another useful explanation. The theory emphasises three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In a speaking lesson, autonomy can be supported by allowing students to choose a role or topic; competence can be strengthened through achievable challenges and constructive feedback; and relatedness can develop through pair work and team tasks. For example, in a classroom activity called “*Plan a Weekend Trip*”, students work in groups to

organise a two-day journey. They choose the destination, discuss transport options, estimate costs, and agree on an itinerary. Each group receives points for completing the task in English, supporting its decisions with reasons, and responding to questions from other groups. The activity gives students a clear objective while allowing them to make their own decisions.

Stephen Krashen's account of language acquisition also draws attention to the role of anxiety and the conditions under which learners receive and process language input [4]. His affective-filter hypothesis suggests that anxiety and low confidence can interfere with language acquisition. Gamification may help some learners participate more readily when mistakes are treated as a normal part of learning. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that every game reduces anxiety: public rankings, strict time limits, or repeated elimination can make speaking more stressful for certain students.

Merrill Swain's output hypothesis offers a further explanation of the value of speaking activities [5]. Producing language may help learners notice gaps in their knowledge and reconsider how they express meaning. A game that requires students to describe an unfamiliar object, clarify a misunderstanding, or reformulate an answer can therefore provide more useful practice than an activity in which they merely select the correct answer on a screen. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that gamification is most valuable when game elements support purposeful language production, learner involvement, and reflection on performance.

Speaking competence involves several related dimensions: fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary range, grammatical control, and the ability to interact appropriately with others. Gamified activities can provide practice in these areas, although the outcomes depend on the task, the learners' proficiency, and the quality of feedback. Fluency involves expressing ideas with reasonable continuity and without excessive hesitation. Repeated speaking tasks can help learners become more comfortable with familiar language. For instance, in “*One-Minute Challenge*”, students speak for one minute about topics such as their favourite

book, university life, travel, or future career plans. They receive credit for maintaining communication, developing ideas, and using linking expressions rather than simply speaking as quickly as possible. The activity can be repeated with a new partner. During the first round, a learner might say, *“I like travelling because it is interesting.”* In a later round, the same learner may expand the answer: *“I enjoy travelling because it allows me to discover different cultures, meet new people, and become more independent.”* The repeated task creates an opportunity to develop an answer while drawing on language already available to the learner.

Games can encourage learners to retrieve and use vocabulary in context. In *“Describe and Guess”*, one student describes a word without saying it, while teammates identify the answer. If the target word is *“lighthouse”*, the speaker might explain, *“It is a tall structure near the sea that helps ships find their way at night.”* The learner practises definition, paraphrasing, and the use of related vocabulary. This type of activity is especially useful because communication does not stop when a student forgets a particular word. Instead, the learner learns to express the intended meaning through alternative language. Such strategies are important in real conversations, where speakers often need to explain an idea without knowing its exact name.

Gamification can create a reason to use a particular grammatical structure repeatedly. In *“Find Someone Who”*, students move around the classroom asking questions such as *“Have you ever visited another country?”*, *“Have you ever taken part in a competition?”* and *“Have you ever spoken to a foreign visitor?”* They then report their findings to the class.

The task provides repeated practice with the present perfect and follow-up questions. Rather than completing isolated sentences, learners use the structure to obtain information from other people. Teachers can award points for accurate questions, relevant follow-up questions, and clear reporting, while allowing students to correct errors and try again.

In *“Pronunciation Detectives”*, pairs receive short sentences containing target sounds, word stress, or sentence stress. One student reads a sentence, while

the other identifies the target feature and provides feedback. For example, learners may compare the pronunciation of “*ship*” and “*sheep*”, or practise stressing different words in the sentence “I wanted the blue one.” The objective should be intelligibility rather than imitation of a single accent. Learners should be able to understand one another and make their own speech understandable. Points are therefore better awarded for successful communication and noticeable improvement than for sounding like a native speaker.

- **Conclusion.** Gamification can serve as a practical means of developing students’ English-speaking skills when it is connected to clear learning objectives and meaningful communication. Points, challenges, role-play, team missions, and constructive feedback can encourage learners to use English more frequently and practise fluency, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and interactional strategies.

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