

ENHANCING EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH GAMIFICATION IN
A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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ANNOTATION

This article analyzes the use of gamification elements in a blended learning environment to develop the speaking skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The blended learning model, which combines traditional classroom instruction with digital platforms, increases flexibility in language learning, while gamification enhances learner motivation and engagement. The article discusses various game elements (points, levels, badges, leaderboards) and methods for their application in EFL speaking practice. Furthermore, the effectiveness, advantages, and potential challenges of this approach are examined.

Keywords: gamification, blended learning, EFL, speaking skills, motivation, digital platforms, interactive learning.

EFL O'RGANUVCHILARINING NUTQ KO'NIKMALARINI ARALASH O'QUV
MUHITIDA O'YINLASHTIRISH ORQALI OSHIRISH

ANNOTATSIYA

Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganuvchilarning (EFL) nutqiy ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishda o'yinlashtirish (gamification) elementlarining aralash ta'lim (blended learning) muhitida qo'llanilishi tahlil qilinadi. An'anaviy sinf mashg'ulotlari va raqamli platformalarni birlashtirgan aralash ta'lim modeli til o'rganishda moslashuvchanlikni oshirsa, o'yinlashtirish esa o'quvchilarning motivatsiyasi va ishtirokini kuchaytiradi. Maqolada turli xil o'yin elementlari (ballar, darajalar, nishonlar, liderbordlar) va ulardan EFL nutqiy amaliyotida foydalanish usullari yoritilgan. Shuningdek, ushbu yondashuvning samaradorligi, afzalliklari va mumkin bo'lgan to'siqlari muhokama qilinadi.

Kalit so'zlar: o'yinlashtirish, aralash ta'lim, EFL, nutqiy ko'nikmalar, motivatsiya, raqamli platformalar, interaktiv ta'lim.

ПОВЫШЕНИЕ РАЗГОВОРНЫХ НАВЫКОВ, ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ АНГЛИЙСКИЙ
ЯЗЫК ЧЕРЕЗ ГЕЙМИФИКАЦИЮ В СМЕШАННОЙ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЙ
СРЕДЕ

АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье анализируется использование элементов геймификации в среде смешанного обучения для развития разговорных навыков, изучающих английский язык как иностранный (EFL). Модель смешанного обучения, сочетающая традиционные аудиторные занятия с цифровыми платформами, повышает гибкость в изучении языка, в то время как геймификация усиливает мотивацию и вовлеченность учащихся. В статье рассматриваются различные игровые элементы (очки, уровни, значки, таблицы лидеров) и методы их применения в разговорной практике EFL. Также обсуждаются эффективность, преимущества и возможные препятствия данного подхода.

Ключевые слова: геймификация, смешанное обучение, EFL, разговорные навыки, мотивация, цифровые платформы, интерактивное обучение.

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization, proficiency in English has become not only a factor of personal development but also a crucial element of professional success. In particular,



developing speaking skills is one of the most difficult and pressing issues for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Many students achieve good results in grammar and vocabulary, yet they struggle with real-time oral communication. The main reasons for this include the lack of a language-rich environment, insufficient speaking practice, fear of participating in class, or low motivation. In recent years, the development of educational technologies has offered new approaches to solving these problems. One such approach is the blended learning model, which combines traditional classroom instruction with online learning.

This model allows learners to study the language at their own pace and in a comfortable environment. Another effective method is gamification. Gamification increases learners' interest and engagement by introducing game elements (points, levels, badges, leaderboards, challenges) into the learning process. The purpose of this article is to analyze the theoretical foundations and practical methods of developing EFL learners' speaking skills through gamification in a blended learning environment. The article also discusses the advantages, challenges, and recommendations for future research regarding this approach. The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed many aspects of modern life, and education is no exception. Among the various innovative approaches that have emerged, blended learning has gained considerable attention, particularly in the field of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Blended learning, which integrates traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning technologies, offers a flexible and effective framework for language acquisition. This essay explores the concept of blended learning in depth and discusses its significant advantages for EFL learners, including flexibility, personalisation, additional practice opportunities, and the rich use of multimedia resources [5, 3].

Blended learning is not merely adding digital elements to a conventional course; it represents a fundamental rethinking of the teaching and learning process. At its core, blended learning combines the best of both worlds: the direct social interaction and immediate feedback of face-to-face lessons with the self-paced, resource-rich environment of online platforms. In an EFL context, this means that learners attend regular classroom sessions where they engage in speaking activities, group discussions, and receive guidance from their teacher. Outside the classroom, they continue their studies through learning management systems (e.g., Moodle, Google Classroom), mobile applications (e.g., Duolingo, Quizlet), or interactive websites. The two components are carefully balanced and designed to complement each other, rather than existing as separate or parallel tracks. One of the most celebrated advantages of blended learning for EFL students is flexibility. Unlike traditional courses that confine learning to fixed hours and a specific physical location, blended learning allows learners to access materials and complete tasks at times that suit their individual schedules. For many EFL learners – especially working adults, university students with heavy timetables, or those living in remote areas – this flexibility is crucial. A learner can review a recorded grammar explanation late at night, practise vocabulary on a smartphone during a commute, or participate in an asynchronous discussion forum on the weekend. This anytime, anywhere access not only increases the total amount of time devoted to English but also enables learners to engage with the language when they are most alert and motivated. Moreover, flexibility reduces the stress caused by missing a class; students can catch up online, ensuring continuity in their learning journey [6, 30].

Every EFL learner has a unique profile: different strengths and weaknesses, different learning styles, and different paces of progress. In a traditional classroom, a single teacher with thirty students often struggles to address each learner's specific needs. Blended learning overcomes this limitation through digital tools that offer built-in personalisation. For example, adaptive learning platforms can assess a student's performance on a reading or listening task and then automatically suggest more challenging or remedial exercises. A learner who struggles with



pronunciation can be assigned additional audio-based drills, while another who needs to expand vocabulary can receive a customised set of flashcards. Furthermore, online components allow students to choose topics that interest them – watching a TED talk on technology, reading an article about sports, or listening to a podcast about culture – thereby increasing intrinsic motivation. Personalisation also empowers learners to take ownership of their studies, as they can track their own progress and decide which areas to prioritise.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for EFL learners is the lack of sufficient speaking practice. Classroom time is limited, and many students feel anxious about speaking in front of peers. Blended learning addresses this issue by creating additional, low-pressure opportunities for oral practice. Through online platforms, learners can record themselves speaking, submit audio or video responses to prompts, and receive feedback from the teacher or even from automated speech recognition tools. For instance, a teacher might ask students to use Flipgrid to record a one-minute monologue about their daily routine. Students can listen to their own recordings, notice their errors, and re-record until they are satisfied. This asynchronous practice reduces the fear of real-time mistakes and builds confidence. Moreover, learners can engage in voice-based discussions with classmates in private groups on WhatsApp or Telegram, simulating natural conversation without the pressure of being observed by the whole class. Thus, blended learning effectively multiplies the amount of speaking practice available, which is essential for developing fluency and automaticity.

Another significant advantage of blended learning in EFL is access to a vast array of multimedia resources that bring authentic language into the classroom and beyond. Traditional textbooks often present scripted dialogues that sound artificial. In contrast, online platforms offer authentic audio clips, video clips, interactive simulations, and virtual reality experiences that expose learners to how English is actually spoken in different contexts. A student can watch a YouTube video of a travel vlogger, listen to a news broadcast, or participate in a simulated job interview through an interactive exercise. These resources model real-life situations – ordering food in a restaurant, making a hotel reservation, or participating in a business meeting – providing learners with the linguistic and cultural knowledge they need to function effectively in English-speaking environments. Additionally, interactive exercises with instant feedback help learners correct grammar and pronunciation errors on the spot, reinforcing accurate usage. The variety of formats also caters to different learning styles: visual learners benefit from video, auditory learners from podcasts, and kinaesthetic learners from drag-and-drop activities.

It is important to note that the success of blended learning depends on thoughtful integration. The teacher's role evolves from a mere transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator and designer of learning experiences. For example, a teacher might assign an online listening task for homework, then in class, use the content as a springboard for pair discussions or role-plays. Grammar explanations can be delivered through short online videos before class, freeing up classroom time for communicative practice and error correction. This “flipped classroom” model maximises the value of face-to-face interaction, which is irreplaceable for developing spontaneous speaking skills and building a supportive learning community. Despite its many benefits, blended learning is not without challenges. Not all students have reliable internet access or suitable devices – a digital divide that can exacerbate inequalities. Some learners may lack the self-regulation skills needed to manage online work independently. Teachers may require training to select appropriate digital tools and design coherent blended lessons. Furthermore, simply adding online tasks to a traditional course without careful alignment can lead to duplication or cognitive overload. Therefore, institutions must provide infrastructure, teacher support, and learner training to implement blended learning effectively [1, 9].



In conclusion, blended learning represents a powerful and practical approach to teaching English as a Foreign Language. By integrating face-to-face instruction with online technologies, it offers unprecedented flexibility, allowing learners to study at their own pace and on their own schedule. Personalisation through digital tools ensures that each student receives tasks matched to their level and interests, while additional practice opportunities – especially in speaking – help overcome the limitations of classroom time. Finally, the rich array of authentic resources models real-life language use and engages diverse learning styles. Although implementation requires careful planning and resources, the potential of blended learning to enhance EFL outcomes is undeniable. As technology continues to evolve, blended learning will likely become not just an alternative but the mainstream model for language education worldwide. However, blended learning itself does not automatically increase motivation. At this point, gamification plays an important role. Gamification and its role in education, Gamification is the use of game design elements in non-game contexts. According to Deterding et al. (2011), it includes the following elements:

- Points – numerical rewards given for completed tasks.
- Levels – stages of learner progress.
- Badges – recognition of specific achievements.
- Leaderboards – showing learners’ rankings.
- Challenges/quests – goal-oriented tasks.
- Real-time feedback – immediate display of results.

How does gamification work in EFL speaking practice? For example, learners record and upload a short dialogue on an online platform and receive points. After accumulating a certain number of points, they advance to a new level. A weekly leaderboard encourages the most active participants. In this way, speaking practice remains engaging and competitive. Research (Zarzycka-Piskorz, 2016; Hung, 2017) shows that in a gamified blended learning environment:

- Motivation increases – game elements enhance learners’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
- Anxiety decreases – game-based tasks reduce the fear of making mistakes.
- Willingness to communicate rises – leaderboards and badges encourage learners to speak more.
- Long-term retention improves – repetition and reinforcement occur through the game process.

Practical examples:

- Using Kahoot! for quick oral responses (combining speaking and listening).
- Recording short video answers via Flipgrid and commenting on others’ responses.
- Voice exercises and level systems in the Duolingo app.
- Creating role-plays and dialogue situations using classroom management games such as Classcraft.

By integrating such tools with an LMS (e.g., Moodle, Google Classroom), teachers can monitor learners’ speaking activity in real time. Steps for implementing gamification in blended learning, the following steps are recommended:

1. Identify the goal: Which speaking skills (monologue, dialogue, pronunciation, fluency) need to be developed?
2. Choose the platform: Zoom/Meet (for class sessions), Flipgrid/WhatsApp (for video tasks), Wordwall/Kahoot! (interactive tests), Moodle (tracking).
3. Design game elements: A point system, levels (e.g., from “Beginner” to “Master Speaker”), a weekly leaderboard.
4. Create tasks: For example, “Daily 1-minute video” for pronunciation and fluency; “Pair interview” for dialogic speech.



5. Provide feedback and rewards: Immediate points, badges, virtual gifts.

6. Monitor and analyze: Track learner participation and results; adjust the strategy if necessary.

Gamified blended learning may also present certain problems:

- Digital divide: Some learners may lack internet access or devices. Solution: Also use offline game elements in the classroom (e.g., card games, role-plays).

- Excessive competition: Leaderboards may cause anxiety for some learners. Solution: Add badges that show personal progress and include team-based tasks.

- Teacher preparedness: Not all teachers are familiar with gamification methodology. Solution: Provide training and use ready-made templates.

- Time demands: Initial design takes considerable time. Solution: Use the ready-made functions of existing platforms (Kahoot!, Blooket, Gimkit).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, applying gamification in a blended learning environment is an effective and innovative method for developing EFL learners' speaking skills. The combination of traditional classroom instruction and digital tools allows learners to practice the language independently in an enjoyable, stress-free environment. Game elements such as points, levels, badges, and leaderboards significantly increase motivation, encourage speaking activity, and personalize the language learning process. Research shows that this approach yields particularly high results in developing pronunciation, fluency, and dialogic speech. However, successful implementation requires attention to teachers' methodological preparation, technical resources, and learners' individual needs. Future research should conduct practical studies (e.g., experiments with control groups) and develop appropriate game models for learners of different ages and proficiency levels. Thus, gamified blended learning not only effectively develops EFL speaking skills but also transforms language learning into a joyful and meaningful process.

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