



BOOSTING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION: FROM TEACHER-CENTERED PRACTICES TO GAMIFIED APPROACHES

Akhmadjonova Diyora Dilmurod qizi

mahmudovadiyora0034@gmail.com

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Annotation: the 21st century needs new pedagogical models to sustain learner interest in English Language Education. Traditional teacher-oriented models, while past successes in control and content delivery, are likely to limit active learner involvement and motivation. This study examines the paradigm shift from traditional teacher-centered models to gamified models, of particular interest regarding the role of game-based principles, competition, collaboration, reward systems, and immersive challenges, in enhancing engagement, motivation, and learning achievement. The study deals with gamification and engagement theories, criticizes instructor-led instruction, and recommends evidence-based solutions for transforming conventional practice into gamified practice.

Keywords: classroom activities, learner engagement, gamification, English language teaching, motivation, pedagogy

Learner engagement is currently one of the gravest issues in English language teaching around the globe. Engagement is not only learners' behavioral participation in classroom activities but also their emotional engagement and intellectual investment in learning. Historically, nevertheless, in the vast majority of educational environments, pedagogy remains dominated by teacher-centered, lecture and exam-driven, hierarchical methods. Structured and explicit as they may be, such practices inevitably result in passive learners memorizing, rather than internalizing, language. [1:70] Pedagogical discussion during the last several years has aimed at drifting toward active learning and learner-centered teaching. One of the most colorful inventions in this category is gamification – adding game elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, stories, and missions to non-game contexts. Gamification is more about playing at games than applying game design to generate motivation, participation, and achievement. [2:12] Participation is complex, usually divided into three domains:

1. Behavioral participation – activity, effort, perseverance in learning activities.
2. Emotional engagement – interest, enthusiasm, sense of belonging.





3. Cognitive engagement – investment in learning, self-regulation, and deep processing.

Students are most motivated when their relatedness, competence, and autonomy needs are met, theory indicates. Pedagogies that enable these needs are likely to yield greater motivation and better learning. [3:297] Gamification in education draws on game design concepts such as:

- clear objectives and rules (learners know what to do and how to achieve);
- feedback loops (points, levels, badges, and immediate response to actions);
- progression systems (scaffolding challenges that build in complexity);
- competition and collaboration (leaderboards, team challenges);
- story and narrative (framing learning as a mission or quest).

Gamification can have some meeting ground with communicative methodology in language teaching by offering authentic contexts for practice, diminishing affective barriers, and fostering active participation. [4:15] Teacher-centered instruction has traditionally dominated English language classrooms in a number of states, including post-Soviet and Asian ones. The main characteristics are:

- delivery of grammar and vocabulary through lectures;
- minimal interaction with teacher-favored talk time;
- focus on accuracy with error correction at the expense of fluency;
- summative assessment direction through tests and exams;
- passive student roles – students as knowledge recipients.

Though this model offers content coverage and classroom management, it typically limits communicative practice opportunities, reduces learner autonomy, and reduces motivation. Research discovers repeatedly that students in teacher-centered classrooms tend to perceive English as a difficult, useless subject and therefore become disenchanting and retain little. Gamification is designed specifically to address limitations of teacher-centered approaches by:

- transforming passive reception into active engagement. students become game players who interact, cooperate, and compete;
- fostering emotional connection. reward, story, and challenge elicit anticipation and curiosity;





- supporting intrinsic motivation. game design accommodates autonomy (task selection), competence (badges for achievement), and relatedness (groupwork quests) requirements;
- providing constant feedback. gamification settings and classroom designs give instant performance feedback instead of week-old examination scores;
- encouraging risk-taking. students perceive mistakes as game errors rather than offenses to be penalized, lowering fear.

Therefore, gamification transforms the learning process to make it more interactive, engaging, and learner-centered. Some teacher-centered practices can be turned into gamification:

Teacher-centered practice	Issue/problem	Gamified alternative	Engagement benefit
Lectures	Students remain passive, memorize little, and get distracted.	Interactive quests: segment lectures into missions where students earn “knowledge points” for solving puzzles or sharing insights. Teacher acts as a “game master.”	Increases active participation, curiosity, and focus.
Rote grammar drills	Repetition leads to boredom and demotivation.	Level-based progression: grammar tasks unlock new “levels,” with badges for mastery.	Creates a sense of achievement, progress, and motivation.
Teacher-dominated talk	Students lack speaking opportunities; teacher monopolizes time.	Role-play games: communicative scenarios (e.g., marketplace, tourism). Points for fluency, creativity, collaboration. Leaderboards highlight achievements.	Builds fluency, confidence, teamwork, and authentic communication.
Summative tests	High-stakes nature causes stress and disengagement.	Cumulative points & badges: multiple low-stakes mini-tests, with achievements collected	Reduces anxiety, sustains motivation, tracks consistent growth.





Teacher-centered practice	Issue/problem	Gamified alternative	Engagement benefit
		over time.	
Solo work	Independent work can isolate students and reduce collaboration.	Group challenges: team competitions (treasure hunts, vocabulary battles).	Encourages cooperation, peer support, shared responsibility.

Though gamification promises, adoption is far from easy, gamification challenges:

- teacher readiness: not many teachers have gamification design training and fear loss of control;
- resource constraints: inadequate digital infrastructure can slow technology-facilitated gamification;
- too much emphasis on extrinsic rewards. gamification risks focusing solely on points and badges with minimal attention to more substantial learning if poorly implemented;
- curriculum alignment: standardized testing still directs much classroom practice, limiting teachers' freedom to innovate;
- student housing: some students initially grumble about gamified strategies, perceiving them as less academic or serious.

Recommendations for teachers:

- start with small-scale gamification (quizzes, badges) before scaling up to course design;
- leverage extrinsic motivators (points, badges) in conjunction with intrinsic motivators (choice, creativity, collaboration);
- incorporate gamified activities within learning outcomes instead of as add-ons.

The transition from conventional teacher-centered practices to gamified methodologies is a substantial paradigm shift in English language instruction. Teacher-centered models, while structured and predictable, all too often discourage participation and limit the potential for communicative competence. [5:196] Gamification, grounded in sound pedagogy, offers a strong alternative – active participation, emotional connection, and sustained motivation. By using game principles such as progression, feedback, collaboration, and storytelling, teachers can create classrooms where students are not merely passive





recipients but active participants in the learning experience. While issues of training, infrastructure, and assessment still exist, the benefits of gamification in enhancing participation are obvious. English teaching in the 21st century must embrace such innovations to prepare students for tests, but more importantly, for communication in a global world.

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