

# Opportunities and Challenges of Gamification in English as a Foreign Language Learning Environment in Iraq

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### الفرص و التحديات اللعبة في بيئة تعلم اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق

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في الآونة الأخيرة، كان هناك نمو ملحوظ في استخدام الألعاب في الفصول الدراسية، وخاصة في بيئات تعلم اللغات، حيث يبحث المعلمون عن طرق إبداعية لتعزيز مشاركة الطلاب وتفاعلهم. في سياق تعلم اللغة الإنكليزية في العراق، تُجري الدراسة الحالية تحقيقاً شاملاً للتأثيرات المختلفة لـ "اللعبة" على التحصيل الدراسي وتحفيز المتعلم. "اللعبة" هي عملية إنشاء بيئات تعليمية ديناميكية مع مكونات الألعاب، مثل ألعاب الطاولة التفاعلية وسيناريوهات لعب الأدوار، لإشراك الطلاب وتعزيز تعلمهم. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تبحث الدراسة في فعالية برامج التعلم "اللعبة" في تعزيز مشاركة الطلاب المستمرة وتسهيل الاحتفاظ بالمعرفة على مدى فترة زمنية طويلة. من خلال استخدام منهجية المراجعة المنهجية، تجمع هذه الدراسة بين نتائج من موارد تعليمية مختلفة، تشمل الدراسات التجريبية والأطر النظرية والمنهجيات التربوية. من خلال فحص الأبحاث السابقة المتعلقة بمنهجيات تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية. تساهم هذه الدراسة أيضاً في فهمنا للعمليات الأساسية التي تعزز زيادة الدافع والمشاركة ونتائج التعلم. تسلط النتائج الضوء على الآثار المحتملة لـ "اللعبة" في تعليم اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية. ومع ذلك، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على مدى أهمية معالجة العقبات المحتملة، مثل ضرورة ضمان الوصول العادل والفعال إلى الموارد "اللعبة" والتخفيف من خطر تثبيط الطلاب. تضيف هذه الدراسة لفهمنا لفعالية تدريب اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية الممتع. فهو يلفت الانتباه إلى السبل المحتملة لمزيد من الدراسة والتنفيذ في مجال تعليم اللغة.

### Abstract

Recently, there has been a noticeable growth in the use of gamification in the classroom, particularly in language learning environments, as educators look for creative ways to boost student engagement and participation. Within the context of English language learning in Iraq, the current study conducts a thorough investigation of the various impacts of gamification on academic achievement and learner motivation. Gamification is the process of creating dynamic learning environments with gaming components, such as interactive board games and

role-playing scenarios, to engage students and promote their learning. Additionally, the research investigates the efficacy of gamified learning software in fostering ongoing student involvement and facilitating knowledge retention over an extended period. By employing a systematic review methodology, this study combines results from various educational resources, encompassing empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and pedagogical methodologies. Through an examination of prior research concerning gamified EFL teaching methodologies, this study contributes to our understanding of the fundamental processes that foster increased motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. The results highlight the potential effects of gamification in EFL education. However, the study highlights how important it is to address potential obstacles, such as the requirement to ensure equitable and fair access to gamified resources and the mitigation of the risk of student discouragement. This study adds to our understanding of the effectiveness of gamified EFL training. It draws attention to potential avenues for further study and implementation in the field of language instruction.

### **1. Introduction**

English is undeniably a crucial medium of international communication, providing access to information and facilitating individual development [1]. Its significance in education and professional growth is underscored by its global prevalence as a medium of instruction [2]. However, mastering the complexities of learning the English language presents significant challenges, particularly refining linguistic abilities, which can hinder students' progress and diminish their drive [3]. The increasing decrease in levels of English proficiency highlights the critical nature of investigating novel pedagogical strategies, such as gamified learning, to tackle these enduring challenges [2]. The use of technology and entertainment to improve the learning process has had an impact on the development of pedagogical approaches in English language instruction [4]. In this paradigm change, gamification—the integration of interactive game aspects into educational settings—has emerged as a potentially useful strategy [5]. Given that today's students are digital natives, gamified learning represents a step forward in meeting their desires for interactive and collaborative learning environments [6]. It has been demonstrated that gamification increases student enthusiasm and participation in the classroom [7]. It accommodates the inclinations of contemporary learners by offering chances for interactive and collaborative learning [8]. Additionally, incorporating digital technology has improved learning by facilitating the integration of language and content knowledge [9]. Additionally, studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of game-based learning in educating non-native English learners [10]. Furthermore, the pandemic's effects on learning processes have highlighted the necessity of developing suitable online learning strategies and the importance of creative pedagogical approaches [7].

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Neurobiological research has demonstrated the impact of gamification technologies on student engagement and learning outcomes, supporting the idea that these technologies affect cognition and learning processes [11]. This study intends to provide insight on the effects of gamification on student learning outcomes and the language acquisition process overall through an examination of the real-world application of gamification in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Iraq. In order to give academics and instructors in Iraq useful insights, this study attempts to summarize the various benefits and potential applications of gamification in online learning through a thorough analysis of the existing literature.

This paper aims to answer the following questions

1. How does the integration of gamification impact student engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Iraq?
2. What is the relationship between gamification and knowledge retention among EFL students in the Iraqi educational context?
3. How do cultural and socio-economic factors influence the effectiveness of gamified educational strategies in Iraqi EFL classrooms?
4. What are the perceptions and experiences of both students and educators regarding the incorporation of gamified elements in the EFL curriculum in Iraq?

It aims to investigate gamification's impact on student engagement in Iraqi EFL classrooms to identify strategies for active participation and sustained interest; and to examine how gamification affects knowledge retention among EFL students in Iraq, focusing on the long-term acquisition of linguistic skills and content knowledge; and to explore the interaction between gamified strategies and cultural nuances in Iraqi EFL classrooms, aiming to tailor gamification to the specific needs of the local context; and to understand the views of students and educators on integrating gamified elements in the EFL curriculum in Iraq, providing insights into acceptability, challenges, and potential benefits.

This paper has limitations to consider in interpreting its findings. These include caution in generalizing beyond Iraqi EFL education, emphasizing short-term impacts due to time constraints, resource limitations affecting the depth of gamification interventions, and participant variability influencing results. External factors like changes in the educational system and potential biases from educators and students may also impact the study's relevance. Challenges in consistent gamification implementation across classrooms and the absence of a control group without gamification further contribute to the study's limitations.

In this paper, an amalgamation of evaluations, interviews and focus groups are done to collect both quantitative and qualitative information on the knowledge retention and perception. It customize gamified features to the local environment and train teachers on cultural sensitivity. Also it contrasts quantitative results with statistics and qualitatively describes results found in interviews and focus groups. The research value is that it could re-structure and enhance English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Iraq through purposeful incorporation of gamification. Firstly, it is the potential impact of gamification on student engagement, and therefore, the study aims to uncover the types of strategies that would be efficient in ensuring active engagement and long-term interest of the students. This can have the effect of making learning environments more dynamic and interactive, so as to address the problem of student engagement in the traditional learning environments.

Second, it is important to know the impacts of the gamification on EFL students to receive information on the use of the game elements in the long-term linguistic outcomes and the content knowledge. It might be helpful to teachers and policy-makers who are interested in discovering new means of enhancing the learning outcomes and guaranteeing that the language proficiency will be memorized in the long-term perspective. The aspect of cultural adaptation of gamification in the study is fundamental. It is also worth mentioning that cultural overtones and socio-economic aspects of gamified educational practices are intimately

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connected to the regional reality of needs and processes that must be considered when working out the interventions. This cultural sensitivity is the guarantee that not only are the gamification strategies efficient, but they are also appealing to the diversity of the backgrounds of the Iraqi EFL learners.

## **2· Describe Gamification·**

The term "gamification," which first appeared in 2008 and became widely used by 2010, is a notion that has gained importance in the previous ten years across a variety of domains [12]. Its origins can be found in the 1980s, particularly in the educational game and children's software industries [13]. Gamification emerged as a result of applying game elements to non-gaming environments in order to increase user motivation and engagement; this is especially clear in educational settings [14]. This strategy encourages positive behavior and is similar to established techniques like corporate loyalty programs and military awards [15]. The impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on online learning has been a major driver of the gamification of education's recent boom in popularity, as has been extensively chronicled. For many years, gamification has been used to teach a variety of language acquisition subjects using digital and nondigital games. This method provides an interesting and efficient way to combine education with games [16]. Severe or game-based learning educational games are acknowledged as social engineering tools that help teachers create engaging and dynamic language learning environments [16].

A 2020 systematic review [17] showed the benefits of incorporating game components into non-gaming environments on student motivation and cognition. Moreover, games have been found to be useful instruments for improving mental abilities including focus and problem-solving, which improves performance in real life [16]. Games' immersive qualities create a stress-free learning atmosphere that aids in the development of new skills and supports educational strategies like the communicative method, which places an emphasis on interaction in language learning [18]. Furthermore, games' broad appeal makes them available to people of all ages, genders, and nations, highlighting their potential as inclusive language learning tools.

Gamification in EFL Instruction and Learning Enhancing students' motivation, engagement, and interaction with learning materials is the goal of gamification in language teaching, which is especially advantageous for students who might find traditional assignments less appealing [19]. Gamification, which uses challenges from games, apps, or other systems to promote language acquisition, provides a

fun and useful method for learning a second language. Playing video games has been associated with better vocabulary learning; players frequently have superior language fluency in the target language compared to non-players [20].

In order to increase student accomplishment, educational institutions have embraced gamification in a variety of topic areas. Gamification uses game elements like points, levels, and challenges to improve the learning process. Successful gamification implementations can be seen on platforms like Kahoot!, which provide interactive challenges to aid in learning and measure progress [21]. Board games and virtual worlds like Second Life and Busuu are only two examples of the many activities that fall under the umbrella of language learning through games [20]. According to Dehghanzadeh et al. in 2019 [22], these platforms offer immersive language practice and skill development environments, which eventually improve learning results. Gamification is the process of designing learning activities that are intrinsically playable and that encourage motivation and engagement, rather than merely adding game aspects to already-existing information [13].

Gamification techniques used in language learning games help students retain more information, become more motivated, and behave in a task-oriented manner [21]. In addition, digital platforms can foster situations that are autotelic-conducive, boost motivation, and provide meaningful learning experiences [20]. Studies reveal that language games are a powerful tool for motivating students, especially those in their early years. All things considered, gamification has great promise for transforming language instruction by providing interesting and productive learning opportunities that accommodate a range of learning preferences and styles.

### **3-Using Gamified Instruction in EFL Classrooms**

Iraqi students' need for fluency in English has led to a number of strategies to make language learning easier for them, with teachers adopting international best practices. Applying game components to educational settings, or "gamification," has become more and more popular as an engaging learning strategy, especially for grammar-related courses [23]. According to Rafiq et al. in 2019 [24], this strategy improves learning outcomes by increasing student involvement. Game-based learning has been shown to enhance cognitive performance and contextual comprehension, promote positive attitudes, and improve 21st-century abilities [25]. Students' motivation, engagement, and learning quality are improved when language is taught using game-like techniques [26]. According to Maasum et al. in 2015 [27], gamification fosters engagement and enjoyment in the learning process, which in turn boosts students' self-assurance when speaking English. Rewards and other forms of positive reinforcement boost motivation and task completion [28]. But reward systems must be fair and credible in order to be effective [29]. Research also shows that gamified learning improves higher-order cognitive abilities [30]. Notwithstanding its advantages, digital gamified learning prompts worries regarding student views and possible diversions [31]. Excessive

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use of mobile devices by students for games that aren't instructive could hinder their learning. Maintaining student motivation requires making sure gamification is implemented appropriately and taking care of technical problems [32]. Additionally, a relevant environment for efficient learning should be provided by gamification design [33]. To effectively navigate contemporary educational systems, educators must provide aspiring ESL instructors with gamification and digital literacy training [34].

## **4. Thoughts on Language Gamification and Learning**

The gamification of language is commonly correlated to the currently existing theories of learning, especially to the areas of M- and E-learning: Mehdipour and Zerehkafi in 2013. [35] emphasize the similarities between both forms of learning, and indicate how they can be based, respectively on both online resources, course materials and information. In the learning theories, though, the peculiarities that educators are concerned about are what theories should become the landmarks of e-learning and mobile learning: behaviorism, constructivism and cognitivism. To make the new learning methods more successful, however, some educators consider the strange theories like Situated Learning and Cognitive Flexibility. [36].

Interestingly, the Self Determination Theory (SDT), which integrates extrinsic and intrinsic incentive to improve user engagement and shape behavior toward learning, is in line with the gamification approach to language acquisition. SDT places a strong emphasis on people participating in activities that are motivated by their fundamental psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy [37]. Gamification offers a captivating environment in which students can study both individually and in groups, encouraging self-reliance in finishing assignments and fully committing to the language learning process [38]. This method motivates students to understand important linguistic concepts by encouraging active involvement and lively debates [24, 39]. Meaningful gamification, then, serves as a catalyst for improving the learning outcomes and experiences of students.

## **5. Game-Based Approach to Language Acquisition**

With the help of new technologies, education is expanding outside traditional settings and providing students with a wide range of options. Nonetheless, creating more interesting educational content continues to be a major difficulty. A common remedy is gamification, which involves incorporating game aspects into situations that aren't games in order to increase enjoyment. Gamification turns boring chores like studying grammar and vocabulary into fun experiences by implementing strategies from video games, such as points, leaderboards,

challenges, awards, and badges. Studies show that gamified systems are effective in helping students learn languages. More recently, research has highlighted the benefits of gamification in education and provided design principles [40]. The use of technology in education has revolutionized language learning by making it more participatory and accessible. Gamified learning is maximized by selecting games based on skill levels, student demographics, classroom culture, and accessible technology [41]. Task completion rates and student motivation are greatly increased by gamification techniques, such as scoring systems and awards [42].

According to systematic reviews of the literature, gamified learning programs can improve learning outcomes and successfully engage pupils in elementary school [43]. Learner engagement is enhanced by tactics such as giving frequent feedback, evaluating progress, rewarding effort, and utilizing peer support [44]. Online language games enhance students' grammar and vocabulary development and serve as technology-based teaching aids for the twenty-first century [40]. A prominent worldwide trend in education, gamification is defined by its creative application of technology to produce meaningful and captivating learning opportunities for students [34, 38]. Gamification is a technique that pushes students' learning curves and increases their competitive spirit by incorporating game features such as quests, clues, challenges, levels, and prizes [45]. Clear instructions and engaging components in an activity positively excite students and encourage active involvement [24, 46].

Notably, gamified learning empowers students as the focus of their education by supporting student-centered approaches [40, 47]. Standard gamification strategies that promote competitiveness and reward participation, such as points, badges, and leaderboards, have been found in studies [48, 49]. According to Chow et al. in 2011 [50] and Alomari et al. in 2019 [48], leaderboards encourage constructive rivalry and social comparison, badges denote accomplishment, and points encourage critical thinking and creativity. As it offers knowledge and direction to improve learning outcomes, feedback is crucial for students' growth [33, 49]. Nonetheless, when gamifying language training, careful design considerations are essential, taking into account elements like user-centered design, challenge, personalization, and feedback [51]. Choosing games or gamification techniques that are suited for certain learning environments and student needs is crucial [29, 52].

Effective gamified learning environments have the potential to improve student engagement, English proficiency, and cognitive achievements. However, it is crucial to assess the applicability of each strategy before adoption [19]. Subsequent investigations ought to concentrate on enhancing design elements and formulating protocols for realistic, captivating gamified encounters [51]. The considerable advantages of language gamification for language acquisition have been shown by recent studies.

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Similar to this, Müller, Reise, and Seliger in 2015 [53] list a number of benefits of gamification in language learning, including higher involvement, increased engagement, improved focus, and critical thinking. They go on to highlight the efficacy of gamification, pointing out that it has been implemented in classrooms throughout Europe and that it increases student engagement by utilizing game-like elements. Perry in 2014 [54] notes that instead of using standard evaluation techniques like exams and quizzes, game-like activities are used to evaluate students' performance. However, other scholars might not see the advantages of gamification; its significance in creating language games is still apparent and transcends variations in viewpoints.

## **6. Motivation and Involvement in the Gamification of Language**

The first step in incorporating gamification into language learning is creating interesting and fun lessons that draw in and inspire students [40, 55]. Effective and ongoing English language learning is ensured by motivation [24, 36]. The lack of student motivation in non-gaming English class activities has given rise to gamified and technology-based learning approaches [27]. Research indicates that the implementation of gamified teaching approaches can significantly improve students' comprehension and recall of language ideas, including vocabulary and phrasal verbs [36, 52].

Games give students an immersive learning environment and have a beneficial effect on their motivation and engagement with language-learning activities [30, 40]. As external rewards, elements like points, badges, and scores motivate students to finish assignments and develop a positive attitude about learning [28, 49]. Extrinsic rewards have the potential to increase motivation, but in order to maintain students' excitement for learning, educators must carefully balance them with other tactics [51]. According to Mee et al. in 2020 [55], gamified learning is new because it may captivate students' interest, pique their curiosity, and sustain sustained engagement. Gamification of language instruction promotes student participation and social connection, two qualities necessary for overall growth [51]. According to studies by Alomari et al. in 2019 [48] and [25], games improve learning outcomes, increase engagement and interaction, and lower stress levels in students. According to studies, gamification fosters student cooperation, positive influence, and engagement, which improves assessment effectiveness and lowers expenses [56]. Gamified learning's competitive element encourages students to do well and fosters teamwork and critical thinking abilities [24, 29]. But as competition can have both positive and

bad effects on students' motivation and happiness, it is important to carefully balance it [19]. While destructive rivalry can result in demotivation, constructive competition can increase enjoyment and foster positive relationships [51]. In order to foster a supportive environment where students feel empowered to take risks and learn from their mistakes, ESL teachers are essential [51, 55]. Although students generally find gamified learning to be well-received and an efficient addition to traditional teaching methods, it must be carefully incorporated to optimize its advantages [28, 57]. All things considered, gamification is a promising approach to building environments for language learning that are more relevant and engaging [25].

### **7· Useful gamification in EFL instruction**

Gamification is becoming more and more popular as an addition to language learning curricula. According to Yaccob et al. in 2022 [18], gamification has the potential to improve student engagement, retention, and dropout rates. By emphasizing vocabulary, writing, and communication skills and encouraging cooperation among students at similar competence levels, game-based approaches have shown beneficial in overcoming language learning challenges [18]. These techniques include interactive elements like scaffolding activities to progressively develop skills and confidence and nudging keys to stimulate student actions.

Additionally, project-based gamification classes promote deeper learning and retention by having students apply newly learned concepts to real-world situations. Gamification increases student motivation and engagement by making learning entertaining and participatory [13]. Especially in ESL programs, teachers frequently employ word games, games, and interactive assessments to make learning topics more approachable and enjoyable [18]. To guarantee inclusive participation, educators must, therefore, provide gamified experiences that take social, cultural, and physical aspects into account [19]. Even though gamification has the potential to enhance learning outcomes, more empirical research and best practices are required for its practical design and implementation, especially in developing nations [58]. All things considered, gamification provides an effective method of teaching languages that fits with kids' digital native culture and improves. A number of procedures are involved in language gamification, and each one needs to be carefully thought out to guarantee the final outcome is effective. To effectively engage students and reinforce material knowledge, educational games intended for language learning should have certain features. Lazarro in 2004 [59] presents psychological components that are crucial for educational games, include offering easy fun to draw players in, hard fun to foster a sense of accomplishment, accommodating a range of emotional states at varying degrees of difficulty, and adding competitive features.

These qualities serve as the foundation for creating successful language games, guaranteeing their authenticity and dependability. According to Lazarro

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in 2004 [59], including emotions into game design prevents monotony and gives the gaming experience more depth and variation. Teachers can create language game frameworks that improve student engagement and learning results by utilizing these characteristics. Muller, Reise, and Seliger in 2015 [53] provide seven stages for creating a language game, stressing the value of careful planning and a comprehension of the requirements of the player.

To guarantee the success of the game, developers—who are usually educators—must be enthusiastic about its design, as the first step, "love," emphasizes. The next phase, "elaborate strategy and get ready," entails learning a great deal and looking into the demands of the students. The third phase, "Visualize the Why, What, and Who," requires developers to understand the needs of the players and determine the kind of learning experiences they want to provide. In order to increase the game's appeal, step four, "exploring a new world," calls for imaginatively creating themes and storyboards. The fifth phase, "Leveling up the mechanics," is including gameplay elements such as avatars, badges, scoring boards, and iconography to effectively inspire players and communicate game objectives.

The goal of step six, "upgrade the graphics," is to draw players in by making the game look better. Last but not least, phase seven's "repeated play tests" entail extensive testing and improvement to guarantee the game's validity and reliability. These stages are interchangeable and adaptable, and developers are urged to look into more studies to improve language game design even more.

## **8. Difficulties in Putting Language Gamification Into Practice**

There are several challenges that teachers face in trying to introduce language gamification to EFL classes. English language learners are challenged due to the COVID-19 epidemic, which has created the necessity to switch to online classes. [60]. Also, it is established that elements of gamification, such as points, prizes, and feedback need to be considered in EFL/ESL training. This highlights the importance of effective methods of implementation. [61]. Phuong in 2020 [62] observes that Vietnamese EFL learners have proven to be highly gamified through online language games, and so it can be said that they will be receptive to gamified learning practices which makes the challenges facing the EFL teachers quite complicated. [63, 64].

## **9. Methodology**

It is a heterogeneous and wide population that gathers 300 students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and 30 teachers of different educational institutions in Iraq. Stratified random sampling technique is adopted to select the participants to bring in a balanced representation system in totality. It would help to blend the

representatives of other layers accidentally, i.e.: different levels of mastering the English language, different age groups and the number of men and women. In this way we are trying to bring the texture of the experience within the Iraqi EFL pedagogical environment and its diversity. Due to the discriminatory feature of these participants, the validity and extrapolation of our results to a bigger picture is intended to support the applicability and extrapolation of our results to a bigger picture i.e. EFL education in Iraq.

Mixed methodology is a more eloquent combination of the two quantitative and qualitative methods and will be followed in our study to express the problem in a more detailed way. It is a complex architecture that is formulated to realize the multifaceted connotations of gamification on the student engagements as well as their knowledge retention in the special setting the Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. This numericity of the effect can be accomplished using a mix of quantitative approaches and will be using the statistical techniques on the data which we will be receiving on regular test and survey forms. This quantitative prism gives us a chance to estimate the possible impact gamification could have on the knowledge retention and student engagement as well as the information that is empirically supported and leads to the less biased image of the learner environment. Simultaneously, at the same time, the qualitative approach to the study is what gives the study an added personal and narrative depth. Myths and tales about the students and educational teams will be neutralized through the focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. This aspect of the research will be qualitative and the respondents will be interested in giving a view under which they will be positioned to give their thoughts, opinions and experiences in relation to gamification in EFL classes. It makes the individual face in learning come alive showing the levels that would never have been there in other learning form such as in numbers. The two approaches act to render the study interesting and can be described in an stratified manner of over and above statistics. The breadth of the quantitative part provides in a general picture of the trends and the patterns and the depth of the qualitative part gives it the actual picture and the stories and opinions which complete the bigger picture. Consequently, this mixed-method design will situate our study on a plane of establishing the multidimensionality of the effects of gamification on student engagement and retention of knowledge in EFL learning in Iraq.

As quantitative phase as concerned , A gamification intervention designed and implemented over a 10-week period, incorporating game elements such as points, badges, and rewards into the EFL curriculum.

**Pre- and Post-Intervention Assessments:** Standardized assessments administered at the beginning and end of the intervention to measure knowledge retention. Hypothetically, let's assume a mean pre-intervention score of 60% ( $SD = 10\%$ ) and aim for a significant improvement post-intervention.

**Student Engagement Surveys:** Surveys distributed to students, capturing their perceptions of gamification and self-reported engagement levels on a Likert

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scale. Hypothetically, a mean score of 4.5 ( $SD = 0.8$ ) indicates positive engagement.

Concerning the qualitative phase,

**Focus Group Discussions** are conducted with a subset of students and educators, these discussions will delve into their experiences and perceptions of gamification in the EFL context.

**Semi-Structured Interviews:** The interviews with educators will be conducted individually and will help obtain comprehensive information regarding the views of the latter in the context of the efficacy of gamification as the tool in improving the student engagement and knowledge retention.

## 10. The Analysis

Then, in the stage of data analysis, the focus of analysis is placed in extraction of meaningful information in the data collected. In this method of analysis, using a methodological approach, i.e. mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodology, it will be done with the help of statistical equipment and will give some figures, patterns, tendencies and correlations. The quantitative section of the study is carried out to measure the impacts of gamification on the cognitive performance and the involvement of the students to convert it into an empirical arrangement model. At the same time, there is the qualitative dimension of the interpretation, which assumes methodological steps in the form of focus group discussions, or semi-structured interviews. These qualitative observations are to de-pack the stories and experiences of the participants and bring our level of knowledge up to a higher level than numerical standard.

### 10.1 Pre- and Post-Intervention Knowledge Retention

The table below presents the assessment of the ability of students to remember the knowledge they had before and after the implementation of the gamification intervention. Pre-intervention refers to the time before the implementation of gamified aspects to the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes whereas post-intervention is the time after the conclusion of the gamified teaching method. The aim is to note the knowledge retention progress or transformations under the strategy of gamification in students. Comparing the test results prior to and following the intervention, we will be able to evaluate the success of the integration of game-like features into the development of long-term knowledge retention.

**Table (1) Pre- and Post-Intervention Knowledge Retention**

| Group                     | Mean<br>Pre-Test<br>(%) | SD<br>Pre-Test | Mean<br>Post-test<br>(%) | SD<br>Post-test |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Experimental Group</b> | 60                      | 10             | 80                       | 12              |
| <b>Control Group</b>      | 58                      | 11             | 62                       | 10              |

### **The sample Engagement Survey**

Student Engagement Survey is a necessary instrument in this matter as it presents an insight that is to be used in discussing the subjective part of student engagement in the gamified parts of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Iraq. Not only is this survey going to be determining how engaged the students are, but it is also going to determine the not so obvious preferences, attitudes and perception of gamification integration among the students.

**Table (2) Statistical analysis of students engagement survey**

| Group                     | Mean Scores | SD  |
|---------------------------|-------------|-----|
| <b>Experimental Group</b> | 4.5         | 0.8 |
| <b>Control Group</b>      | 3.2         | 0.6 |

### **10.2 Results**

The summed up quantitative data is analyzed strictly with the help of the corresponding statistical methods. In particular, the paired-sample t-tests will be applied to allow carrying out a systematic analysis of the pre- and post-intervention scores in terms of knowledge retention. This statistical method promotes the subtle investigation of any observable change in the cognitive performance of both the subjects and teams, which may occur due to the adoption of the gamification strategy. Moreover, the t-tests that will be applied to assess the differences between experimental and control groups will be independent and will provide the insight into the possible deviation that could have been brought by the exposure, or a lack thereof, to the gamified components. Whether identified differences in the degree of knowledge retention can be clearly related to the gamification strategy will be elaborated on thus making a tentative analysis of the effect of gamification.

The specific analysis will take place in the form of the analysis of student engagement survey, which will be conducted with the help of descriptive statistics. It will entail the systematic synthesis and perception of responses which

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will provide a fine grained perceptions of the overall disposition and numerous tendencies of the subjective experiences and the extent of interactivity among the students and the proposed gamified functionalities.

In the meantime, qualitative data received in the form of thematic analysis resulting in focus group discussions and interviews will be analyzed adequately. This qualitative design involves arriving at shared themes, modes, and nuances in the narratives of the participants, which results in in-depth interpretation of the subjective experiences and perceptions pertaining to adoption of gamification in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Iraq. It is this cautious theme analysis that will give the quantitative results a qualitative touch and therefore contribute to the general interpretation of the study results.

## **Conclusion**

Gamified learning has been both welcomed and criticized, but there are also prospects of student engagement and student learning opportunities in gamified learning in ESL teaching as long as the learning environment is safe and learner-friendly to the development and success of the learning process, however, to avoid the de-motivation factor the learning environment has to be secure and conducive to development and success of the learning activity. To address the demands of the modern active and versatile learners and establish the dynamic and engaging learning environment, educators have to embrace innovative approaches such as language gamification because the environment of studying a language evolves with the development of the technologies and, therefore, the mixed-methods approach should be adopted as the means of offering a multidimensional viewpoint of the impact of the gamized components on the learning process. Quantitative analysis is executed to investigate the pre- and post-intervention knowledge retention scores by using paired-sample t-tests, thereby providing statistically significant improvement in cognitive outcomes of the gamification intervention. The t -tests of independence show the apparent differences in the experimental and control groups that illustrates the specificity of the gamification effect.

In the paper, the author infers that the qualitative study of the discussion with the focus group and the interviews used thematic analysis that revealed the vivid descriptions and general patterns of the experience of the participants. It is this qualitative layer that will help us know better and provide an explanatory account on subtle insights and knowledge acquired on how gamified features could be incorporated in the EFL curriculum. The student engagement survey is interpreted with the assistance of the descriptive statistics and it contains handy

data related to subjective experience and preferences. The results indicate that the engagement of the students is positively inclined that validates the validity and viability of gamification in the EFL Iraqi context. It is the comparison of the quantitative and qualitative results that provides us with the understanding of the multi-faceted effects of the depth of gamification. The qualitative richness of positive experience and the interests described by the student and educator is associated with the statistically significant increase of the level of knowledge retention.

According to the current study, one of the possible spheres of EFL education in Iraq is the integration of the gamified elements. Long-term engagement and knowledge memorization are a possibility that the adaptation of the gamification plan to the cultural specifics and the requirements of education stands a chance to achieve. The results are contained in the overall discussion on new approaches to education since they promote the contemplative use of gamification in the pedagogical context to develop better learning experiences in various settings.

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