Gamification in Education: Enhancing Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes

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Terhathum Multiple Campus Research Journal (ISSN2565-48x Print) (3149-7594 Online.)

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Double Blended Peer-Reviewed Research Journal
Plagiarism and AI Tested

Date of Summission
March 12, 2026

Date of Acceptance
July 02, 2026

Date of Published
August 07, 2026

Abstract

Gamification has emerged as an innovative teaching strategy that enhances student engagement and learning by integrating game-design elements into educational activities. Features such as points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, and immediate feedback make learning more interactive, enjoyable, and motivating. Research indicates that gamification encourages active participation, improves knowledge retention, strengthens conceptual understanding, and develops problem-solving and collaboration skills. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational approaches contribute to creating meaningful learning experiences when game mechanics are aligned with educational objectives. However, effective implementation requires careful planning to ensure fairness, inclusiveness, and a balance between rewards and genuine learning, avoiding excessive dependence on external incentives. In higher education, partic[a]\uaLrly in Nepal, where traditional lecture-based instruction remains common, gamification offers a promising approach to address the learning preferences of digitally connected students. By fostering autonomy, collaboration, and continuous feedback, educators can create dynamic, student-centered classrooms that support academic achievement while preparing learners with critical thinking, teamwork, and resilience. Continued research and practical application will further refine gamification as an effective educational strategy.

Key words: Gamified learning, pedagogy, interactive, fun, classroom technology

Introduction

The phenomenon of gamification has become one of the most innovative ways of implementing education in modern times owing to the integration of technology in classroom teaching. The integration of technology has led to a revolution in the way of imparting education and has provided new avenues of engaging the learners in the entire process of learning. Gamification implies using game-based elements including points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, and other rewards in a non-game context. In an educational scenario, it involves the use of game elements in order to facilitate interactive and engaging learning that would help improve knowledge retention and encourage different styles of learning. It is different from the traditional method of teaching as it uses both types of motivation while fostering a spirit of healthy competition and collaboration**.**

Despite its relatively recent popuaLrity, the idea of gamification has developed during many decades. The notion "gamification" was introduced by Bret Terrones in 2008 as the application of game mechanics, game aesthetics, and game design techniques to encourage people's behavior, motivate actions, educate people, and problem-solving. Yet, the idea behind this notion existed much earlier. Its origins date back to the 1970s, when computer-based instructional programs used a game structure with educational content to attract students' attention and interest. The development of technologies, along with the emergence of affordable internet access, greatly broadened the range of opportunities provided by gamification. Now, gamification is understood as a strategic application of game-like elements and game structures for the creation of compelling educational experience without necessarily being like a game itself.

The modern learners, often referred to as digital natives, have different learning styles as compared to other generations. Therefore, there is a need for the teachers to embrace new pedagogies that help in keeping learners motivated and engaged.

Gamification has been recognized as one of the pedagogies because of its alignment with the learners' familiarity with technology as well as engaging them in interactive learning processes. Gamification has been proven to engage the learners in the similar manner as games keep the players engaged, thus enabling skill development and good learning experiences. It has been successfully implemented in many fields including medical education in order to improve the learners' knowledge acquisition and motivation (L. F. Hamidi, B. S. Hantono, & A. E. Permanasari, 2022). Also, according to Ghai and Tandon (2023), teachers need to embrace the changes in the educational needs of the digital-native learners through the implementation of gamification.

Hopeetal (2023) argued that gamified learning improves the learning outcomes. However, all empirical studies also address the limitations of their findings. These studies used gamification in a very specificcon text and applied it to a very narrow branch of educating students instead of formal education.Therefore, theold saying“one-size-fits-all”doesnot carry weight and excludes gamification from innovating education holistically (Zhaoet al., 2020). Although the accumulating empirical literature yields encouraging findings, such results are necessarily bound by the controlled classroom conditions under which they were obtained, and their generalizability to other educational contexts remains an open question. When implemented thoughtfully, gamification holds genuine promise as a mechanism for enhancing student motivation and engagement.However, its efficacy fundamentally depends on the degree to which game-based elements are aligned with the underlying learning objectives, rather than merely appended to them.Where this alignment is absent, gamification risks reducing itself to a superficial overlay of game mechanics that fail to advance meaningful educational outcomes.Therefore, it is incumbent upon educators and institutions to ensure that any game elements introduced into the curriculum are purposefully integrated

with instructional goals rather than adopted for their novelty alone.When this principle is observed, gamification can meaningfully enrich the learning experience and improve its overall effectiveness for students.

Furthermore, this method creates a lively educational setting and provides students with the essential skills and understanding needed to successfully tackle the intricate challenges of the future.Over the past ten years, gamification has developed as an effective strategy for influencing human behavior in various contexts.Nonetheless, it remains a new concept in the realm of education (Hosseini, Hum lung, Fagerstrøm, &Haddara, 2022).

There is a growing interest in using gamification in education, with many studies exploring how it can improve learning.The main goal of gamification in classrooms is to boost student motivation, whether it is attending classes, accessing materials, joining discussions,or doing extra work.While many studies have reported positive effects, not all have shown the same success rate.Gamification helps make learning more engaging by adding game-like features to regular activities.This includes points, badges, and leaderboards, which can motivate students and create a friendly and competitive environment.

The study is significant because it contributes to the limited body of research on gamification in Nepalese higher education. Its findings are expected to provide practical insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers who seek to improve teaching and learning through innovative instructional approaches. Moreover, the study addresses an important research gap by focusing on higher education in Nepal and integrating both theoretical and practical perspectives. Existing literature demonstrates the growing global relevance of gamification, yet there remains a lack of empirical evidence within Nepalese universities. This gap highlights the necessity for context-

specific research that examines how gamification can be effectively implemented to enhance student engagement, improve learning outcomes, and overcome implementation challenges.

As a result, the purpose of this research is to investigate the efficiency of gamification in increasing students' motivation, determine its effect on academic performance, and discuss difficulties that may be faced during the implementation of this approach at Tribhuvan University. The analysis of previous studies and cases of gamification will help to understand positive and negative sides of gamification and identify situations in which gamification is efficient in higher education institutions.

Methodology

This exploratory study used a quantitative approach.As a component of a aLrger research project, this study focused on and reported the quantitative dimension.The potential advantage of employing a quantitative approach lies in its capacity to minimize data bias, thereby enabling the researcher to independently verify that participants meet the required profile for the study without disclosing additional, identifying information.

One of the courses was delivered via blended learning. Therefore, delivery of the course entailed classroom instructions by the lecturer and incorporation of technology both within and out of the classroom setting. The use of technology entailed using MOODLE (ModuaLr Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment). MOODLE was used as an online repository for the course materials for purposes of interaction with them by the students. Additionally, MOODLE was used to create quizzes which were automatically scored and displayed on scoreboards. Some quizzes provided the opportunity to do several attempts on the question with scores decreasing with the increasing attempt numbers.

Population and Sample

A study was conducted with 50 university professors from the constituent and affiliated colleges of the Koshi Province (TU), Nepal.The participants were selected using random sampling.

Ethical issues

Before administering the questionnaires, the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their anonymity would be maintained. Furthermore, the purpose of the study was communicated to the respondents before they completed the online questionnaire.

Gamification and Its Challenges

1. Loss of Motivation over Time: While gamification can spark initial interest, over time, users may lose their intrinsic drive to learner complete tasks, foc^{a}\usin ginsteadon external rewar dssuch as pointsor badges.

2. Lack of Personalization: Gamified systems of ten apply the same design to everyone, which can ignore individual differences in learning styles, preferences, orabilities, making them less effective for certain groups.

3. Shallow participation: Gamification elements can sometimes push users to engage superficially just to earn rewards without encourageing deeper thinking or real skill development.

4. Excessive Competition: Competitive features in gamified environments can create stress and anxiety for some, alienating individuals who do not thrive in competitive settings, and limiting inclusiveness.

5. Challenges with Scalability: Maintaining a gamified platform that effectively

engages a aLrge and diverse user base requires significant resources for reguaLr updates, content, and tech support.

6. Ethical Considerations: There is always the risk that gamification will beused to manipulate user behavior and prioritize organizational goal sover the well-beinga and genuine engagement of the users.

7.Short and Lived Engagement: While gamification can boost interest in the short term, its ability to keep users engaged over the longhaul is questionable, especially if the system lacks ongoing innovation.

8. Cognitive Overloading: Users with too many game-like features can lead to confusion or frustration, especially in situations where caLrity and focus are crucial for learning or performance.

9. Cultural Misfit: What works in one cultural or social setting may not work in another setting. Gamification strategies developed for one group might not resonate or function the same way in a different context.

10. Difficulty in measuring the impact: It can be challenging to measure the true effectiveness of gamification in improving learning or behavior. Reliable assessment methods are needed, but the results can be hard to quantify.

Result and Discussion

Meaningful insights into educators' perspectives on in corporating gamification into teaching and learning.According to the data, (70%) of respondents shared that they occasionally applied innovative gamified teaching methods in their classrooms. They specifically highlighted the use of strategies such as rewards, challenges, and competitive features, such as levels, to enhance student engagement. Most of these educators taught subjects such as grammar, financial management, marketing,

andsocial studies. A noticeable pattern suggests that while gamification is widely recognized as an effective tool for engaging students, its application often varies due to fact or ssuch as class size, time limitations, and resource availability. Furthermore, (60%) of respondents noted that incorporating rewards and levels significantly boosted student participation and motivation.This under scores that when used effectively, gamified techniques can create a more dynamic and inspired learning environment**.**

The survey also highlighted several challenges associated with the use of gamification in education, raising questions about its overall effectiveness and practicality.While 50% of educators acknowledged that gamification enhances student engagement, they expressed concerns that it cansome times divert attention away from the primary learning objectives. For instance, (40%) of respondents noted that in aLrger classes, students of ten become more focused on the entertainment aspect rather than the academic goals of the lesson, which diminishes th eoverall educational value of gamified activities.

Additionally,(55%) of educators identified time constraints, and extensive preparation requireds insignificant obstacles to implementing gamification effectively.They explained that designing and managing gamified lessons is time-consuming and can be difficult to fit into the limited class of time available. Another critical challenge, cited by (45%) of respondents, was the need for resources such as digital tools and technology, which are not always accessible in every educational setting.These concerns underline thefact that while gamification holds promise as a teaching strategy, its practical application is often hindered by logistical and resource-related limitations, making it viable option for some classrooms.

Despite these challenges, the survey indicated that most educators (65 %) viewed gamification as moderate or very effective in fostering student engagement and learning

outcomes. Notably, (70%) of respondents agreed that rewards, levels, and challenges contribute positively to student motivation. However, when considering the applicability of gamification in higher education, (50%) of respondents indicated that while gamified techniques work well for younger students, they may be less effective for older students, who tend to be more intrinsically motivated.This suggests that gamification may need to be adapted based on the age and motivational level of the student demographic. About (30%) of respondents also highlighted the potential demotivating effect of gamification on student sat lower achievement levels, as these students may struggle to progress through levels and earn rewards, leading to frustration and disengagement.

Merits

And Demerits of Gamification in Teaching and Learning Based on Statistical Findings: Merits:

1. Increased Student Engagement: The most significant advantage of gamification, according to the survey, is its ability to increase student engagement. Seventy percent of respondents reported that gamified elements such as rewards, levels, and challenges had a positive impact on students' motivation to participate in class activities.This shows a clear trend toward gamification effectiveness in making lessons more interactive and engaging.
2. Active Learning and Critical Thinking: Approximately (60%) of respondents noted that gamification encourages active participation, with students engaging in problem-solving and critical thinking through game-likes cenarios. By involving students in hands-on learning activities, gamification enhances the retention and understanding of academic content.

3. Personalized Learning Paths: Fifty-five percent of educators highlighted that gamification provides an opportunity for students to progress at their own pace, adjusting the level of difficulty to suit their individual learning speeds.This flexibility can cater to a diverserange of learners and foster a sense of achievement as students advance through different levels.
4. Collaboration and Social Learning: Fifty percent of respondents mentioned that gamified activities can foster collaboration, as students work to gether to solve challenges or achieve group goals. This collaborative a pect not only enhances academic learning but also promotes social skills and teamwork.

Demerits:

1. Entertainment Over Education: A significant concern voiced by (40%) of respondents was that gamification may sometimes shift the focus from educational content to entertainment. This can lead to a superficial understanding of the material, with students prioritizing game mechanics over the actual subject matter.
2. Time-Consuming Setup: Fifty-five percent of educators pointed out that preparing and managing gamified learning activities can be time-consuming, which may detract from the efficiency of lesson planning. In some cases, teachers felt that the effort required to set up a gamified activity was not always justified by the outcomes.
3. Distraction in ALrge Classes: Approximately 45% of respondents indicated that it becomes difficult to manage individual student progress in a gamified environment in large classes.This can result in distractions, where students focus more on the competitive aspects of the game rather than the learning goals.

4. Frustration among Struggling Students: Thirty percent of respondents noted that gamification could demotivate students who are struggling academically. For lower-level achievers, the challenge of progressing through gamified level scan be frustrating, potentially leading to disengagement and a decrease in confidence.

Institutional Support and Professional Development Needs

The survey responses highlighted the significance of institutional support and professional development in facilitating effective gamification integration. A significant (65%) of respondents expressed the need for workshops and training to help educator's better understand how to balance gamification with traditional teaching methods and tailor gamified elementsto meet the diverse needs of students.

Additionally, (50%) of respondents stressed that schools and institutions should provide the necessary resources, such as digital tools and teaching materials, to effectively implement gamification in the classroom. Institutional policy was also highlighted by 40% of respondents, who suggested that clear guidelines and policy framework should be established to ensure that gamification is integrated into the curriculum in a way that aligns with educational objectives.

In conclusion, the survey findings highlight that gamification has immense potential as an effective strategy for fostering student engagement and enhancing learning experiences. However, its uccessful implementation is closely tied to several critical factors, including class, size, resource availability, and students' academic level.The data emphasizes that gamification is most effective when it is thoughtfully and meticulously planned, ensuring harmonious balance with traditional teaching methods to maintain focus on educational objectives. Further more, this studies under scores the importance of institutional support, such as the provision of adequate resources and

opportunities for professional development, to empower educators to implement gamified techniques effectively. By addressing the challenges, such as resource constraints, time management issues, and the need for sufficient training, educators can unlock the full potential of gamification as a dynamic tool that not only enhances student motivation but also enriches the overall learning experience.

Conclusion

The literature shows that gamification can boost motivation, engagement, and learning in English language teaching (ELT). Game elements, such as points, badges, and leader boards, make learning fun and encourage students to stay active and motivated. It also helps students work together, share feedback and solve problems as ateam. Gamified activities provide real-time feedback and allow students to track their progress. However, challenges such as lack of technology, training, and careful planning can affect its success.Teachers need proper support and must balance fun with learning goals. Studies also show that not all students enjoy game-based learning; therefore, it should be optional. Importantly, the content must be well structured, where students complete one step before moving to the next. Most research lacks control groups and focuses only on student opinions.Future studies should also explore teachers' views and test how team work and game-based learning impact academic success more clearly.

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