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Elsa Melania Rodríguez López¹[0009-0009-1052-8152], Augusto Paolo Bernal Parraga²[0000-0003-0289-8427],
Olayis Verónica Cuero González³[0000-0003-4670-5105], Laura Comanecy Gavilanez González⁴[0000-0003-4777-7581],
Silvia Tatiana Merchán Ortiz⁵[0009-0007-2730-4062]

¹ Ministerio de Educación, Deporte y Cultura, Ecuador,

² Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas ESPE, Ecuador,

³⁻⁵ Universidad Estatal de Bolívar, Ecuador

¹elsam.rodriguezl@educacion.gob.ec, ²abernal2009@gmail.com, ³olayis.cuero@ueb.edu.ec, ⁴lgavilanez@ueb.edu.ec,
⁵silvia.merchan@ueb.edu.ec

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Abstract

This research examines the influence that gamification has on motivation and the development of students' communicative competence in the Basic General Education level of English as a Foreign Language in public schools in Manabí, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, and Los Ríos, regions of Ecuador. The study took a quantitative, non-experimental approach with a cross-sectional design. The research consisted of 245 students, of which 135 were female and 110 were male. The study selected students attending morning in-person classes. The digital tools used were Quizizz, Kahoot!, and Wordwall, and were supplemented with gamified group work designed to improve the students' English communicative skills. Questionnaires, tests, rubrics, and observer charts for motivation and communicative competence were the natural instruments for collecting data. The research demarcated that the students' motivation and performance after the intervention improved. The qualitative data appreciated that learners brought about an increase in their speaking and their willingness to communicate and interact with colleagues. The analysis of this research identified similarities with current literature on gamification, active methodologies, and technology for learners' language acquisition. The study finds that gamification as a pedagogical approach in the Ecuadorian public school system Secondary School English as a Foreign Language.

Keywords: gamification, motivation, EFL, communication, secondary education.

Resumen

Esta investigación analizó cómo la gamificación impacta la motivación y la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes en Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ELE) en la Educación General Básica en Manabí, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas y Los Ríos en Ecuador. La investigación utilizó un enfoque cuantitativo que adoptó un diseño cuasi-experimental con pretest y postest. Participaron un total de 245 estudiantes, 135 mujeres y 110 hombres, todos en la sesión matutina. Se emplearon herramientas de gamificación que incluyen Quizizz, Kahoot!, Wordwall, y actividades colaborativas que ayudan a las habilidades comunicativas en la intervención. Para recopilar datos, se utilizaron cuestionarios de motivación, pruebas, rúbricas y observación en clase. Se obtuvieron varios resultados positivos tras la intervención. También hubo un aumento en el número de estudiantes, en su confianza para comunicarse y en las actividades colaborativas realizadas. Esta investigación determina que las metodologías activas y las técnicas de gamificación del aprendizaje fomentan la participación y las capacidades comunicativas de los estudiantes en la educación secundaria en ELE.

Palabras clave: gamificación, EFL, motivación, competencia comunicativa, educación secundaria.

INTRODUCTION

Secondary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction necessitates pedagogy that integrates motivation, sustained participation, and communicative competence skills. Gamification, a pedagogy that borrows elements typical of games such as points, badges, and challenges, as well as narratives and leaderboards to achieve engagement, has a unique role to play to positive impact participation and engagement and direct and measurable progress toward desired academic outcomes. Gamification has particular impact on foreign language acquisition as it provides spaces that depict participation and create interactive engagement and, therefore, meaningful and impactful learning (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019; Sailer & Homner, 2020).

The effects of gamification are particularly evident in students' motivation, learner autonomy, and communicative interaction in EFL settings. Gamification is considered the most effective resource to perform the English language oral and written tasks and achieve impact in communication. Various systematic reviews categorize the gamification as a learning resource that has a significant impact and positive feelings toward the process of learning English and promotes both extracurricular and in-class participation (Zhang & Hasim, 2023; Chan & Lo, 2024). On the other hand, more recent bibliometric studies show that gamification in EFL and foreign language teaching have motivated the majority of research, especially in the areas of motivation, digital education, and communicative skills (Shang, 2025). Recent empirical research increasingly suggests that gamification can more accurately be defined as a teaching design to aid with the maintenance of students' cognitive, emotional, and social engagement concerning given learning materials, as opposed to solely a rewards apparatus. Comprehensive reviews, such as the one conducted by Bai et al. (2020), show that gamification can enhance learning outcomes, especially when specific and clear learning goals accompany the integration of gamification elements. Similar conclusions were reported by Sailer and Homner (2020), whose studies reflected the positive influence of gamification on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral outcomes, but found the influence of gamification highly dependent on the given learning contexts, instructional design, and the alignment of gamification elements to the learning objectives.

As far as EFL contexts are concerned, Li (2021) showed a notable positive influence on lexical achievement, student motivation, and self-confidence as a result of the implementation of game-based vocabulary learning applications. The same conclusion was drawn by Panmei and Waluyo (2023), who found an increase in participation and learning as a result of gamification in English vocabulary training, especially given the session structure of in-class activities with immediate feedback and challenges of increasing difficulty. Meccawy et al. (2023) also found the same outcome as path of game-based learning regarding linguistic performance and self-confidence in EFL learners in contexts of disquiet and uneasiness of the learners' part in using the given target learning objectives.

Several more recent works have studied different types of digital resources. Zhang and Crawford (2024) studied Quizizz today as a gamified formative assessment resource and discovered greater motivation to

complete and participate in assessments. Temel and Cesur (2024) showed that Web 2.0 resources such as Kahoot!, Socrative, Quizizz, and Mentimeter, significantly enhanced motivation and achievement in EFL learners. Moreover, Tsai (2024) concluded that gamification, along with collaborative dynamics, feedback, and progressive learning that deepen the learning goals of gamified EFL learning, led to greater motivation and participation of EFL learners.

In the last decades of research in Latin America, the growing use of active methodologies and emerging technologies have transformed educational processes. Alarcón Burneo et al. (2024) argued that secondary education students' understanding of abstract concepts and meaningful learning is further developed through the use of manipulative resources and dynamic strategies. Likewise, Alarcón Burneo et al. (2024) argued that dynamic and manipulative strategies strengthen meaningful learning and student participation in secondary education contexts. This also helps deepen the pedagogical innovations in the classroom.

There is existing research that presents the values of digital tools and methodologies that offer active participation opportunities in learning. According to Castillo Baño et al. (2024) modern classroom digital tools enhance student engagement and the development of modern citizenship skills. In the field of language and literature, Mora Villamar (2024) reported the 21st century teaching methodologies that inspire student. Subsequently, Sarango Lucas et al. (2025) became the first to show within the context of primary education that digital storytelling as a pedagogical strategy promotes and enhances reading comprehension and motivates the active participation of students.

Also, the ongoing development of the latest tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) have created even greater opportunities to innovate in the field of education. Troya Santilán et al. (2024) reported that the AI-based design of game-like experiences increases the level of learning and player engagement, Zamora Franco et al. (2024) emphasized that collaborative strategies supported by technology foster participation, interaction, and active learning processes. The studies cited above suggest that the design of gamified and interactive environments may have a positive impact on the learning of the English language as well.

Lastly, the most recent studies show the importance of describing some socio-emotional and family-oriented characteristics as influencers of student performance and engagement. Troya Santilán et al. (2024) reported that AI-driven gamified environments enhance motivation, engagement, and active participation in educational settings. In line with that claim, Fajardo López et al. (2024) suggested that learning efforts are reinforced by family involvement and new support tools. Other researchers who correlated social media with self-esteem in adolescents reported that learning environments shape motivation and engagement positively, and influence self-perception in adolescents. In particular, Vargas Castro et al. (2024) reported that emotionally supportive learning environments positively influence motivation, self-confidence, and student participation.

Despite the increasing interest in the role of gamification in learning EFL, there are substantial research gaps pertaining to this field at the secondary education level. Since most studies focus on higher education

learning and virtual environments, adolescent gamification studies in secondary education are scarce. Moreover, despite the extensive research on motivation, there has been little to no research on the effect of gamification on communicative competence. This is the ability to function and interact in English, within a given context. This gap is especially significant, given that secondary school students have a low Willingness to Communicate, a high fear of making errors, a lack of oral exposure, and a form of exposure that involves the memorization of linguistic rules and structures.

Therefore, the primary research problem addressed in this paper is the degree to which gamification learning impacts motivation and communicative competence among secondary school students, within the context of EFL. Gamification is one way to make English classes places of meaningful learning, and as a result, interacts with many other variables. These include, in particular, planning and teaching, the type of feedback, the challenges posed to the students, the relevance of the challenges, and the contextual goals of the particular linguistic tasks. (Zhang & Hasim, 2023; Chan & Lo, 2024).

Designing experiences that combine elements of motivation and communicative performance has been the driving force for including the theory of motivation and communicative performance in English as a Foreign Language classes. From this standpoint, gamification intends to encourage persistence of students, lessen the degree of the affective filter, and predispose students to employ the language using methods such as missions, role-playing, and collaborative tasks, as well as providing immediate feedback. From this viewpoint, a theory of motivation, i.e. Self-Determination Theory, suggests that motivation is further enhanced in students when learning activities or tasks meet the needs of students to feel self-initiated and competent in their learning, and also socially connected to others (Escobar Fandiño et al., 2019). This is particularly evident in the adolescents segment and may be reflected in learning tasks where students select their own learning techniques, receive feedback on performance, and engage in learning activities of a significant objective.

This study is directed toward exploring the influence of motivation and change of communicative performance due to the introduction of gamified tasks in EFL classrooms among secondary students. With this objective in mind, motivated performance in terms of the level of motivation, the change in communicative performance due to the introduction of tasks, and the functional use of English would be analyzed. Additionally, students' feedback on the role of the gamified tasks in the process of learning and the communicative tasks would also be taken into consideration.

Gamification involves applying game components and dynamics in non-game settings to improve engagement and motivation. This method has become important for application in education with the student involvement shift away from the instructor to focus more on the student for learning (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). This change has affected the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The teaching of EFL via gamification emphasizes the learning and development of dynamic and engaging environments for language use and communicative interaction.

The first of the theories used to support the case for gamification is often referred to as Self-determination Theory (SDT). The argument is advanced by Deci and Ryan that motivation is affected and often increased when one is engaged in an act that meets the demands of the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and social relatedness. This is the case in EFL where gamified environments challenge the language user to respond, work together, and maintain a level of interaction that strengthens motivation (Escobar Fandiño et al., 2019). This motivation is achieved regardless of the level of language focus required and is further supported by the assertions of Sailer and Homner (2020).

The other theory that one should use to support gamification is the constructivist approach to learning. This theory argues that knowledge and understanding should be employed to solve a problem by engaging in social interaction with the problem. Through the use of gamified education, students are encouraged to work on a problem that learning is the result of collaborative and communicative tasks. This is especially important in the learning of a foreign language.

In language acquisition, arguably, one of the most important of the so-called “affective” factors is motivation. There is a body of evidence which indicates that more motivated learners manifest greater levels of participation, persistence, and overall linguistic achievement. In that regard, the introduction of game elements, i.e. gamification, has seen a robustness of interest and research in the enhancement of interest and engagement of EFL learners.

Zhang and Hasim (2023) raise the issue of the role of gamification in raising the levels of motivation, participation and even shifting more positive attitudes in language learners in EFL/ESL. The use of digital language learning tools such as Kahoot!, Quizizz and Duolingo as game-based elements creates an interactive space that dampens linguistic related anxieties and even motivates the learners to practice consistently. Likewise, Chan and Lo (2024) state that gamified learning environments enhance learners’ emotional engagement, and stimulate even more positive and productive learning atmospheres.

The role of game-based motivation is three-pronged with extrinsic motivators, perception of progress, and immediate feedback. Li (2021) argues that gamification of vocabulary-learning applications sharply increases learners’ self-efficacy and positively impacts their overall linguistic achievement. Gamification sustains participation and motivation more urgently when progressive tasks and teamwork are incorporated, so Panmei and Waluyo (2023) argue.

The goal of many secondary schools is to get students to a threshold of proficiency in English. This includes a good understanding of English grammar and some of the practical use of convertible skills. Therefore, in the prevocational stages of education, the use of gamified communication is appropriate to encourage students to engage in collaborative work discussions to simulate realistic communication situations.

Gamified communication facilitates the improvement of social skills, oral communication, and confidence in the participant of the activity. Gamification, when used as a pedagogical strategy, is valuable in formative assessments in class. Gamified formative assessments increase communication and presentation skills in students. Game-based learning increases self-efficacy and performance in the students.

Gamified communication breaks communication gaps and reduces communication anxiety. In secondary school, when students are learning English, many students experience anxiety when speaking English due to a fear of making a mistake. Therefore, gamification pedagogically responds to communicative competence.

There is a lot of research that uses gamified techniques to teach students English. However, if we compare this literature to other areas of education, we see an imbalance, mainly in secondary education pedagogy and communicative competence studies. Therefore, the literature does not focus on communication, and the studies are unbalanced on academic achievement and motivation.

Another relevant gap concerns the length of the gamified interventions. Many investigate the short-term effects, and studies of the long-term effects on the level of oral communication and the actual interaction of learners in English are lacking (Chan & Lo, 2024). In addition, the latest bibliometric reviews indicate that the field of gamification in EFL has developed toward personalized, AI-assisted, and immersive learning, but empirical studies in real school settings are lacking (Shang, 2025).

Considering the above, the present work assumes that the introduction of gamified techniques in EFL secondary school teaching can increase learner motivation and help develop their skill level, in this case composing of oral communication, in a variety of ways by encouraging a more dynamic, participatory, and interactive learning process.

METHODS AND RESOURCES

The study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive-correlational and a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design. This methodology was relevant as the study sought to measure the impact of a gamified instructional intervention on Basic General Education students' learning motivation towards English and on their communicative competence. Recent studies suggest that it is appropriate to use quasi-experimental design to measure the effects of gamified activities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, when participants are already formed in school groups, and random assignment is not possible (Zhang & Crawford, 2024; Temel & Cesur, 2024).

The intervention was based on the principles of gamification, which integrates planned learning activities that incorporate elements characteristic of games such as challenges, points, badges, feedback systems, achievements, driving progress, and collaboration. Gamification is bound to yield positive results in academic performance, levels of motivation, and comparative levels of engagement of gamified participants with the concept of instructional dynamics, as evidenced by several meta-analyses (Bai et al., 2020; Sailer & Homner, 2020; Li et al., 2023). Moreover, with the same instructional dynamics, gamification has been shown to significantly improve the engagement, and communicative use of a foreign language among learners in the educational environments of English as a Foreign Language (Zhang & Hasim, 2023; Chan & Lo, 2024).

From the Ecuadorian provinces of Manabí, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, and Los Ríos, the sample of this research derived Basic General Education students enrolled in morning face-to-face classes at public

educational institutions. A total of 245 students participated in the research, with an arrangement of 135 and 110 drawn from the respective female and male genders.

The sample was chosen based on the accessibility of the institution, the presence of English teachers, and the permissions granted by the education authorities, all of which justified the use of the non-probabilistic convenience sampling method. This approach is widely used in applied educational research, as well as in studies that focus on real school environments and complete classrooms. Due to its size, the sample was appropriate for conducting descriptive analysis, mean comparison, and correlation of variables, as it was larger than the minimum established for studies of quasi-experimental nature based in classrooms. It also made it possible to observe differential trends based on gender, province, and initial performance.

The intervention included the use of gamification through digital platforms for motivation and English practice. These include Quizizz, Kahoot!, Wordwall, Liveworksheets, Google Forms, and various interactive audio-visual materials. These tools allowed the integration of interactive challenges, listening tasks, collaborative missions, and real-time participation activities.

The use of Web 2.0 tools to teach English as a Foreign Language has positively impacted students' motivation and interest and has led to the improvement of their academic performance, especially regarding the integration of activities that provide immediate feedback and the necessity of active student participation (Temel & Cesur, 2024). More precisely, Quizizz is seen as an excellent example of gamified formative assessment that, by spelling out learning, leads to students' participation and focus, as well as accuracy in English (Zhang & Crawford, 2024). Recent evidence also indicates that gamification in the context of EFL has a positive effect on self-efficacy, as well as on the level of engagement and the perception of enjoyment associated with the process of learning a language (Meccawy et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2025).

Data collection relied on several main instruments. First, participants filled out a motivation questionnaire regarding learning English. This questionnaire was implemented using a Likert scale to assess various motivational factors toward English language learning, include the participant's interest, classroom engagement, self-confidence, persistence, and language usability. Second, a communicative competence test was required to assess oral performance, comprehension, functional vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and appropriateness of the given communicative context.

Third, an analytical communicative performance rubric was filled out during the oral, guided, and role-playing dialogues and collaborative activities. Lastly, a classroom observation checklist was developed to indicate the participants' participation, interaction, the completion of challenges, and incidental English during the intervention.

Instruments underwent validation through expert judgment, with particular emphasis on relevance, clarity, and coherence, and appropriateness to the learner's level. As for the reliance of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was utilized, while the communicative competence rubric was analyzed with internal consistency and inter-rater agreement. The motivations and performance indicators, along with communicative interaction, were included, as motivated self-confidence, language anxiety, and

communicative competence have a direct influence on the extent of students' willingness to communicate in a second language (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019; Jin & Lee, 2022).

For the given quantitative data, both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized. In the descriptive stage, motivation and communicative competence were measured, before and after the intervention, in terms of frequency and percentage; as well as in terms of mean score and standard deviation. Normality tests were then conducted to determine the use of either parametric or non-parametric statistics.

As appropriate in relation to the normality of the distributions, the paired samples t-test or the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was chosen to evaluate the pretest and posttest results. Also, changes in the magnitude concerning the interventions was determined by calculating Cohen's d. Pearson or Spearman coefficient correlations were also used to determine how the relatable constructs by the interventions were distributed and how the variables of motivation and communicative competence were associated.

The study was done in accordance to the guidelines guiding educational research, especially those involving participants of lower age. An approach was made to the relevant authorities, and informed consent was gained. Passive consent was also gained to mark the lower age of the participants. Participants were asked on numerous occasions if they would like to withdraw and that doing so would not impact their grades in any manner.

All data collected was done so under the mark of confidentiality of participants and in accordance to guidelines. Marked data was given to ensure the students name was not disclosed, and findings were done so to show data as a whole. The gamified intervention sought to limit the scope of concern for the self image of participants post intervention. The proposed study allowed the researchers to determine the impact of gamified interventions, while the assessment of active methodologies in the public educational sector of Ecuador was provided as evidence. Also, the proposed study allowed the integration of motivation and communicative competence in the school context, areas that have seldom been researched.

The study also shows some restrictions. One, because of the convenience sample, the assessment cannot be universalized for all Ecuadorian students. Two, because the intervention was directed to the morning face-to-face classes, comparisons cannot be made with evening, rural, or virtual educational environments. Third, some of the effects related to the improvement of communicative competence can be attributed to the students' previous contact with English, family support, technological availability, and the students' starting level of English. Finally, the proposed design is replicable despite these restrictions and describes the target population, the sample, the instruments, the procedural and the methodological steps of the intervention, the analysis procedures, and the procedures for dealing with ethics.

RESULTS

Most participants showed noticeable improvements in both motivation and communicative performance after the intervention. On the motivation scale, the mean score increased from 3.08 in the pretest to 4.12 in the posttest, with a mean difference of 1.04 points. Regarding communicative competence, the average score increased from 58.43 to 76.91 out of 100. This tendency may indicate that integrating challenges,

badges, and immediate feedback encouraged more active participation in English-related tasks. This pattern is consistent with recent studies reporting positive effects of gamification on motivation, performance, and participation in EFL contexts (Zhang & Hasim, 2023; Zhang & Crawford, 2024).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Motivation and Communicative Competence

Variable	Time	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.
EFL Motivation	Pretest	245	3.08	0.62	1.80	4.40
EFL Motivation	Posttest	245	4.12	0.51	2.70	5.00
Communicative Competence	Pretest	245	58.43	10.27	32.00	79.00
Communicative Competence	Posttest	245	76.91	8.64	51.00	96.00

Note. N = number of participants; M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Data obtained from pretest and posttest assessments administered during the gamified intervention.

The paired samples t-test showed significant differences in motivation, $t(244) = 22.84$, $p < .001$, and communicative competence, $t(244) = 26.17$, $p < .001$. The effect size was high for both variables, confirming the hypothesis of improvement after the intervention.

The analysis of classroom observations and teacher records allowed the identification of four emerging categories: increased oral participation, greater communicative confidence, peer collaboration, and positive perceptions of gamified platforms. The category with the highest frequency was active oral participation, observed in 198 students, followed by communicative confidence in 181 cases. These findings complement the quantitative data, as they show that statistical improvement was not limited to test scores but was also reflected in observable behaviors during EFL activities.

Table 2
Emerging Categories from the Qualitative Analysis

Emerging Category	f	%	Observed Evidence
Active oral participation	198	80.8	Greater spontaneous use of English
Communicative confidence	181	73.9	Reduced fear of making mistakes
Peer collaboration	169	69.0	Support during group challenges
Reward-based motivation	156	63.7	Interest in points and badges
Immediate feedback	149	60.8	Autonomous error correction

Note. f= frequency. Data obtained from classroom observations and qualitative records during the gamified intervention.

The qualitative data substantiate the findings of Temel and Cesur (2024), which stated that the motivation and academic performance of students using Kahoot!, Quizizz, Socrative, and Mentimeter in EFL classes are improved. The results are also in agreement with Meccawy et al. (2023), who demonstrated the positive impact of game-based learning on performance and self-efficacy.

The combination of both findings of quantitative and qualitative data shows that students who participated in the study increased their scores after the given the intervention and also displayed a higher level of willingness and comfort to communicate in English. The positive and significant correlation of the posttest motivation and posttest communicative competence was identified with Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .61$, and $p = .001$ ($p < .001$), indicating that motivating participants led to improved level of communicative performance.

This finding indicates that the recent literature supports participants' positive impact and the improvement of gamification in learning, leading to an increased motivation to participate and an improvement in the level of gamified learning when it was conducted with specific pedagogical goals defined (Zhang and Hasim, 2023; Chan & Lo, 2024). Conversely, some of the qualitative data also indicate that most of the participants were motivated and willing to participate in learning activities to earn external tokens of appreciation, rather than to meet the goal of the communicative learning activity. This is an indication of the divergence of gamified activities and/or learning. Thus, a balance in the gamified learning activities is needed that properly incorporates tokens of appreciation with goal-oriented communicative learning activities.

The findings point to the positive impact of gamification on modern learning models utilized in teaching, leading to increased motivation and improvement in gamified learning progress of reflective students from EFL classrooms, as demonstrated in the improvement of scores on the posttest, improvement in communicative competence, and increase in the students' willingness to participate.

These findings carry significant educational implications for the public schools of the provinces of Manabí, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, and Los Ríos; they show how gamified strategies can improve morning face-to-face English classes. Future research, however, needs to incorporate control groups, longitudinal follow up, and comparative analytical studies per province, sex, and original language level.

DISCUSSION

The results show that the gamified intervention significantly improved students' motivation and communicative competence. Overall, the evidence gathered throughout the intervention supports the initial assumptions of the study, and more active due to the presence of gamified challenges, badges, immediate feedback, and collaborative work. In teaching EFL, an increase in motivation and active participation, in this specific case, is more than the enthusiasm shown by students as it represents the development of the functional use of English. This aspect becomes particularly relevant because motivation in the learning of foreign languages is directly related to the attitudes of language learners, their learning, and success (Habók et al, 2022).

Similarly, the observed improvements in communicative competence indicate that gamification is applicable as a practice of pedagogical mediation, positively, because of the reduction of affective factors. This improvement is indicative of the positive effect of gamified interventions on the language skills of learners (Dehghanzadeh et al, 2021). From a curricular perspective, the results provide the justification in this case that instruction strive to include communicative, collaborative, and constructively work to remove the repeated expression of the same grammatical structures and shift emphases to the use of the language. In a social sense, the results of the study indicate that in the public schools of Ecuador, the purposeful implementation of methodological innovations has the potential to reduce the existing pedagogical deficit and increase learning experiences. For example, Aráuz Cerezo et al. (2026) state that cooperative learning trends positively impact motivation and achievement of students and innovations in the area of active

learning support the development of reading skills and learning to enhance the active methods used in modern teaching as discussed by Madrid Toapanta et al. (2024). Similarly, so do the works of Vargas Castro et al. "Activating Pedagogy: Pedagogy and Dance for Social Imagination." and Habók et al.

(2024) shows that employing some psychological strategies that build up self-esteem demonstrates improvements not only in academic achievement but also in a positive increase related to confidence in communication of the participants.

The results align with global research demonstrating benefits from gamification in EFL contexts. Almufareh (2021) noted that personal distinctions affect the success of gamification. The qualitative part of this study shows that, unlike Almufareh's study, not all the students in the research gamification systems reacted the same way towards the competitive structures and rewards. Additionally, Foroutan Far and Taghizadeh (2024) found both types of gamification promote the learning of vocabulary and achieving a flow state, supporting the use of a technology-pedagogy fusion for learning that incorporates both digital platforms and face-to-face interventions.

While there was evidence of agreement with the literature, there were also aspects that appeared to contradict existing research. Several studies conducted during interventions in higher education focused on the digital age report mainly improvements in vocabulary or reading skills. In this case, the study reports improvement in participants' oral communication and an increase in confidence to communicate. This may be related to the nature of the activities which emphasized communicative roles and challenges. Research on language games that use the Virtual Reality (VR) environment also suggests that VR technologies can increase motivation and learning of a foreign language (Pinto et al., 2021; Špruk et al., 2025), and involve technologies that are far more advanced than those that are typically found in public education systems. These findings are also supported by Cosquillo Chida et al. (2025) that argue that ICT-supported interactive strategies stimulate critical and advanced skills in problem-solving. In turn, Zamora Franco et al. (2024) highlights collaborative approaches that integrate technology to develop a teaching strategy while promoting innovative learning. Ruiz et al. (2024) advocate for the recent modifications in learning to be more active and set in reality to fit the current style of learning.

The findings have meaningful potential for impact on face-to-face English instruction in Basic General Education. At first, the findings allude to thinking about gamification in practitioners' classroom settings as part of planned instructional gaps, as opposed to simply gamification to be intended as a recreational pastime. Teachers implementing such a communicative approach should design instructional sequences in which they provide linguistic instruction, criteria for anticipated learning gaps, immediate feedback, and communicative activities. In the field of EFL, classroom settings identified for active communicative instruction really thrive on the level of participation and on the 'emotional climate' of the learning tasks designed (Ye, 2024).

Secondly, the findings encouraged the use of several easily available technological resources, such as quiz platforms, vocabulary games, rubrics, varied digital resources, and games. Users should, however, resist

the temptation to use such resources to create a competitive learning environment based on extrinsic motivation, as that would detract from developing intrinsic motivation to learn as a core objective. New research employing joyful and playful AI-based resources and serious games demonstrate that when the learning and communication focus is on the accomplishment of learning and communicative goals, rather than achieving learning goals of 'earning points' {Pitucosuvam et al., 2025, Lago-Ferreiro et al.}, that the core technological component can be very effective. In that vein, adaptative platforms of AI to personalize the English classroom through communicative objectives, offer the practitioner an opportunity to have the learning goals based on meaningful learning objective rather than simply learning goals (Chicaiza et al., 2025; Villacreses Sarzoza et al., 2025; Troya Santillan et al., 2024).

This study contributes to the understanding of gamification use in Ecuadorian public school EFL classrooms through empirical evidence that has been adequately situated in context. Where previous studies examine Higher-ed or high-tech contexts, this study examines Basic General Education students in the Provinces of Manabí, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, and Los Ríos. It expands the gamification state of the art for public school contexts, as long as the conditions regarding students' curriculum, technology, and socioculture are met.

Theoretically, the dimensions of motivation, participation, and communicative competence were delineated and discussed as interrelated dimensions. This aligns with the recent emerging theory regarding language acquisition as a nested process of cognition, emotion, and social activities (Karatsiori et al., 2025). From this aspect, this study contributes to the creation of a systematic framework that integrates a communicative rubric, feedback, and observation, and that aims to facilitate replication in other contexts. Lastly, From a social perspective, the research has shown that even low-cost and simple strategies can help to increase students' level of engagement in public schools and to make the teaching process of the English language more dynamic and with greater (participation). Within this framework, Troya Santillán et al. (2024), state that the promotion of innovative teaching practices hinges on educational leadership of a transformational nature, and Yaule Chingo et al. (2024) point out that inclusive methods promote greater learning and participation in students with a more diverse set of educational requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research is to investigate the potential effects of gamification on students' motivation and the development of the four core competencies -- listening, speaking, reading and writing, in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning. The study involved 3 classes of 35 second-year students (a total of 105 students) and utilized a pre-post survey and semi-structured interview. The Class of the Study was 3.53. Based on the findings, it can be stated that the gamification increases students' motivation to learn English.

The findings from the present study highlighted how motivation and the push for gamification and other learning strategies for creating an engaging, student-centered English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom impacted competencies. It showed how the design of advanced instructional gamification

reduced learners' anxieties and encouraged motivation through class challenge, in-game reward, and learning game content. The results of the present study complement the ideas of modern methodologies which underscore the importance of active and reflective learning combined with communicative language teaching for the successful acquisition of a foreign language.

The results reveal that not only does gamification have the potential to impact student motivation and push learning, it can also foster communicative competencies of students even in a low technologically-oriented context. The nature and design of the instructional produced gamified learning which is a relevant activity in the design of gamification centered learning for EFL students. The research is unique in the Ecuadorian context and provides a basis for further developing gamification centered teaching and learning.

The research also establishes the connection between motivation and communicative competence. It was found that students who gamified activities with maximum engagement and enjoyment showed improved communicative performance. It is clear that there is a relationship between the cognitive and the affective components of language learning that need to be accommodated during learning. The finding also affirms the importance of motivational theories and active methodologies in today's EFL learning.

Some limitations should be accepted. The non-probabilistic sampling method observed in this research somewhat informed the exclusion of the window of control. It was notable that the length of the intervention was not sufficient to comment on the effects of the intervention for the purposes of this research. The gaps in performance can be attributed to the pre-existing differences in the level of English of the students, teacher mediation, access to digital resources and the differences in the socio-educational level of the various provinces.

It is important that researchers make use of longitudinal research in the future to gain a better understanding of the impact of gamification on English language learning. It is important to discover more on AI, and how it, along with immersive instructional activities and gamified learning, can be used to improve the quality of English language teaching.

The resources reveal that the gamification of teaching is a highly motivational intervention, especially in the field of language learning. The study reveals that teaching language through the use of gamification is highly motivational in getting learners to communicate enthusiastically and creatively. The positive effects of gamification are evident in teachers' and students' digital participation in the English classes.

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