

The Benefits of Gamification of Teaching for English Teaching among Chinese Students

Xuanzhe Hua

School of Foreign Languages, Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology, Guangzhou, China

a624470028@outlook.com

Abstract. This article explores the application of gamified teaching in Chinese English education and its positive impacts on students' learning motivation, language application ability, and core literacy. In the context of globalization, English proficiency is crucial for Chinese students. However, traditional exam - oriented education often leaves them lacking in practical language use, and there is also the issue of uneven distribution of educational resources in China. As an emerging model, gamified teaching transforms the learning process by incorporating elements like feedback, challenges, points, rewards, leaderboards, and levels. It creates an experience that combines fun and challenge, effectively sparking students' interest and enhancing their classroom participation and motivation to learn. Gamification in education, through interactive tasks and activities, exposes students to new vocabulary repeatedly across various scenarios for better memory and association. Its immediate feedback mechanism boosts students' sense of achievement and learning motivation, promotes teacher-student interaction, and enlivens the learning process. Moreover, this approach encourages student interaction and collaboration, fostering teamwork and competition. To complete tasks or earn rewards, students must communicate and work together, enhancing their social skills and creating a positive learning environment. This article highlights the importance of teacher training and school technical support. Teachers should undergo systematic training to master designing and implementing gamification in education. Schools must offer technical support for gamified teaching tools. Challenges like urban-rural resource disparities exist. The paper suggests improvements for wider student benefits. Future research can explore its application in different settings and its role in education.

Keywords: Gamification, English teaching, Chinese students

1. Introduction

With the development of globalization, Chinese education requires students to master English. As a foreign language and a second language, English is a tough task for Chinese students who have spoken Chinese for years and are used to it.

At present, the progress of English learning among most students in China is slow, with primary reasons including, but not limited to, learning difficulty, an unfamiliar language system, and

teaching methods. English learning plays a crucial role in helping students keep pace with global development. The status of English as a global lingua franca is of vital importance for contemporary Chinese college students in their English learning. From the perspective of personal development, English proficiency has become a key competency for students in advancing their education and securing employment. Many universities link CET-4 and CET-6 scores to degree conferment, and English is a critical subject in postgraduate entrance exams. Against the backdrop of globalization, English, as the primary tool for academic exchange, directly impacts students' ability to access cutting-edge knowledge and participate in international academic activities.

However, current college English education in China continues to encounter persistent structural and pedagogical challenges. On one hand, the exam-oriented teaching model has led to students' lack of practical application skills, resulting in the phenomenon of "high scores but low practical competence." On the other hand, the uneven distribution of educational resources across regions has created significant disparities in English proficiency among students from different backgrounds. Notably, the introduction of Western cultural content during English learning subtly influences college students' values and cognitive frameworks, prompting critical reflection cultural identity and critical thinking in foreign language education.

This highlights three major challenges in China's current English education: first, exam-oriented education leads to students' insufficient practical application skills, manifesting as the "high scores but low competence" phenomenon; second, uneven regional distribution of educational resources results in significant disparities in students' English proficiency; third, the integration of Western cultural content exerts a subtle influence on students' values and cognitive frameworks. These issues not only represent core obstacles in the development of English education in China but also pose critical challenges that demand systemic solutions.

Driven by China's "Education Informatization 2.0" initiative and the "Double Reduction" policy, gamified teaching (Gamification) has been incorporated into the educational reform agenda as an innovative pedagogical model. The 2022 revised edition of the *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards* emphasizes the cultivation of core competencies, advocating a shift toward interactive and scenario-based teaching methods, to which gamified teaching aligns seamlessly. At the same time, China's educational gaming market exceeded 8 billion yuan in 2023, reflecting growing societal recognition of engaging digital learning strategies, reflecting societal recognition of engaging and digital learning approaches.

With the rapid development of educational informatization, gamified teaching has demonstrated significant application potential in China's English education as an innovative pedagogical approach. This study employs literature analysis to explore the impact of gamified teaching on Chinese students' English learning motivation, language application competence, and the development of core competencies. The mechanisms of gamified teaching can effectively enhance students' learning engagement, particularly in addressing the "mute English" phenomenon and promoting personalized learning, showcasing unique advantages in these domains.

2. Literature review

To begin with, Hojjat Dehghanzadeh et al. conducted a review of all relevant studies published between 2008 and 2019, excluding research unrelated to gamification and non-English studies, focusing specifically on gamified teaching English as a Second Language (LESL) in digital environments. After screening, 22 eligible publications were selected for a comprehensive review. These studies primarily targeted high schools (10 articles), higher education (7 articles), and primary schools (4 articles). The analysis revealed that the most frequently employed gamification elements

in LESL included feedback, challenges, points, rewards, leaderboards, and levels, while the least utilized elements encompassed curiosity, warning signals, badges, chunking, avatars, and virtual currencies. Nearly all studies reported reported beneficial effects of gamification on LESL learning experiences, with students consistently describing this approach as "fun," "engaging," and "highly interactive." The review further explored learners' experiences and outcomes in gamified LESL digital environments, concluding that students exhibited overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward such methods. Learners frequently emphasized that gamified LESL environments were enjoyable, fun, highly interactive, and engaging [1].

Uberman posits that the process of learning through games inherently integrates learning and enjoyment within instructional contexts. American educator Marc Prensky defines gamification as "the application of game-related elements and mechanics to non-game scenarios." In the context of English skills instruction, gamified pedagogy refers to a teaching strategy that applies game elements (e.g., points, badges), game design principles (e.g., progression systems, feedback loops), and gameful thinking to non-game environments, aiming to enhance student engagement and motivation. Specifically, gamification can be leveraged to improve students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills while fostering their intrinsic interest in English learning [2].

Ana Vrcelj et al. conducted a systematic literature review focusing on successful pedagogical methods and outcomes of gamified teaching in primary and secondary education. Their analysis comprehensively examined instructional strategies, activities, digital tools, and game design elements employed in gamification, alongside its positive impacts on students[3]. Within the synthesized literature, Dichev and Dicheva systematically reviewed educational gamification and identified its generally positive effects in educational settings, though noting that many studies lacked robust empirical support or theoretical grounding. They highlighted that the majority of gamification research has concentrated on higher education, particularly in fields such as computer science and information technology, with significantly fewer studies addressing primary and secondary education. This indicates that while gamified teaching has achieved notable success in tertiary education, its application in basic education remains underdeveloped and requires further advancement. Mora et al. also conducted a systematic review of gamification at the tertiary education level, highlighting that gamification elements are predominantly used in commercial contexts, while educational settings—particularly in primary and secondary education—exhibit limited availability of specialized gamification tools. They note that most higher education gamification studies lack a formal design process. Many do not specify gamification goals or assumptions, or explain how it impacts student motivation, engagement, and outcomes. They also do not detail gamification steps, such as selecting and integrating game elements with teaching objectives, or how to assess gamification effectiveness and make adjustments based on student and teacher feedback. Such omissions reduce the practical value of these studies for educators and researchers seeking guidance, underscoring the need for primary and secondary education gamification research to fill gaps and offer practical guidance. In terms of the categorization and application of gamification elements, Toda et al. presented their own classification, dividing gamification elements into five categories and examining their pros and cons. They hope that future research can offer more comprehensive guidance for classroom gamification implementation[4]. Hamari et al. conducted a systematic review of the general literature on gamification and found that gamification demonstrated positive effects in almost all analyzed studies, including enhancing learning motivation, improving learning efficiency, promoting engagement, and strengthening learning retention. However, they emphasized the need for more research, particularly quantitative studies, to confirm these findings. This suggests that while existing research has generally recognized the positive impacts of gamification, its

effectiveness in educational contexts still requires further validation through more rigorous quantitative investigations [2]. Hamari et al. conducted a systematic literature review on gamification and found that gamification demonstrated positive impacts in nearly all analyzed studies. These impacts included enhancing learning motivation, improving learning efficiency, fostering interaction, and strengthening knowledge retention. However, the authors emphasized the necessity for further research to validate these findings, particularly through quantitative methodologies. This indicates that while existing studies generally acknowledge the beneficial effects of gamification, its educational efficacy still requires more rigorous empirical validation via quantitative approaches [2]. Nieto-Escamez and Roldan-Tapia explored the implementation of gamified teaching in secondary schools and universities during the pandemic, finding that gamification positively impacted student motivation and learning outcomes. However, they highlighted the need for further research validation and noted a lack of comparative studies with traditional non-gamified teaching approaches. Plantak Vukovac et al. conducted a study on gamification in primary and secondary education, revealing that teachers demonstrated limited familiarity with gamification and lacked relevant knowledge and professional training, thereby highlighting existing gaps in the application of gamification within the educational system [3].

These research findings indicate that, despite the potential positive effects of gamification in education, there are still numerous challenges in practical implementation, particularly in teacher training and professional development. In practical terms, some studies have applied gamification across various subjects and teaching models in both primary and secondary schools. For instance, Martinez-Hita et al. implemented a gamified project based on historical thinking in primary school history education. The study subjects were first-grade students (average age 4 years) from a public school in the Murcia region of Spain. Martinez-Hita and colleagues conducted a controlled experiment using two groups, employing a gamified project rooted in historical thinking aimed at enhancing elementary students' learning outcomes in history through gamification. The experimental results demonstrated that this approach more successfully achieved learning objectives, specifically improving students' academic performance in the history. Park and Kim investigated the impact of online gamification on elementary school students' learning motivation, finding it effectively enhanced students' engagement. Hursen and Bas applied gamification in elementary science education through elements like badges and avatars, successfully boosting learners' enthusiasm. Alshammari evaluated gamification in elementary school e-learning systems, demonstrating its positive influence on achieving learning outcomes. Barahona Mora implemented gamification via the ClassDojo system in secondary classroom management, which fostered the development of students' positive behaviors [4].

Ma Weiran introduced a gamified teaching model into primary school classrooms by designing goal-oriented tasks and incorporating elements such as competition, rewards, challenges, and immediate feedback. This approach enhances students' learning interest in English classes through strategic task design and game-based mechanics, transforming learning activities into engaging experiences. The resulting positive learning attitude helps students develop a favorable disposition toward English acquisition. Rather than perceiving learning as tedious obligations, students become willing participants in the educational process. This enjoyable learning mindset effectively boosts academic motivation, learning drive, and classroom engagement, making it easier for students to sustain their interest in English language learning [5].

According to Tan Na in her research, gamified teaching refers to the application of game design elements and principles to non-game contexts to enhance participants' motivation and engagement. These elements include but are not limited to point systems, badge rewards, leaderboards, narrative

storylines, and challenge-based tasks. Through these components, gamified teaching can stimulate students' intrinsic motivation, making the learning process more enjoyable and engaging. For instance, in English language teaching, educators can design a series of tasks where students earn points or badges upon completion. The design must emphasize clear objectives by establishing well-defined instructional goals while ensuring the gamified model is both attractive and effective. Repetition and reinforcement are critical to vocabulary acquisition. Gamified teaching facilitates repeated exposure to and application of new vocabulary across various contexts through interactive tasks. For example, in a "word chain" game, students take turns generating words starting with a specific letter. This repetitive practice not only aids in retention of new vocabulary but also strengthens associative thinking. Furthermore, immediate feedback mechanisms in games (such as points and badge rewards) can reinforce memory retention, while enhancing students' sense of achievement and sustaining their motivation for continued learning. Additionally, games can increase interaction between students and teachers. In a game with full interaction and timely feedback, students' learning efficiency can be significantly improved [6].

Lee Sheldon transformed traditional classrooms into multiplayer gaming environments at Indiana University in the United States, replacing conventional grading with an Experience Points (XP) system, which significantly enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes. Hong Chenfei and Zhang Lingjun conducted experimental research focused on English vocabulary learning in primary schools. With the continuous evolution of educational philosophies, gamified teaching methods have gradually emerged as a prominent instructional strategy [4]. Wang Xinyue emphasized that games effectively stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning while helping them perceive education as an enjoyable and personally beneficial developmental process. The integration of diverse vocabulary games in primary school English vocabulary instruction demonstrates multiple advantages. Research-based learning objectives should be designed considering students' comprehensive learning profiles. Studies on primary school English vocabulary learning design reveal that game-integrated teaching models can substantially enhance classroom interactivity through increased entertainment value, adaptability, and progressive nature. Zhang Lingyu's research indicates that incorporating games into vocabulary and sentence pattern instruction strengthens teaching effectiveness, with entertainment value serving as the key factor in attracting active student participation. Therefore, maintaining entertaining design principles proves crucial for game-based English vocabulary teaching in primary education. This entertainment principle can be reflected in reasonable game rule configurations, prop designs, and contextual scenario creation [4].

The gamified teaching approach has been shown to significantly enhance students' motivation in learning English by stimulating their engagement [7]. In a study conducted by Khairani Dian Anisa et al., the researchers utilized Kahoot to investigate the impact of gamified teaching on student motivation. The data were collected from 13 eleventh-grade students at a high school in Indonesia. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants, comprising three male students and ten female students aged between 16 and 17 years old. During the study, the teacher instructed students to play a Kahoot-designed game containing questions based on previously taught English materials. Data gathered through questionnaires and interviews underwent three analytical stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that the gamified teaching model substantially improved students' intrinsic motivation (autonomy, sense of competence, and social engagement) and overall learning motivation [8].

The research conducted by Yusuf Polat at Zirve University in Gaziantep, Turkey involved 16 student participants (9 female and 7 male) aged 18-25. Using the "iEnglish" system that incentivized task completion through experience points (XP) and achievement points (AP), the study revealed

that while there was no significant improvement in students' motivation levels, they maintained a positive attitude toward the gamification approach [4].

3. Conclusion

Amid of today is global digital transformation, gamified teaching as an innovative educational concept is quietly revolutionizing traditional models of English education in China, demonstrating tremendous application potential and developmental prospects. By ingeniously integrating gaming elements with English language instruction, it injects fresh vitality and enjoyment into conventional pedagogy. Amidst this trend, the Chinese government has introduced corresponding policies to support the promotion of gamified teaching, including the "Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan" issued by the Ministry of Education in 2018, the "Several Opinions on Strengthening Educational Scientific Research Work" published in 2019, and the "Several Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Educational Evaluation Reform in the New Era" released in 2020.

By introducing game elements such as point systems, leaderboards, badge rewards, role-playing, and scenario simulations, gamified teaching helps overcome the monotony and limitations of traditional pedagogy, significantly stimulating students' learning interest and intrinsic motivation. Students no longer perceive learning as a tedious obligation but are drawn into engaging and challenging educational activities, actively participating with genuine enjoyment. This instructional approach not only remarkably enhances classroom engagement but also fosters interaction and collaboration among learners. Within gamified learning environments, students frequently need to communicate, cooperate with peers, and even engage in healthy competition to complete tasks, earn rewards, or achieve objectives. Such interactions not only strengthen students' social skills but also cultivate team spirit and a sense of competition.

However, fully leveraging the advantages of gamified teaching is no simple task. As the leaders of instructional activities, teachers require systematic training to thoroughly study the theoretical foundations and practical experience of gamified pedagogy. They must master design methodologies that organically integrate game elements with educational objectives, as well as implementation techniques for flexibly applying these elements to guide student learning in the classroom. Only when teachers possess solid professional knowledge and rich instructional strategies can they ensure the effective implementation of gamified teaching and prevent it from becoming a superficial formality.

Meanwhile, schools also play an indispensable role in the implementation of gamified teaching. Schools need to provide necessary technical support, including stable network environments, advanced information technology equipment, and professional technical maintenance teams. This technical support ensures the normal operation of gamified teaching tools and platforms, enabling teachers and students to seamlessly utilize various gamified resources, thereby ensuring the smooth progress of teaching activities.

In conclusion, as a promising innovative educational strategy, gamified teaching offers new perspectives and methodologies for the development of English education in China. Through professional teacher training, technological support from schools, and ongoing educational research, gamified teaching has the potential to play a significant role in future English instruction. It holds the potential to create richer, more engaging, and effective learning experiences for students, thereby advancing English education to new heights.

The majority of current research primarily focuses on empirical studies, lacking controlled experiments to examine the impacts and benefits of gamified English education. Additionally, significant disparities still exist between urban and rural areas in China, with relevant technologies

for gamified education not yet widely adopted in impoverished regions and a corresponding lack of comprehensive data.

Looking ahead, there remains vast potential for research in gamified teaching. Researchers could further explore the effectiveness of gamified approaches across various educational contexts, such as online instruction, blended learning models, and English language teaching practices in diverse cultural settings. Additionally, studies could focus on how gamified pedagogy cultivates critical thinking and innovative capabilities in learners. Within gamified learning environments, students engage with complex scenarios and problem-solving challenges that require analytical reasoning, informed decision-making, and creative solutions, thereby enhancing their cognitive abilities. This pedagogical approach not only improves academic performance in English language acquisition but also lays a solid foundation for lifelong learning and personal development.

References

- [1] Dehghanzadeh, H. , Fardanesh, H. , Hatami, J. , Talae, E. , & Noroozi, O. (2019). Using gamification to support learning English as a second language: A systematic review. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*.
- [2] Hong, C. , & Zhang, L. (2024). Vocabulary instruction design for primary school English based on gamified teaching. *English Square*, (15), 134–136. <https://doi.org/10.16723/j.cnki.yyc.2024.15.026>
- [3] Vrcelj, A. , Hoić-Božić, N. , & Holenko Dlab, M. (2022). Use of gamification in primary and secondary education: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*.
- [4] Polat, Y. (2014). A case study: Gamification and its effect on motivation of learners of English. *ResearchGate*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264707044>
- [5] Ma, W. (2024). The impact of gamified teaching methods on classroom atmosphere and learning motivation in primary school English. *Inside and Outside the Classroom (Senior High Edition)*, (23), 20–21.
- [6] You, J. (2016). Gamified teaching makes primary school students fall in love with English. *Teaching and Educating People*, (25), 63.
- [7] Vathanalaoha, K. (2022). Effects of gamification in English language learning: The implementation of "Winner English" in secondary education in Thailand. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 15(2), 830–857.
- [8] Anisa, K. D. , Marmanto, S. , & Supriyadi, S. (2020). The effect of gamification on students' motivation in learning English. *Leksika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra dan Pengajarannya*, 14(1), 22–28.