**Gamification Techniques in Enhancing English for Elementary Level Students**

**Abstract**

*Over the years, educators have been increasingly incorporating various games into their teaching curriculum in an effort to create a fun and engaging learning environment for students. This study aimed to introduce games that will encourage pupils’ class participation in the different phases of teaching-learning activities in elementary English; identify problems and difficulties in the use of the proposed technique, and propose some recommendations to employ as well as improve the proposed technique. The desire to play is basic to every individual, especially among children. Hence, this technique was used by the inclusion of games as a motivational activity, main activity, application, evaluation, and assignments to English teaching. Games in English, if properly carried out, can develop the three domains of learning – cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. The more the learners are involved in the learning process, the better their chances to grasp and attain the objectives set forth by the particular lesson.*

*Games can be obtained commercially or through one's creativity. There are also lots of available games on the internet that teachers can easily download. They may also revise the procedure of the games suited to the level and needs of the learners. Not all games are applicable to every learning situation. Games can be a hindrance in a way to attaining the objectives set forth in concept formation, yet the task breaking these obstacles lies in the hands of the teachers who should be able to strengthen these weaknesses that games may pose. This paper used a mixed methods research design, particularly the sequential explanatory. The researcher identified the least learned topics/concepts in Grade 6 English.*

*Overall, this study provides evidence for the usage of gamification in educational settings. The study revealed specific areas and ways in which gamification applications can be more or less effective. Gamification appears to work better in shorter doses. Gamification is not only focused on making the students participative, but it is also used to enhance their competencies in English, especially the least learned skills. Games help in enhancing the teaching strategies of the teacher to attain the proficiency of pupils in English. Games can also encourage the pupils to participate more in class discussions and activities.* *Additionally, competitive elements are also beneficial in gamification. Lastly, the use of elements that focus on the time on task is extremely important. Studies that appropriately applied time-on-task elements experienced positive results. The study recommended that teachers should have a file of relevant games suited to different lessons. Seminar-workshops and training on the production of games and the application of gamification in education should be organized.*

*Keywords: gamification, games, elementary English, teaching curriculum*

**INTRODUCTION**

Teaching English as a second language is not a laid-back job. It requires heaps of skills, patience and perseverance, and time to commit to perfecting the practice. It is a journey and an unobtainable quest for perfection that nevertheless makes English teachers stronger as they pursue what they need to know and to be able to do their best to satisfy their students' needs.

A fundamental aspect of today’s society is language education. Particularly, English is the most frequently used language on a global scale and is taught as a second language in many schools around the world. On a global scale, it is a widely used language that is taught as a second language in many schools around the world9. In the Philippines, English serves as a vehicle for advancement in most fields of study. It is also used as a primary tool to compete globally. Therefore, it has been a challenge to all English teachers who are in the field to carry out the teaching of English perfectly as it is expected in every classroom. However, the present conditions in most schools in the country seem to be very unimpressive.

It has been observed that major academic problems include English Language proficiency in class discussions and preparing written and oral reports. It has been observed that English teachers are often caught in a dilemma because of the pupils’ poor performance in reading comprehension 13. There are pupils who can read but cannot understand what they are reading, and what is worse is the inability of others to identify the letters of the alphabet.

Effective teaching is only possible if teachers would consider the understanding of the complexity of classroom teaching and learn to develop strategies that will enable them to continually evaluate and improve teaching-learning effectiveness.1 Despite all the in-service training and seminars that have been conducted, pupils and students continue to achieve very poorly in English as reflected in the division and district tests conducted yearly.2

With these pressing problems being encountered in the field of English teaching, innovations in the strategies and approaches of teachers must be considered. One of these is the use of games and in the teaching of English 14.

Amonashvile said that play is an expression of children’s need to act a role and let their imagination run free. Children get to know the world around them through games. Games are also a manifestation of a child’s development-oriented psychic functions 15. These built-in functions need to be used in order to develop. When children are absorbed in a game, they are giving certain functions the opportunity to develop 16. If they switch to another game, dropping the first one, this means that other functions are now being put into action.3

Rabelais stated that learning should be facilitated through natural activities. Montaigne encouraged competition and application of what had been learned, thereby lessening the authority of teachers. Malcaster suggested the use of games, plays, and exercises for learning purposes.5 Dewey adhered to the learning-by-doing rule.6

The basic concept of gamification isn't new, but the word itself is a 21st-century addition to the English lexicon. The word refers to the incorporation of game elements, like point and reward systems, to tasks as incentives for people to participate 17. In other words, gamification is about making something potentially tedious into a game. Through the use of game-based elements, teaching and learning turn into a more collaborative and enjoyable process. The purpose of implementing the gamification concept in education is to maximize learners' motivation and engagement10. Gamification is effective because it taps into people's natural desires for competition and achievement 18. Teachers, managers, and others use gamification to increase participation and improve productivity. Gamification is also often an essential feature in apps and websites designed to motivate people to meet personal challenges, like weight-loss goals and learning foreign languages; tracking your progress is more fun if it feels like a game.7 Well-designed gamified systems can offer continual opportunities for learners to improve their knowledge with spontaneous feedback whilst academic tasks are inculcated throughout the playing experience 11.

Over the years, educators have been increasingly incorporating various games into their teaching curriculum in an effort to create a fun and engaging learning environment for students 12. Although this can be very challenging and time-consuming, interactive, collaborative and competitive games tend to motivate and encourage students' participation in the learning process.8

All of the above-mentioned issues have brought the interest of the researcher to propose the use of games in the teaching of elementary English since it is the stage where the foundations of learning take place. This could also be a remedy to the boredom of elementary pupils and elicit their interest in learning through involvement.

This paper is aimed at introducing the use of gamification in teaching elementary English at the University of Eastern Philippines Laboratory Elementary School, the school year 2016 – 2017. Specifically, it tried to; (1) introduce games that will encourage pupils’ class participation in the different phases of teaching-learning activities in elementary English; (2) identify problems and difficulties in the use of the proposed technique; (3) propose some recommendations to employ as well as improve the proposed technique.

**METHODOLOGY**

The technique was field tested during the school year 2016 – 2017 in the English class of the researcher. This paper used mixed methods research design particularly the sequential explanatory. The researcher identified the least learned topics/concepts in Grade 6 English. The researcher selected appropriate games for the lesson/s. The researcher asked the views of the pupils, student teachers, and other teachers who were involved and used these games.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Generally, the study found that through the use of games in teaching English, the pupils improved in some competencies in English. One of these observations is that the involvement of the pupils in the activity is evident. It was also observed that some pupils were just passive listeners before the introduction of the technique. Next was that their eagerness to participate improved since most of them are interested in games.

The results of this study show that gamification helped build up students’ competitive spirits and increased their cognitive and social growth.

Gamification also helped students become active learners. Students' feedback showed that many students tend to focus only on the fun and usefulness of games in helping them learn, but they overlook one important aspect of this experience. They were engaged and motivated during the process of the game.

Gamification is primarily used as a motivational activity. In this part, it helped the teacher elicit interest and desire of the students to listen and participate. Gamification is not only applicable as a motivational activity. It can also be part of the main lesson. Gamification can be used as the main activity in the case of using the 4A’s structure of the process of the lesson. Games can also be utilized in the students’ application of the day’s lesson. This part concretized the students' learning through their involvement in games. Gamification can also be used in evaluating learning. There are particular games that can be used in this particular part of the lesson process. In this part, games acted as a means of assessing learning. In the giving of assignments or agreements, gamification can also play its part. In this study, online games in English were utilized.

The researcher utilized several games included in the different phases of the teaching-learning process. When a game was used as a motivational activity, it was then that the students showed eagerness to participate. There was an increase in student participation on the duration of the lesson. In the use of the game as the main activity of the lesson, the eagerness of students was still observed. They tended to participate and cooperate more during the game. Since the students were enjoying the activity, it was easy for the teacher-researcher to carry out the objective of the day's lesson. In the application stage, students were able to accomplish the tasks given to them. Although there were some students who found it difficult doing the activity, they were guided properly by the teacher. Several games can also be used in evaluating learning. In this study, the researcher considered the psychomotor skills of the students; this was aside from the development of their cognitive ability of the day's lesson. It was observed that the game was an effective tool in assessing learning. A majority of the students got the perfect score in the given task. The use of the game as an assignment was also utilized in this study. The online game was used in consideration of the fact that the respondents are still in their young age and they are particular nowadays with the use of gadgets and internet.

In this study, the researcher decided to use games in the lessons on sentence construction since most of the students found it boring to construct sentences. Most of them were not motivated to listen to the discussion especially if they knew that the lesson is in sentence construction. The researcher specified this kind of lesson in English since it was the researcher's observations during the English classes.

In using games in the different phases of the teaching-learning process, the teacher must consider the type of games to use based on the particular type of the lessons. Gamification is not only focused on making the students participative, but it is also used to enhance their competencies in English, especially the least learned skills.

Teachers who utilized games in their classes stated the advantages of these games in the improvement of language skills and competence of their students. Generally, learning objectives were met, and active student participation was observed. Teachers also observed that time in the conduct of the game was a problem. Most of the games used consumed much time than the allocated time for its purpose. The teachers also observed the behavior of students when they over-enjoyed themselves while playing games. Most of the students created noise out of their excitement and enjoyment.

In terms of pupils’ participation and the use of games, it was found that they become active participants of the class. The technique encouraged pupils to participate in the accomplishment of the teaching-learning activities. The technique also established a norm among the pupils to always involve themselves at all times.

The researcher observed the transformation of the pupils in terms of participation. With this increase of participation in the class, it was observed that improvement of competence in English was evident. A majority of students answered the given tasks properly. During the use of a game in the motivation stage, students were interested in the things that they needed to do. The students were excited, and that is why participation and cooperation were evident. As to the use of a game as the main activity, excitement and eagerness of the students were still observed. They listened well to the instructions and the reminders of the teacher so that they could perform the task well. A majority of the students got the correct answers and followed the mechanics of the game properly. In using a game as an activity in the application stage, the students were also made to answer the activity given to them. The eagerness and enjoyment were still evident, but more importantly, they were also able to carry out the desired and expected educational outcome of the day's lesson. During the evaluation period, a majority of the students were able to perform the task properly. They constructed sentences correctly based on the given directions. In the assignment or agreement, the students found it enjoyable and exciting since they used their gadgets and the internet in playing games. All students submitted the results of the online game, although there were some pupils who were not able to get the expected perfect scores in the online game.

In the students' opinion on the use of games in teaching English, a majority of them believed that games are commonly used as motivational activity and in the other parts of the lesson. They also assumed that games can be useful tools to catch their interest to participate in the class. A majority of them also said that games can be effective in learning concepts. Generally, a majority of the students pointed out that games can be used in teaching and learning.

On the students' observations on the weaknesses of games as used in the classroom, a majority of them stated that games are time-consuming and may affect other activities in the class. They also believed that it is possible that games can be used as an activity when the teachers/students are bored and also, students may tend to have over-enjoyment when playing games that may result to repeated requests to conduct games even to non-game lessons. On the use of games in the class that may result in negative attitudes of students, a majority of the students were not sure if it is possible. It could be noticed from their response that they were still confused about whether it is a weakness or not. Furthermore, a majority of students did not believe that games could be a waste of time if it is not suited to the lesson. It can be observed that students really appreciated the use of games in the class, whether it was suited to the specific lesson or not. It was noticed that students did not care at all about the type of games to be used in the lessons as long as they were enjoying it.

On the student teachers' feedback on the use of games in the classroom, almost all of them believed on the benefits of the inclusion of games in the teaching-learning process not only as a motivational activity but also in other parts of the process.

In their opinion on the weaknesses of this technique in the classroom setting, a majority of them stated that games were time-consuming and that it affected other activities in the class. The majority of them also believed that the use of games in the class could result in negative attitudes among the learners. The student teachers assumed the possibility of using games in the class as an activity when the teachers/students are bored. The majority of them considered that students may tend to over-enjoy when playing games that may result in repeated requests to play games even to non-game lessons, while most of them agreed that using games in the classroom could be a waste of time if it is not suited to the particular lesson/objective.

During the initial conduct of the games, the researcher had difficulty in adopting which games would be used in the particular lessons in English. There are games that can only be used for a certain type of lesson. Other games could be used by the teacher, but they need to be revised to suit the level and background information of the learners.

On the too much use of this technique also, it may create over-enjoyment to the students and may result to an environment that would prefer games in most lessons and may deprive the conduct of other tasks and important activities in the classes. This may change the behavior of the students in terms of playing games, particularly games that are not applicable to teaching.

Moreover, if students are not properly motivated and guided, the objectives of the lesson will be defeated. Students will view games, which are intended to educate, as a means to spend the period when teachers are unprepared for the main lesson. On the other hand, teachers may lead to abuse the effectiveness of games by applying them to daily lessons even when the nature of the lesson does not call for game applications.

Another problem is the time allotment for the subject. English is only allocated one hour of class time. There are games that need more time to conduct. These games require most of the class time rather than the discussion of the lesson. Learners may also have too much enjoyment that it will create unnecessary noise that may disturb other classes in the nearby classrooms.

The implementation of any method does not usually come out as successfully as it has been originally conceived. Every move to ensure the proper delivery of methods and materials will meet obstacle on the way.

In the case of the implementation of games in teaching elementary English, the time constraint is one of the problems. A game usually takes much time before concepts could be formed. The case is true for most classes with students of average intelligence. In 1 hour or 50-minute time allotment in the English subject, a game or games would likely be used as a motivational activity only. In this study, time was the most observed problem. A majority of the games used in this study consumed most of the time specified for the purpose. Other parts of the process of the lesson were sacrificed just to suffice the time allotted for the subject.

**Table 1. Allotted Time in Using Game in the Different Parts of the Lesson Versus the Actual Time Consumed**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Game used in… | Allotted time | Actual time consumed |
| Motivational Activity  “Pak Ganern” | 6 minutes | 9 minutes |
| Main Activity (4A’s)  “English Bingo” | 10 minutes | 20 minutes |
| Application Stage  “Sentence Race” | 10 minutes | 15 minutes |
| Evaluating Learning  "Bring It to Me Gently" | 10 minutes | 15 minutes |

Another was the level of comprehension of some students. There were some students who hardly understood the mechanics of the games. They tended to ask the teacher and their classmates on the things that they needed to do and accomplish. Although it was just a few of them, this may affect the performance of other students in case of the group games.

The attitude of students in the class toward the use of games was also observed as a problem. Students were likely to just play games rather than listen to the discussion during the non-game lessons. Students thought that all lessons in their English class could use games every day. Students always asked the teacher to play games just to arouse their interest and excitement just because they were bored.

The use of games in teaching English would advance the pupils’ knowledge and would enhance their learning as they will somehow enhance their dedication and interest in the learning aspect.

The use of this technique is relatively new as not all teachers and pupils are aware of the use of these games. But when they are given a task, they would do their best to deliver what has been assigned to them.

Games help in enhancing the teaching strategies of the teacher to attain the proficiency of pupils in English. Games can also encourage the pupils to participate more in the class discussions and activities. This can also help the teacher reach out to those pupils who are not participative and/or introverts. This will arouse the interest of the learners.

Some of the potential benefits of successful gamification initiatives in the classroom include: giving students ownership of their learning; opportunities for identity work through taking on alternate selves; freedom to fail and try again without negative repercussions; chances to increase fun and joy in the classroom; opportunities for [differentiated instruction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Differentiated_instruction); making learning visible; providing a manageable set of subtasks and tasks; inspiring students to discover intrinsic motivators for learning.

The teachers' knowledge of the conduct and process of games is one of the challenges in the implementation of this technique. This means that the teacher should make sure that he/she should have enough knowledge on how to use games application to teaching-learning process. The teacher should be open-minded and embrace the changes that may cause a successful transfer of learning to the learners.

On the too much use of this technique, it may create over-enjoyment to the students and may result in an environment that would prefer games in most lessons and may deprive the conduct of other tasks and important activities in the classes. This may change the behavior of the students in terms of playing games, particularly games that are not applicable to teaching.

If students are not properly motivated and guided, the objectives of the lesson will be defeated. Students will view games, which are intended to educate, as a means to spend the period when teachers are unprepared for the main lesson. On the other hand, teachers may lead to abuse the effectiveness of games by applying them to daily lessons even when the nature of the lesson does not call for game applications.

The selection of games to fit a lesson entails a lot of preparation. Teachers will find this as time-consuming; hence, there will be a tendency to focus on other things than think of varied strategies for teaching. Lazy teachers who are already used to their methods, which according to them they have already mastered, cannot implement these techniques in teaching.

Another issue that may arise is the attitude of the teachers to the approach. Some teachers are hesitant to introduce changes in the classroom. Thus, resort to their usual traditional method of teaching. This negative feeling to change is also attributed to the lack of training and background knowledge of teachers in games and their educational advantages, especially when the teachers are non-English majors.

In this study, the major constraint was the time allotment for the inclusion of games in the different phases of the teaching-learning process. The time allotted for the purpose of the game was not properly followed due to some concerns regarding the pupils' behavior and understanding of the game mechanics and directions.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The desire to play is basic to every individual, especially among children. Hence, this internal device is used to the fullest by the inclusion of games as enrichment and main activity to English teaching.

Games in English, if properly carried out can develop the three domains of learning – the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. The more the learners are involved in the learning process, the better are their chances to grasp and attain the objectives set forth by the particular lesson.

Games are of many kinds. These can be obtained commercially or through one's creativity, can be invented. There are also lots of available games on the internet that teachers can easily download. They may also revise the procedure of the games suited to the level and needs of the learners. Not all games are applicable to every learning situation. Games can be a hindrance in a way to attaining the objectives set forth in concept formation, yet the task breaking these obstacles lies in the hands of the teachers who should be able to strengthen these weaknesses that games may pose.

Overall, this study provides evidence for the usage of gamification in educational settings. More importantly, the variables have revealed specific areas and ways in which gamification applications can be more or less effective. Gamification appears to work better in shorter doses. Additionally, competitive elements are also beneficial in gamification. Lastly, the use of elements that focuses on time on task is extremely important. Studies that appropriately applied time on task elements experienced positive results.

These results suggest that gamification could have definite applications in the field of second language acquisition. As of yet, gamification is a new field that has rarely been used in the teaching of English. However, with the emergence of language learning applications, there is space for research to be done using gamification in language learning. At this point, more research is necessary to determine the exact effects gamification can have when used in SLA. From the benefits shown by gamification in general and the importance of specific moderator variables, evidence strongly suggests that gamification could have beneficial effects in the language classroom.

The Theory of Gamified Learning and Conditioning Theory were confirmed in this study since the use of games in English classes elicits positive attitudes on the part of the students, particularly on active class participation and involvement. On the Expectancy Theory, Goal-setting Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, the students were motivated to learn more and easily acquire the necessary competencies expected from them since games were used as a means of motivation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since games were effective in the Grade Six Level English, it is recommended that these games may be used in different grade levels, considering some revisions on the mechanics in a particular grade level.

Since games in English develop the three domains of learning, these should be considered part of the learning process. Teachers should find time to introduce games so as to create new and varied experiences for the learners.

Games should be properly selected. Teachers should know when not to apply games in their lessons. Games should serve as means to an end, and not a filler for boredom or a scapegoat for unpreparedness.

Since time allotment was greatly affected when using games in the classroom, it is recommended to ensure procedures that will lessen the excess time in using games in the lesson. Teachers should see to it that mechanics and directions are properly stated and explained to avoid confusion among the students. Revisions or modifications of the games could also be a possible solution to avoid the consumption of more time in playing games during classes.

Teachers should have a file of relevant games suited to different lessons. Some games are commercially produced, but it is advisable for teachers to be creative, thus producing their own games.

A study should be conducted assessing the effectiveness of games in the lessons in English. Seminar-workshops and trainings on the production of games and application of gamification in education should be organized.

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