



Teachers' Perspectives on Gamification in ELT Enhancing Student Engagement Through ICT

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2025-07-14 Revised: 2026-04-29 Accepted: 2026-04-29</p> <p>Keywords: <i>EFL;</i> <i>inclusive classroom;</i> <i>teacher perception;</i> <i>vocabulary instruction;</i> <i>vocabulary learning difficulties</i></p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.7512</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Nur Layli Faiqiah fey@students.unnes.ac.id Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FBS Universitas Negeri Semarang</p>	<p><i>Gamification has emerged as a promising instructional strategy to address low student engagement in English language classrooms. While previous studies show its effectiveness in enhancing motivation, limited research focuses on how pre-service teachers apply gamification supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) during teaching practicum. This study aims to explore how gamification is used to increase student engagement and the challenges faced by pre-service English teachers. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected from 20 respondents through open-ended questionnaires based on Engagement Theory. The findings show that gamification fosters collaboration, creativity, and real-world application of English through interactive platforms like Kahoot! Quizizz, and Wordwall. However, challenges such as limited ICT infrastructure, time constraints, and lack of training were also identified. The study concludes that with thoughtful design and support, gamification can be a powerful pedagogical approach to promote meaningful engagement in English language learning.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Student engagement remains a persistent challenge in English language learning, particularly in junior high school classrooms where teacher-centered approaches are still widely used. Many students tend to be passive and less motivated during lessons, which negatively affects their learning outcomes. This issue is echoed by Siregar & Degeng (2025), who found that pre-service teachers frequently observed low student participation in English classes, especially when traditional teaching methods were implemented. These findings highlight the urgent need for more interactive and student-centered instructional strategies.

One promising approach to address this issue is gamification, defined as the application of game design elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, rewards, and challenges into non-game contexts to enhance engagement and motivation (Christopoulos and Mystakidis, 2023). In educational settings, gamification has been increasingly utilized to transform routine learning activities into more engaging and goal-oriented experiences. Titania (2024) emphasized that gamification can align with students' preferences, particularly when it is carefully designed to support curriculum objectives.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), gamification has gained attention as an innovative pedagogical tool that fosters a more dynamic and meaningful learning experience. Research indicates that gamification can reduce language anxiety, encourage collaboration, and improve students' communication skills Chan and Lo (2024). It also supports multiple dimensions of student engagement emotional, behavioral, and cognitive especially when aligned with principles such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Stocker, 2020; Christopoulos and Mystakidis, 2023). Furthermore, elements such as feedback, quizzes, and challenges have been identified as particularly effective in promoting active participation in language learning.

The importance of engagement is further emphasized in the digital era, where students are more responsive to interactive and technology-based learning environments. Gamification, particularly when integrated with ICT tools, has been shown to enhance students' motivation, participation, and overall learning experience. Studies have demonstrated that tools such as Kahoot! and Quizizz can significantly improve both engagement and learning outcomes (Reftyawati, 2024). Additionally, students' enjoyment and positive learning experiences play a crucial role in sustaining their interest in gamified environments (Acosta-Medina, Torres-Barreto, and Cárdenas-Parga, 2021).

Despite the growing body of research highlighting the benefits of gamification, several challenges remain. Previous studies reveal that while teachers and students generally perceive gamification positively, its implementation is often hindered by limited ICT infrastructure, lack of training, and concerns about overemphasis on rewards (Siregar and Degeng, 2025; Johan et al., 2022). Moreover, although pre-service teachers show positive attitudes toward

gamification, they frequently lack practical experience and pedagogical readiness to implement it effectively in real classroom settings (Belda-Medina and Calvo-Ferrer, 2022; Guerrero Puerta, 2024).

However, there is still a limited number of studies that explore gamification from the perspective of pre-service teachers in the Indonesian junior high school context, particularly those that focus on ICT-integrated practices. Most existing research emphasizes outcomes rather than examining how future teachers understand, design, and implement gamification in real or simulated teaching.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the potential of ICT-based gamification in enhancing student engagement in English language learning from the perspective of pre-service teachers. This study contributes by providing practice-based insights into how gamification is perceived and implemented by future educators, as well as identifying the challenges they encounter in integrating ICT into their teaching. The findings are expected to enrich the theoretical discussion on gamified learning and offer practical recommendations for improving teacher preparation programs and classroom practices in order to create more engaging and effective English learning environments.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore pre-service English teachers' perspectives on the use of gamification in English Language Teaching (ELT) to enhance student engagement through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). A qualitative approach was chosen to capture participants' experiences, reflections, and interpretations of gamification practices in teacher preparation contexts (Creswell, 2009).

The study was theoretically grounded in Engagement Theory (Kearsley and Shneiderman, 1998), which emphasizes meaningful learning through three core principles: Relate (collaboration and interaction), Create (productive and creative tasks), and Donate (authentic and meaningful contributions). This framework guided both data collection and analysis, particularly in examining how gamification supports collaborative, creative, and meaningful learning experiences.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 20 pre-service English teachers in their eighth semester at a public university in Indonesia. All participants had prior teaching experience through microteaching, peer teaching, or teaching practicum, and were familiar with gamification either through practice or observation. They reported using or observing digital tools such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Wordwall in diverse teaching contexts, ranging from well-equipped urban schools to resource-limited rural settings.

Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument consisted of two main sections with a total of 10 questions. The first section included three demographic questions (e.g., teaching

experience and type of practicum), while the second section comprised seven open-ended questions focusing on: (1) types of gamification strategies used, (2) digital tools and game elements applied, (3) perceived impact on student engagement and learning outcomes, and (4) challenges and readiness in implementing gamification. The open-ended format allowed participants to express their experiences in depth and provide context-specific insights.

The instrument was reviewed by two experts in English language teaching to ensure content validity. Ethical considerations were addressed by providing informed consent, ensuring anonymity, and maintaining confidentiality of responses. Participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily within a one-week period.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke (2019) six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, definition, and reporting. To enhance rigor, coding was reviewed by a peer to ensure consistency and credibility (intercoder agreement). Data saturation was considered achieved as no new themes emerged from the final responses.

The identified themes were then organized based on the Relate–Create–Donate framework. This allowed the researcher to systematically examine how gamification supports (1) collaboration and interaction (Relate), (2) creativity and active learning (Create), and (3) meaningful and authentic learning experiences (Donate). Representative excerpts from participants were included to support each theme and provide analytical depth.

Overall, this methodological approach enabled a structured yet flexible exploration of pre-service teachers' experiences, highlighting both the potential and the contextual challenges of implementing gamification in ELT.

3. Result

The findings indicate that gamification enhances student engagement across the three dimensions of Engagement Theory: Relate, Create, and Donate. Within each dimension, several sub-themes emerged, reflecting both the benefits and challenges experienced by pre-service teachers.

Relate: Collaboration, Interaction, and Competition

Most participants reported that gamification significantly increased student interaction and collaboration in English classrooms. Digital tools such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Wordwall encouraged students to actively participate, particularly through team-based activities. A dominant sub-theme was collaborative learning, where students supported each other in completing tasks. As R2 stated, "*Gamification makes my students talk more and assist one another since they are in teams.*"

Another sub-theme was competitive engagement, where elements such as leaderboards, time limits, and scoring systems motivated students to participate more actively. Several respondents noted that competition created excitement and increased focus during lessons. Additionally, immediate feedback was identified as an important factor that helped students reflect on their performance and improve their responses in real time.

However, challenges were also evident. Several participants reported issues related to over-competitiveness, where some students focused more on winning than learning. Others mentioned classroom management difficulties, such as increased noise levels and unequal participation within groups. These findings suggest that while gamification promotes interaction, it requires careful facilitation to maintain a balanced learning environment.

Create: Creativity, Autonomy, and Active Learning

In the Create dimension, most respondents highlighted that gamification supports creative and meaningful learning activities. Students were not only participants but also content creators, engaging in tasks such as designing quizzes, creating posters, and developing digital learning materials. This reflects the sub-theme of learner autonomy, where students take ownership of their learning process.

For instance, R5 explained, *"I associate gamified activities with real-life application by asking students to make posters or quizzes on Wordwall."* Such activities allowed students to connect language learning with practical applications, enhancing both engagement and understanding.

Another emerging sub-theme was active problem-solving, particularly in time-based challenges and storytelling tasks. Participants observed improvements in students' critical thinking, creativity, and language use. These findings indicate that gamification can move learning beyond passive reception toward more productive and student-centered experiences.

Despite these benefits, several respondents identified constraints. The most common challenges included limited preparation time, rigid curriculum demands, and insufficient practicum duration, which made it difficult to design and implement creative gamified tasks effectively. This suggests that successful implementation requires both pedagogical readiness and institutional support.

Donate: Authentic Learning and Real-World Relevance

The Donate dimension revealed that gamification can foster authentic and meaningful learning experiences when tasks are connected to real-world contexts. Several participants described activities where students shared their work beyond the classroom, such as publishing quizzes or presenting their projects to other classes. This reflects the sub-theme of real-world relevance, where students perceive the practical value of their learning.

As R2 noted, “Students once made a quiz on Wordwall and shared it with other classes.” Such experiences enhanced students’ sense of responsibility and motivation, as their work had a broader audience and purpose.

However, this dimension was the least frequently implemented among participants. Many respondents reported barriers such as limited ICT infrastructure, unstable internet connections, and lack of institutional support, which restricted opportunities for extending learning beyond the classroom. These challenges highlight a gap between the potential of gamification and its practical application in resource-constrained settings.

4. Discussion

This study examined how gamification supports student engagement in English Language Teaching (ELT) from the perspective of pre-service teachers, interpreted through the framework of Engagement Theory (Kearsley and Shneiderman, 1998). The findings demonstrate that gamification facilitates engagement across the Relate, Create, and Donate dimensions; however, its effectiveness depends on how it is designed, implemented, and supported within specific classroom contexts.

Relate: Social Interaction and Managed Competition

The findings suggest that gamification enhances engagement primarily by increasing social interaction among students. This occurs because game elements—such as team-based tasks, leaderboards, and instant feedback—create structured opportunities for communication and collaboration. In this sense, gamification works not merely as a motivational tool but as a social learning mechanism that encourages peer support and shared problem-solving.

However, the role of competition requires careful consideration. While moderate competition can stimulate participation and focus, excessive emphasis on winning may lead to superficial engagement, where students prioritize scores over learning. This indicates that gamification is most effective when competition is balanced with collaboration, supporting Govindarajan (2021) view that teacher facilitation plays a critical role in maintaining productive classroom dynamics.

Create: Active Learning, Autonomy, and Cognitive Engagement

In the Create dimension, gamification promotes deeper engagement by shifting students from passive recipients to active creators of knowledge. Tasks such as designing quizzes or producing digital content require students to apply language skills in meaningful ways, which enhances both cognitive processing and learner autonomy. This explains why students often demonstrate a sense of ownership and pride in gamified activities—they are not only completing tasks but constructing learning experiences.

This aligns with Yacob et al. (2022), who argue that creative gamified tasks foster motivation through self-expression and active involvement. However, the findings also reveal a practical limitation: the implementation of such tasks requires substantial preparation time and pedagogical readiness. For pre-service teachers, this challenge is particularly significant, as they are still developing the ability to integrate innovative methods within rigid curricular structures (Titania, 2024). This suggests that without sufficient training and support, the potential of gamification in promoting creativity may not be fully realized.

Donate: Authentic Learning and Contextual Constraints

The Donate dimension highlights the importance of connecting classroom activities to real-world contexts. Gamification supports this by enabling tasks that extend beyond the classroom, such as sharing student-generated content with wider audiences. This type of authentic engagement helps students see the relevance of English learning, thereby increasing motivation and responsibility.

Nevertheless, this dimension appears to be the most challenging to implement. The findings indicate that technological limitations, such as unstable internet access and lack of institutional support, restrict opportunities for authentic, outward-facing tasks. This suggests that while gamification has the potential to create meaningful learning experiences, its success in the Donate dimension is highly dependent on external factors, including infrastructure and school policies (Siregar and Degeng, 2025).

Synthesis and Implications

Taken together, the three dimensions illustrate that gamification supports engagement in complementary ways: Relate fosters social interaction, Create promotes active and cognitive involvement, and Donate provides meaningful real-world relevance. However, the findings also reveal that these dimensions are not equally realized in practice. While Relate and Create are more readily implemented, Donate remains limited due to contextual constraints.

Importantly, this study highlights that gamification is not inherently effective; rather, its success depends on thoughtful design and pedagogical alignment. Without careful planning, gamification risks becoming superficial focused on rewards and competition rather than meaningful learning.

These findings have several implications. For teacher training programs, there is a need to provide more practice-based experiences that help pre-service teachers design and implement gamified activities effectively, particularly in integrating ICT and managing classroom dynamics. For curriculum design, flexibility is essential to allow space for creative and student-centered tasks. Additionally, institutional support in terms of infrastructure and resources is crucial to maximize the potential of gamification, especially in achieving authentic learning outcomes.

Overall, this study underscores that gamification can be a powerful approach in ELT, but only when it is critically and contextually implemented within a balanced pedagogical framework.

5. Conclusion

This study has affirmed that gamification techniques, which are facilitated by ICT tools, can help greatly in engaging students in English language teaching by addressing the fundamental tenets of the Engagement Theory. Gamified activities allow active collaboration and peer interaction, motivate students to complete purposeful, project-based learning that builds problem-solving skills and creative thinking, and relate classroom activities to real-world audiences and authentic purposes, and make learning more meaningful. Nevertheless, to make gamification sustainable, obstacles like poor access to ICT, teacher preparation, and time should be overcome.

As the results indicate, these difficulties may influence the efficiency of the Relate-Create-Donate cycle unless they are adequately addressed. All in all, pre-service English teachers regard gamification as a useful method of making English learning more interactive, collaborative, and purposeful. Teachers should be trained, provided with planning and a stable infrastructure to make gamification not only fun, but really meaningful in terms of actual learning.

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