

SSTSDS-Vol.4. N1. 092

La gamificación como enfoque pedagógico para fortalecer la motivación y el compromiso de los estudiantes en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés

Gamification as a pedagogical approach to strengthen students' motivation and engagement in english language learning

Autores:

Evelyn Carolina Macías Silva
Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo (ESPOCH)
Chimborazo – Ecuador
evelyn.macias@epoch.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7593-6952>

Marco Antonio Aquino Rojas
Competencias Lingüísticas, Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo (UNACH)
Chimborazo – Ecuador
marco.aquino@unach.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2252-8397>

Tula Anaya Bellido
Universidad Tecnológica de los Andes (UTEA)
Cusco – Perú
tanayab@utea.edu.pe
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1598-7677>

Cinthya Rosana Ortiz Barrera
Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas ESPE
Tungurahua – Ecuador
rocsanabarrera441@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5685-8853>

Wendy Ximena Ordóñez Pérez
Unidad Educativa Federico González Suárez
Chimborazo – Ecuador
bryakvaor@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3264-4955>

Autor de correspondencia: Evelyn Carolina Macias Silva, evelyn.macias@epoch.edu.ec

Enviado: 09-05-2026

Revisado: 16-05-2026

Aceptado: 24-07-2026

Publicado: 27-07-2026



Cómo citar este artículo:

Macías Silva, E. C., Aquino Rojas, M. A., Anaya Bellido, T., Ortiz Barrera, C. R., & Ordóñez Pérez, W. X. (2026). La gamificación como enfoque pedagógico para fortalecer la motivación y el compromiso de los estudiantes en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés. *Sage Sphere of Technology, Sciences, Discoveries And Society*, 4(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.63688/1bwxqs63>

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ABSTRACT

Gamification has emerged as an innovative pedagogical approach capable of transforming traditional learning environments by incorporating game elements to promote students' motivation, engagement, and active participation. This systematic literature review aimed to analyze the contribution of gamification to the English language learning process, focusing on its influence on students' motivation, engagement, and learning experiences. The study followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, and a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was applied. The literature search was conducted in recognized academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and other specialized sources. From 152 initially identified records, 19 studies met the inclusion criteria and were selected for the final analysis. The findings revealed that gamification contributes positively to English language learning by promoting interaction, motivation, engagement, and participation through game-based activities. The reviewed studies identified benefits related to student involvement, meaningful learning experiences, and language development through challenges, feedback, rewards, and collaborative activities. However, limitations were also reported, including inadequate instructional design, excessive dependence on external rewards, technological barriers, and the need for appropriate teacher guidance. It is concluded that gamification should be considered a complementary pedagogical strategy rather than a replacement for traditional teaching methods. Its effectiveness depends on the alignment between game elements, educational objectives, learner characteristics, and teacher mediation.

Keywords: gamification; English language learning; student motivation; student engagement; systematic review.

RESUMEN

La gamificación ha surgido como un enfoque pedagógico innovador capaz de transformar los ambientes tradicionales de aprendizaje mediante la incorporación de elementos propios del juego para favorecer la motivación, el compromiso y la participación activa de los estudiantes. La presente revisión sistemática tuvo como objetivo analizar la contribución de la gamificación en el proceso de aprendizaje del idioma inglés, considerando su influencia en la motivación estudiantil, el engagement y las experiencias educativas. El estudio siguió las directrices PRISMA 2020 y empleó un enfoque cualitativo de tipo descriptivo-analítico. La búsqueda bibliográfica se realizó en bases de datos académicas reconocidas, incluyendo Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect y otras fuentes especializadas. De los 152 registros identificados inicialmente, 19 estudios cumplieron con los criterios de inclusión y fueron incorporados en el análisis final. Los resultados evidenciaron que la gamificación contribuye positivamente al aprendizaje del inglés al favorecer la interacción, la motivación, el compromiso académico y la participación mediante actividades basadas en elementos del juego. Los estudios revisados identificaron beneficios relacionados con experiencias de aprendizaje significativas, desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas, retroalimentación constante y colaboración entre estudiantes. Sin embargo, también se señalaron limitaciones asociadas con un diseño pedagógico inadecuado, la dependencia excesiva de recompensas externas, dificultades tecnológicas y la necesidad de una adecuada orientación docente. Se concluye que la gamificación debe comprenderse como una estrategia complementaria que fortalece la enseñanza tradicional del inglés, cuya efectividad depende de la integración coherente entre los elementos del juego, los objetivos educativos, las características del estudiante y la mediación docente.

Palabras clave: gamificación; aprendizaje del inglés; motivación estudiantil; compromiso académico; revisión sistemática.



1. INTRODUCTION

English language learning has become a fundamental component of contemporary education due to the increasing processes of globalization, international communication, and academic and professional mobility. In current educational contexts, learning English is not only associated with the acquisition of linguistic knowledge but also with the development of communicative, intercultural, and digital competencies required for participation in a constantly changing society. Consequently, English language teaching has progressively moved beyond traditional instructional approaches toward methodologies that promote active participation, learner autonomy, interaction, and meaningful learning experiences (Richards, 2017).

Despite the importance of English proficiency, many educational contexts continue to face challenges related to students' motivation, participation, and sustained engagement during the learning process. Traditional approaches frequently centered on memorization, grammar-focused activities, and teacher-directed instruction may limit students' involvement and reduce their willingness to participate actively in language learning activities. In this regard, contemporary pedagogical approaches seek to create more dynamic learning environments where students assume an active role and develop positive attitudes toward learning a foreign language.

Among the innovative methodologies that have gained relevance in education, gamification has emerged as a promising pedagogical strategy for increasing students' motivation and engagement. Gamification refers to the incorporation of game design elements, such as points, challenges, rewards, feedback systems, levels, and competition, into non-game contexts with the purpose of influencing users' experiences and behaviors (Deterding et al., 2011). Unlike game-based learning, which involves the use of complete games for educational purposes, gamification focuses on integrating specific game mechanics into existing learning activities to enhance participation and motivation.

The theoretical foundations of gamification are closely related to motivational theories that explain how individuals engage with learning experiences. According to Self-Determination Theory, students are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation when educational environments satisfy psychological needs related to autonomy, competence, and social



interaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). From this perspective, gamified learning environments may strengthen students' motivation by providing immediate feedback, opportunities for achievement, and a sense of progression throughout the learning process.

Research on gamification has demonstrated its potential to influence students' attitudes and behaviors in educational contexts. Hamari et al. (2014) found that gamification can generate positive effects on motivation and participation; however, its effectiveness depends on the appropriate selection and implementation of game elements. Similarly, Seaborn and Fels (2015) emphasized that gamification outcomes are strongly influenced by contextual factors, instructional design, and learners' characteristics. Therefore, gamification should not be considered merely as the addition of rewards or competitive elements, but as a pedagogical approach that requires intentional alignment with learning objectives.

In the field of foreign language education, gamification has received increasing attention due to its capacity to create interactive and learner-centered environments. Learning a language requires continuous practice, exposure, and active participation; therefore, strategies that promote involvement and reduce anxiety may contribute positively to language development. Through challenges, collaborative activities, digital platforms, and immediate feedback, gamified environments can encourage students to participate more frequently and maintain greater interest in English learning activities (Kapp, 2012).

Furthermore, motivation and engagement represent essential factors in second language acquisition. Students who demonstrate higher levels of motivation tend to invest greater effort, persist in learning tasks, and participate more actively in communicative activities. Dörnyei (2020) highlights that motivation plays a central role in determining learners' commitment and long-term involvement in foreign language learning. In this context, gamification may provide meaningful experiences that connect educational activities with students' interests and promote a more positive relationship with language learning.

Empirical studies have also reported positive associations between gamification and educational outcomes. Domínguez et al. (2013) demonstrated that gamified learning experiences can increase student participation and create more engaging educational environments. Likewise, Sailer et al. (2017) found that specific game design elements, such as feedback, goals, and challenges, can influence psychological need satisfaction



and enhance motivation. These findings suggest that gamification may represent an effective strategy for addressing motivational challenges commonly observed in language classrooms. However, despite the growing interest in gamification, its implementation in English language learning requires critical analysis. Some studies indicate that poorly designed gamified activities may generate excessive competition, superficial participation, or dependence on external rewards rather than genuine interest in learning. Zainuddin et al. (2020) highlight that the educational impact of gamification depends on the pedagogical design, technological context, and integration of activities with learning objectives. Therefore, understanding the conditions under which gamification contributes effectively to motivation and engagement remains necessary.

Considering the increasing adoption of innovative educational methodologies, examining gamification as a pedagogical approach in English language learning is relevant for identifying its contributions and limitations. Although previous studies have explored the relationship between gamification and educational outcomes, there is a need to synthesize existing evidence regarding how gamified strategies influence students' motivation and engagement specifically within English language learning contexts.

Therefore, this systematic review aims to analyze the role of gamification as a pedagogical approach to enhance students' motivation and engagement in the English language learning process. By examining empirical evidence from previous studies, this research seeks to identify the main gamification elements used in language education, their effects on student participation and motivation, and the factors that influence their successful implementation in educational settings.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gamification as a pedagogical strategy in contemporary education

The continuous transformation of educational environments has increased the need for pedagogical approaches capable of promoting students' motivation, participation, and active involvement in learning processes. In this context, gamification has emerged as an innovative instructional strategy that integrates game-based mechanisms into educational activities to create meaningful and interactive learning experiences. Recent research emphasizes that gamification should not be understood as the simple inclusion of rewards or competitive



elements, but rather as a structured pedagogical approach in which game mechanics are intentionally aligned with learning objectives (Toda et al., 2021).

According to Toda et al. (2021), effective gamification requires careful selection of game elements according to the educational context, since inappropriate implementation may reduce its effectiveness or generate superficial participation. The authors propose that gamification should consider different dimensions, including motivation, social interaction, performance, and cognitive engagement. Therefore, in English language learning environments, gamification can provide opportunities for students to participate actively through challenges, feedback systems, collaborative tasks, and progressive learning experiences.

Similarly, Manzano-León et al. (2021) highlight that gamification has become increasingly relevant due to its capacity to transform traditional educational practices into more engaging environments. Their systematic review indicates that gamified approaches can positively influence students' motivation and participation when activities are designed according to pedagogical principles rather than merely incorporating game elements without educational purpose.

Gamification, motivation, and student engagement

Motivation represents one of the most influential factors in successful learning, particularly in foreign language education, where continuous practice and sustained effort are necessary. Recent studies indicate that gamification can enhance motivation by creating learning experiences characterized by challenge, achievement, feedback, and active participation. Sailer and Homner (2021) demonstrated through a meta-analysis that gamification produces positive effects on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral learning outcomes.

From this perspective, gamified environments may contribute to students' engagement by increasing their willingness to participate and persist in learning activities. Alomari et al. (2021) explain that gamification techniques such as points, badges, leaderboards, and interactive challenges can strengthen students' involvement by providing immediate feedback and creating a sense of progression. However, the authors emphasize that the effectiveness of these elements depends on their relationship with instructional goals and learners' characteristics.



Furthermore, student engagement involves multiple dimensions, including behavioral participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment. In English language learning, engagement is particularly important because language development requires active communication, interaction, and continuous exposure. Therefore, gamification may support engagement by reducing passive learning behaviors and encouraging students to become active participants in their own learning process.

Gamification and English language learning

The acquisition of a foreign language requires meaningful opportunities for communication, interaction, and practical use of linguistic knowledge. Recent research has explored gamification as a strategy to promote these conditions by creating environments where learners practice language skills through interactive and motivating activities.

Li et al. (2023) found that gamified learning environments can increase students' motivation and participation in English language learning by combining technological resources with learner-centered methodologies. The study highlights that gamification can encourage students to engage more frequently with language activities, particularly when tasks involve collaboration, problem-solving, and authentic communication.

Similarly, Sadeghi et al. (2022) demonstrated that digital game-based learning approaches can contribute to vocabulary development and learner motivation in English as a foreign language context. Their findings suggest that interactive and game-supported activities may facilitate vocabulary acquisition by providing repeated exposure, contextualized practice, and immediate responses to learners' performance.

These findings support the idea that gamification can function as a complementary pedagogical approach in English language education, as it creates opportunities for students to practice language skills in environments that are more dynamic and aligned with contemporary learning preferences.

Digital learning environments and instructional design

The effectiveness of gamified learning depends strongly on the design of the educational environment. Modern digital learning approaches require the integration of technological resources with appropriate pedagogical strategies. According to Li et al. (2023), successful gamified environments should consider instructional objectives, accessibility, learner



characteristics, and meaningful interaction rather than focusing exclusively on entertainment aspects.

In addition, Mayer's principles of multimedia learning suggest that students learn more effectively when instructional materials combine different forms of representation, such as text, images, audio, and interactive elements. Although multimedia design alone does not guarantee learning success, appropriately structured digital environments can facilitate comprehension and engagement.

Therefore, gamification in English language learning should be viewed as a multidimensional approach that integrates motivation, technology, interaction, and instructional design. Its effectiveness depends on the capacity of educators to select appropriate game elements and connect them with specific language learning objectives.

Challenges and considerations in gamified learning

Although current research demonstrates positive effects of gamification, scholars also recognize several challenges related to its implementation. Excessive dependence on external rewards, competition, or superficial game mechanics may limit long-term motivation and reduce students' focus on meaningful learning. Alonso-Fernández et al. (2022) emphasize that gamification requires careful planning and evaluation to ensure that game elements contribute to educational outcomes.

Consequently, gamification should not replace traditional pedagogical practices but rather complement them by creating additional opportunities for interaction, motivation, and engagement. In English language learning contexts, its successful application requires alignment between game mechanics, linguistic objectives, student needs, and teacher guidance.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study was conducted through a systematic literature review aimed at analyzing the available scientific evidence regarding the role of gamification as a pedagogical approach to enhance students' motivation and engagement in the English language learning process. This methodology allowed the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of scientific studies



related to gamified learning environments, educational game elements, student motivation, engagement, active participation, and foreign language learning outcomes.

A qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was adopted to examine the findings reported in previous studies and identify relevant trends, theoretical contributions, methodological approaches, and research gaps regarding the implementation of gamification in educational contexts, particularly in English language learning. This approach facilitates the interpretation of existing evidence by synthesizing findings from different studies and analyzing how gamification strategies influence students’ motivational and engagement processes (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019; Page et al., 2021).

Information Sources and Search Strategy

The bibliographic search was conducted using internationally recognized academic databases related to education, applied linguistics, educational technology, and learning sciences. The databases consulted included Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, SAGE Journals, ERIC, SciELO, Redalyc, and Google Scholar.

These databases were selected because they provide access to peer-reviewed scientific studies focused on gamification, educational innovation, English language teaching, motivation, student engagement, technology-enhanced learning, and instructional strategies. The search process was conducted between March 10 and March 20, 2026. During this period, search equations were applied according to the requirements of each database, retrieved records were organized, and duplicate studies were removed. Subsequently, a verification process of references, metadata, and DOI information was conducted to ensure the traceability and reliability of the systematic review.

Table 1
Records Identified by Database

Database	Records identified
Scopus	22
Web of Science	18
ScienceDirect	20
Taylor & Francis Online	16
SpringerLink	15
SAGE Journals	12



Database	Records identified
ERIC	14
SciELO	8
Redalyc	7
Google Scholar	20
Total	152

Note. A total of 152 records were identified from the selected databases. After removing 42 duplicate records, 110 studies remained for the screening phase. Titles and abstracts were reviewed, excluding 70 studies that did not meet the research objectives. Subsequently, 40 articles were assessed through full-text evaluation, and 19 studies met all eligibility criteria and were included in the final systematic review.

Search Strategy

The search strategy was developed using keywords in English combined with Boolean operators AND and OR. The main keywords were selected according to the research objective and included:

“gamification”

“gamified learning”

“English language learning”

“English as a foreign language”

“foreign language learning”

“students’ motivation”

“student engagement”

“learning motivation”

“game elements”

“educational technology”

“language learning outcomes”

The search equations were adapted according to each database

Search Equations

Scopus and Web of Science

("gamification" OR "gamified learning" OR "game-based learning")

AND



("English language learning" OR "English as a foreign language" OR "foreign language learning")

AND

("motivation" OR "student engagement" OR "learning outcomes")

ScienceDirect and SpringerLink

("gamification" AND "language learning")

AND

("student motivation" OR "student engagement")

AND

("educational technology" OR "digital learning")

Taylor & Francis and SAGE Journals

("gamification" AND "English learning")

AND

("motivation" OR "engagement" OR "participation")

ERIC, SciELO and Redalyc

"gamification"

AND

"English language teaching"

AND

"student motivation"

Google Scholar

"gamification"

"English language learning"

"student engagement"

Additional searches were conducted using:

“gamified activities AND English teaching”

“game elements AND language acquisition”

“digital gamification AND student motivation”

“gamification AND foreign language education”

Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria considered:



Scientific articles published in indexed journals.

Peer-reviewed studies.

Research focused on gamification in educational contexts.

Studies related to English language learning or foreign language education.

Research analyzing motivation, engagement, participation, or learning outcomes.

Publications written in English or Spanish.

Studies published between 2011 and 2026.

Articles with DOI or reliable bibliographic information.

The inclusion criteria considered empirical studies directly related to gamification in English language learning. Conceptual studies, theoretical contributions, books, and meta-analyses were used only as complementary sources for the theoretical framework and were not considered part of the empirical corpus analyzed in this review. Studies were included when they presented clearly defined objectives, an identifiable methodological approach, and relevant contributions to understanding the effects of gamification on motivation, engagement, participation, or learning outcomes.

The exclusion criteria included:

Duplicate documents.

Opinion papers without scientific methodology.

Studies unrelated to education or language learning.

Research focused exclusively on non-educational applications of gamification.

Publications without accessible full text.

Studies without reliable bibliographic information.

Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed the guidelines established by the PRISMA 2020 statement proposed by Page et al. (2021). This framework provides a transparent and systematic procedure for identifying, screening, evaluating eligibility, and selecting studies included in systematic reviews.

The selection process consisted of four stages:

1. Identification

A total of 152 records were identified from the selected academic databases.

2. Screening



After removing 42 duplicate records, 110 studies were screened according to titles and abstracts.

During this stage, 70 studies were excluded because they did not directly address gamification, English language learning, motivation, or student engagement.

3. Eligibility

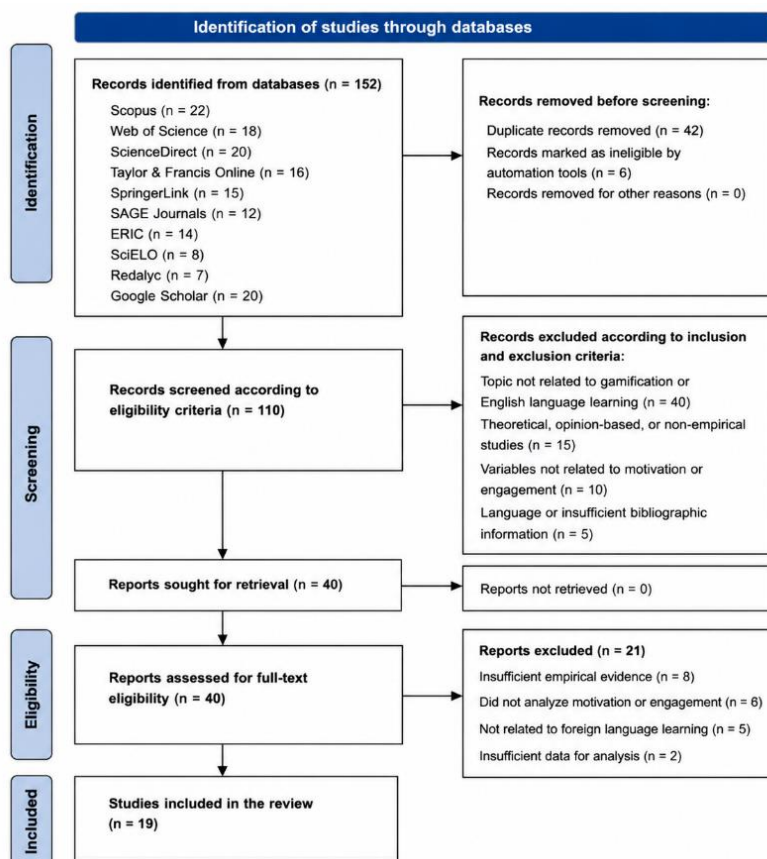
A total of 40 articles were evaluated through full-text analysis.

Twenty-one studies were excluded because they did not provide relevant evidence related to gamification and English language learning, lacked methodological clarity, focused on unrelated educational contexts, or did not contribute directly to the research objectives

Finally, 19 scientific studies met all inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the systematic review.

Figure 1

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram



Note. The flow diagram was developed according to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines proposed by Page et al. (2021). The systematic search process identified 152 records related to gamification, educational technology, motivation, student engagement, and English language learning. After duplicate removal and application of eligibility criteria, 19 scientific studies were selected for the final systematic review.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the 19 studies selected through the systematic literature review allowed the identification of the main trends, contributions, and challenges associated with the implementation of gamification as a pedagogical approach to enhance students' motivation and engagement in the English language learning process.

The included studies were organized into five thematic categories: conceptual foundations of gamification in education, gamification and student motivation, gamification and student engagement, gamification applied to English language learning, and challenges and limitations associated with gamified educational environments.

This classification made it possible to understand gamification from technological, pedagogical, and motivational perspectives, identifying its contribution to active participation, learner autonomy, feedback processes, vocabulary acquisition, communicative practice, and sustained engagement. Likewise, the analysis considered limitations reported in the literature, including excessive dependence on rewards, inadequate instructional design, superficial participation, and the need for appropriate teacher guidance during the implementation of gamified activities.

To facilitate the presentation and interpretation of the findings, Table 2 presents the methodological quality assessment of the included studies, while Table 3 summarizes the general characteristics and thematic classification of the studies that formed the final corpus of análisis. The included studies were organized into five thematic categories: conceptual foundations of gamification in education, gamification and student motivation, gamification and student engagement, gamification applied to English language learning, and challenges and limitations associated with gamified educational environments. Table 2 presents the methodological quality assessment of the included studies, while Table 3 summarizes the



general characteristics and thematic classification of the 19 studies that formed the final evidence corpus.

Results of the Methodological Quality Assessment

The methodological quality assessment of the 19 selected studies showed that 16 studies were classified as high quality and 3 as moderate quality. No studies were identified as having low methodological quality. No studies were identified as having low methodological quality.

The studies classified as high quality presented clearly defined research objectives, appropriate theoretical foundations, transparent methodological procedures, and consistent relationships between research questions, methods, and findings. These studies provided stronger evidence regarding the influence of gamification on students' motivation, engagement, learning outcomes, and educational participation.

The studies classified as moderate quality mainly presented limitations related to reduced empirical samples, conceptual approaches, or insufficient description of methodological procedures. However, these studies were considered relevant because they contributed theoretical perspectives and complementary evidence regarding gamified learning environments and motivational processes.

The methodological quality assessment was not considered an exclusion criterion; instead, it was used to determine the degree of confidence assigned to each study during the synthesis process. Studies with higher methodological quality received greater consideration when identifying trends and establishing conclusions.

Table 2

Methodological quality assessment of the included studies

No.	Author and year	Type of document	Score Percentage	Quality level
1	Deterding et al. (2011)	Conceptual study	15/16 93.75%	High
2	Domínguez et al. (2013)	Research article	15/16 93.75%	High
3	Hamari et al. (2014)	Literature review	14/16 87.50%	High
4	Seaborn and Fels (2015)	Review article	14/16 87.50%	High
5	Sailer et al. (2017)	Experimental study	16/16 100.00%	High



No.	Author and year	Type of document	Score	Percentage	Quality level
6	Koivisto and Hamari (2019)	Review article	13/16	81.25%	High
7	Reinhardt (2019)	Academic book	13/16	81.25%	High
8	Bai et al. (2020)	Meta-analysis	16/16	100.00%	High
9	Zainuddin et al. (2020)	Systematic review	15/16	93.75%	High
10	Ryan and Deci (2020)	Theoretical review	15/16	93.75%	High
11	Alomari et al. (2021)	Review article	14/16	87.50%	High
12	Manzano-León et al. (2021)	Systematic review	15/16	93.75%	High
13	Sailer and Homner (2021)	Meta-analysis	16/16	100.00%	High
14	Toda et al. (2021)	Research article	13/16	81.25%	High
15	Alonso-Fernández et al. (2022)	Systematic mapping study	12/16	75.00%	Moderate
16	Sadeghi et al. (2022)	Research article	13/16	81.25%	High
17	Hung (2022)	Research article	12/16	75.00%	Moderate
18	Dörnyei (2020)	Theoretical study	13/16	81.25%	High
19	Li et al. (2023)	Research analysis	12/16	75.00%	Moderate

Note. The methodological assessment considered eight criteria evaluated from 0 to 2 points, with a maximum possible score of 16 points. The methodological quality assessment was conducted using eight evaluation criteria: (1) clarity of the study objective, (2) adequacy of the methodological design, (3) description and characterization of the sample, (4) definition of analyzed variables, (5) appropriateness of the analytical procedures, (6) clarity of results presentation, (7) consistency between findings and conclusions, and (8) identification of study limitations. Each criterion was scored from 0 to 2 points, with a maximum possible score of 16 points per study..

Studies were classified as high quality when achieving $\geq 80\%$, moderate quality between 60% and 79%, and low quality below 60%.

Table 3



General Matrix of the Sources Included in the Systematic Review

No.	Author and year	Type of source	Main focus	Thematic category
1	Deterding et al. (2011)	Conceptual study	Definition and theoretical foundations of gamification and game elements	Conceptual foundations of gamification
2	Domínguez et al. (2013)	Research article	Effects of gamified learning experiences on student participation	Gamification and engagement
3	Hamari et al. (2014)	Literature review	Empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of gamification	Gamification effectiveness
4	Seaborn and Fels (2015)	Review article	Theoretical perspectives and applications of gamification	Conceptual foundations
5	Sailer et al. (2017)	Experimental study	Influence of game elements on psychological motivation	Motivation and autonomy
6	Koivisto and Hamari (2019)	Review article	Evolution of motivational information systems and gamification research	Motivation and engagement
7	Reinhardt (2019)	Academic book	Application of gamification in second and foreign language learning	English language learning
8	Bai et al. (2020)	Meta-analysis	Effect of gamification on student learning outcomes	Learning outcomes
9	Zainuddin et al. (2020)	Systematic review	Impact of gamification on learning and instruction	Educational gamification
10	Ryan and Deci (2020)	Theoretical review	Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation processes	Motivation



No.	Author and year	Type of source	Main focus	Thematic category
11	Alomari et al. (2021)	Review article	Gamification techniques promoting student learning	Engagement and participation
12	Manzano-León et al. (2021)	Systematic review	Trends and applications of gamification in education	Educational innovation
13	Sailer and Homner (2021)	Meta-analysis	Effects of gamification on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral outcomes	Motivation and engagement
14	Toda et al. (2021)	Research article	Classification of game elements for educational contexts	Gamification design
15	Alonso-Fernández et al. (2022)	Systematic mapping study	Applications of gamification in educational environments	Implementation challenges
16	Sadeghi et al. (2022)	Research article	Digital game-based learning and English vocabulary acquisition	English language learning
17	Hung (2022)	Research article	Gamification strategies in English language learning	Language learning motivation
18	Dörnyei (2020)	Theoretical study	Motivation processes in second language learning	Language motivation
19	Li et al. (2023)	Research analysis	Design and implementation of gamified learning environments	Educational technology

Note. The table presents the 19 studies included in the final evidence corpus. The sources were organized according to their methodological contribution and their relevance to understanding gamification as a pedagogical approach for improving motivation and engagement in English language learning.



5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review indicate that gamification represents a relevant pedagogical approach capable of enhancing students' motivation and engagement in the English language learning process. The reviewed studies demonstrate that the integration of game elements, such as challenges, feedback systems, points, rewards, levels, and collaborative activities, can transform traditional learning environments into more interactive and learner-centred experiences. However, the effectiveness of gamification depends on its appropriate pedagogical design and its alignment with specific learning objectives.

Regarding the theoretical foundations of gamification, the reviewed evidence confirms that the educational value of gamification goes beyond the simple incorporation of game mechanics. Deterding et al. (2011) established that gamification involves the use of game design elements in non-game contexts, while Seaborn and Fels (2015) emphasized that its effectiveness depends on the relationship between motivational mechanisms and the characteristics of the learning environment. Therefore, gamification should be understood as a structured pedagogical strategy rather than merely an entertainment resource.

The analysis also revealed that motivation is one of the main contributions associated with gamified learning environments. Studies by Sailer et al. (2017), Ryan and Deci (2020), and Sailer and Homner (2021) indicate that gamification can strengthen psychological factors related to autonomy, competence, and participation. Elements such as immediate feedback, progressive challenges, and achievement systems may encourage students to maintain effort and develop positive attitudes toward learning activities. In English language education, this motivational effect is particularly relevant because language acquisition requires continuous practice, persistence, and active involvement.

Regarding student engagement, the reviewed studies suggest that gamification promotes greater behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation. Domínguez et al. (2013) and Alomari et al. (2021) reported that gamified activities increase interaction and student involvement by providing opportunities for active participation and feedback. Similarly, Zainuddin et al. (2020) highlighted that gamification can improve engagement when game elements are carefully integrated with instructional objectives rather than applied superficially.



The evidence also demonstrates the potential of gamification in English language learning contexts. Studies by Reinhardt (2019), Sadeghi et al. (2022), and Li et al. (2022) indicate that gamified environments can support vocabulary development, communication practice, and learner motivation in foreign language education. Through interactive tasks, challenges, and digital activities, students may experience greater opportunities to use English in meaningful contexts, reducing passive learning behaviors and encouraging active language practice.

Furthermore, recent studies emphasize the importance of appropriate instructional design in determining the success of gamified learning environments. Toda et al. (2021) and Li et al. (2023) argue that the selection of game elements must respond to educational purposes and learner characteristics. Excessive dependence on external rewards, competition, or poorly designed activities may reduce intrinsic motivation and limit meaningful learning. Therefore, teachers play a fundamental role in planning, implementing, and monitoring gamified experiences.

Despite the positive contributions identified, the reviewed literature also reports several challenges. Alonso-Fernández et al. (2022) and Manzano-León et al. (2021) highlight that gamification implementation may face difficulties related to technological limitations, inadequate teacher preparation, unequal access to digital resources, and the risk of focusing excessively on rewards rather than learning processes. Consequently, gamification should be considered a complementary pedagogical approach that requires balance between technological innovation, instructional planning, and teacher mediation.

Overall, the findings indicate that gamification can contribute significantly to English language learning by strengthening motivation, engagement, and active participation. Nevertheless, its educational impact depends not only on the presence of game elements but also on the quality of pedagogical decisions that guide their implementation.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This systematic review demonstrated that gamification represents a valuable pedagogical approach for enhancing students' motivation and engagement in the English language learning process. The evidence analyzed from 19 selected studies indicates that gamified learning environments can promote active participation, autonomy, interaction, and positive attitudes toward language learning.



The reviewed studies show that game elements such as challenges, feedback, rewards, progression systems, and collaborative activities may contribute to increased motivation and engagement by creating more dynamic and interactive educational experiences. Furthermore, gamification has demonstrated potential benefits for English language learning, particularly in areas related to vocabulary acquisition, communication practice, and student participation. However, the effectiveness of gamification does not depend exclusively on the use of game mechanics but on their appropriate pedagogical integration. The reviewed evidence highlights that teachers must carefully design activities according to learning objectives, student characteristics, and educational contexts. Challenges associated with excessive competition, dependence on external rewards, technological limitations, and inadequate implementation must be considered to ensure meaningful learning experiences.

In conclusion, gamification should not replace traditional English teaching approaches but should function as a complementary strategy that enriches learning environments through motivation, interaction, and active participation. Its success depends on the balance between educational objectives, game design principles, technological resources, and effective teacher guidance.

Future research should continue exploring the long-term effects of gamification in English language education, particularly through empirical studies that analyze different learner populations, educational contexts, and specific game elements associated with successful learning outcomes.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

FUNDING

Not applicable.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Evelyn Carolina Macías Silva, Marco Antonio Aquino Rojas, Tula Anaya Bellido, Cinthya Rosana Ortiz Barrera, Wendy Ximena Ordóñez Pérez.

Methodology: Evelyn Carolina Macías Silva, Marco Antonio Aquino Rojas, Tula Anaya Bellido, Cinthya Rosana Ortiz Barrera, Wendy Ximena Ordóñez Pérez.

Investigation: Evelyn Carolina Macías Silva, Marco Antonio Aquino Rojas, Tula Anaya Bellido, Cinthya Rosana Ortiz Barrera, Wendy Ximena Ordóñez Pérez.



Data curation: Evelyn Carolina Macías Silva, Marco Antonio Aquino Rojas, Tula Anaya Bellido, Cinthya Rosana Ortiz Barrera, Wendy Ximena Ordóñez Pérez.

Formal analysis: Evelyn Carolina Macías Silva, Marco Antonio Aquino Rojas, Tula Anaya Bellido, Cinthya Rosana Ortiz Barrera, Wendy Ximena Ordóñez Pérez.

Validation: Evelyn Carolina Macías Silva, Marco Antonio Aquino Rojas, Tula Anaya Bellido, Cinthya Rosana Ortiz Barrera, Wendy Ximena Ordóñez Pérez.

Writing – original draft: Evelyn Carolina Macías Silva, Marco Antonio Aquino Rojas, Tula Anaya Bellido, Cinthya Rosana Ortiz Barrera, Wendy Ximena Ordóñez Pérez.

Writing – review and editing: Evelyn Carolina Macías Silva, Marco Antonio Aquino Rojas, Tula Anaya Bellido, Cinthya Rosana Ortiz Barrera, Wendy Ximena Ordóñez Pérez.

