

The Effect of Gamification on Learners' English-Speaking Skills Performance: A Case of Five Selected High Schools in Kicukiro District, Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

This paper sought to investigate the effect of gamification on the improvement of English-speaking skills among high school learners. The paper employed a mixed method involving both quantitative and qualitative data, with a sample size of 336 respondents from the target population (N = 2100). The study was analyzed through the lenses of gamified learning theory, or the Theory of Gamified Learning, which was introduced by Lander's (2014). The t-test was used to analyze the data. Furthermore, guided interviews, the Gameful Experience Questionnaire (GAMEFULQUEST), and classroom observation methods were used to gather data. The findings indicated that the scores of a pre-test had a mean of 42.25 with a standard deviation of 8.42, while the scores of a post-test had a mean of 81.21 with a standard deviation of 8.56. This marked an average increase of 38.96 points from the pre-test to the post-test with the mean difference (MD) (post-test - pre-test): 81.21 minus 42.25 = 38.96. The standard deviations indicated that the scores for variability remained relatively consistent before and after the intervention. The findings also indicated that the difference between the score means of the experimental groups was statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level (P-value 0.01 < 0.05). The findings of the study showed how gamification contributed to the enhancement of English-speaking performance and how gamification increased students' motivation and made learning fun and enjoyable. The paper recommended that the Rwandan Ministry of Education, in partnership with REB, make investments in the development and implementation of gamified learning platforms that foster interactive and enjoyable learning. Extensive teacher training initiatives that guarantee the successful use of gamification in the classroom should be encouraged.

Keywords: Gamification, Gamified Learning, Speaking Performance, Students' Motivation

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language in Rwanda presents significant challenges due to various influencing factors (Uwambayinema, 2019). However, even though the language shift was very practical and came when it was needed for various reasons, its implementation still poses very challenging problems for a country that was originally Francophone. In a study conducted by Sibomana (2008), it was stipulated that Rwanda had never had any bond with English-speaking colonial masters before the promotion of English as the language of education. English is thus used today as a foreign rather than a second language. However, language learning does not take place in a vacuum but rather involves numerous factors that impact learners' acquisition of the target language. For example, Hayakawa et al. (2021) contend that the most difficult terms are typically simpler to forget when learning a new language. Therefore, connections should be made between words and the outside world if policymakers and educators want second language acquisition to be effective. Learners should be taught how to read the world before reading the words (Maisuria et al., 2022). Obviously, teachers need to use creative teaching methods to engage learners in the teaching and learning process, particularly in cognitively demanding activities (Ordu, 2021).

Second language teachers and researchers must contend with mounting pressure to become more technologically oriented due to the rapid growth of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) as well as the ongoing proliferation of mobile applications (Godwin-Jones, 2015, as cited in Boudadi & Gutierrez, 2020). In fact, since the advent of computers, a number of technological applications, such as technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) and CALL, have been tested in the field of foreign language instruction.

According to Enayati and Gilakjani (2020) and Muhawenimana and Ngabonziza (2024), gamification has also been advantageous for the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). These writers also claim that recognition of the potential of game-based learning in language acquisition emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Gamification in the context of EFL refers to the application of game design concepts and features like challenges, leaderboards, badges, and awards. These components seek to enhance students' motivation, increase their level of involvement, and make learning more enjoyable (Lee & Kim, 2024).

A study conducted by Boudadi and Gutierrez (2020) revealed that due to the widespread use of digital devices, gadgets, and applications, new sub-fields of study have been developed in CALL. One case is gamification, a relatively new educational approach that appears to increase learning motivation in both digital natives and immigrants. In order to engage and motivate pupils to learn, digital technologies for education have also expanded in both formal and non-formal education in recent years.

According to Terzioğlu and Kurt (2022), there are a lot of apps available, such as Babbel, Duolingo, Kahoot, FluentU, and Speakly, to name a few, for language learning that incorporate gaming components and help in the development of various language skills. They continue to argue that their driving factor can be connected to what a number of writers have discussed as a crucial element to succeeding in SLA.

In Thailand, Thai learners, who have fewer opportunities to utilize English, demonstrate the dearth of students' interest in English classes because of gamification. Vathanalaoha (2022) emphasizes that gamification can boost students' interest and participation in English classrooms since it incorporates gaming elements into the learning material. He also states that it attracts unmotivated learners to participate.

In Kenya, the gamification method has provided English teachers with a fresh perspective on teaching English-speaking skills and demonstrated its efficacy in helping students engage with the curriculum and raise their level of competency (Nabangi, 2021).

In Rwanda, the government has also currently promoted the competency-based curriculum as a solution to learners' low communication skills in English, even though its high school learners' access to technology appears to be limited. Therefore, the present study seeks to investigate whether the application of digital and non-digital gamification can help enhance their English-speaking skills.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The integration of gamification in educational contexts has garnered significant interest as a potential tool to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. However, there remains a need to investigate its specific impact on learners' English-speaking skills. Studies conducted by Dichev and Dicheva (2017) and Kapp (2012) indicated that gamification can positively influence language learning by increasing motivation and providing immersive, interactive environments that lead to improved English-speaking skills.

A report generated by the World Bank (2018) showed that English language proficiency among Rwandan students continues to be increasingly low, with less than 30% of learners in primary, lower, and upper secondary schools showing adequate skills in the language, the sole medium of instruction in many educational institutions throughout Rwanda. This skill discrepancy is very alarming, and the consequences of this gap are seen in a number of areas related to students' academic achievement (Ntabwoba & Sikubwabo, 2024). Students' speaking skills are severely impacted by this lack of competency, which creates many difficulties for successful spoken communication. For example, a lot of students have significant failure rates in oral English exams, mostly because of their poor vocabulary and issues with syntax and sentence construction (Maji et al., 2022).

Pronunciation is considered another crucial area of concern. Students frequently have trouble pronouncing English words correctly, which makes it difficult for them to be understood by others and lowers their self-confidence when speaking the language (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). This difficulty is most noticeable in educational settings, where mispronounced words are not rectified, which can cause misconceptions and an aversion to taking part in discussions. Furthermore, the lack of adequate listening comprehension skills exacerbates these speaking difficulties. Students often find it challenging to follow and engage in spoken English, which is essential for developing fluent speaking abilities (Chand, 2021). This deficit has an impact on their academic performance, which leads to their inability to communicate successfully in real-world settings (Chand, 2021). This is probably due to the lack of consistent support that would otherwise result in a smooth shift to English as the main language of instruction. In fact, many schools are faced with a shortage of both adequate resources and well-trained teachers. Many teachers are not native English speakers, which limits their capacity to train students in the language and set an example of correct grammar and pronunciation (Gul & Aziz, 2015). Their lack of preparation makes it even harder for students to improve their speaking skills.

It is against this background that the researcher considered looking at whether methods of gamification may be used in English language instruction. Gamification of English language instruction may be a useful way to solve these problems associated with students' inadequate English-speaking skills. Gamification is bringing elements of game design into non-gaming environments in order to encourage and engage students. By making learning more engaging and entertaining, this method may motivate students to practice speaking a lot more frequently. In addition, role-playing games and numerous other games where students must use English to navigate various circumstances are examples of games that are intended to help students improve their speaking of the language. Students can practice vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure in a fun and engaging way with the help of gamified learning (Deterding et al., 2024).

1.2 Research Objectives

The paper seeks to investigate the effect of gamification on the improvement of high school learners' English speaking skills performance. The following specific objectives helped in achieving its primary aim:

- i. To investigate effective types of gamification in promoting English speaking skills among high school learners;
- ii. To examine the high school students and teachers' perceptions towards the use of gamification in English language learning;
- iii. To explore and analyze the challenges associated with implementing a gamification approach in the development of English speaking skills among students.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

In this study, alternative Hypothesis (H1) asserts that gamification significantly improves learners' English-speaking skills.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Gamified Learning Theory (GLT)

In the theory of gamified learning theory (GLT), gamification is defined as a method of applying game attribute categories outside of a game to influence learning-related behaviors or attitudes (Landers, 2014; Zaric et al., 2021). To apply gamified learning theory to assess the effect of gamification on students' English-speaking skills, a comprehensive approach is essential. Moreover, continuously monitor students' progression within the gamified environment, adjusting activities based on feedback that helps encourage self-reflection, goal-setting, and intrinsic motivation for language improvement. By implementing these strategies, the gamified learning theory becomes a powerful framework for not only enhancing English-speaking skills but also for creating an engaging and motivating language learning environment.

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Definitions of Key Terms

Games

The study conducted by Al Fatta et al. (2018) (p. 41) found that "games are an activity that is closely connected to the history of humankind. Games are sometimes related to play concepts as well as "fun," as they are basic characteristics of humankind. They denote play as an independent activity that is considered not serious." According to Wikipedia, a *game is something that people often do for fun or as a as a recreational activity.*

Gamification

The concept of "gamification," which emphasizes engagement, fun, and entertainment, was coined by Nick Pelling in 2002. Etymologically, gamification is derived from the Latin verb *facere*, which means to make or to fabricate (Oostendorp & Fijnheer, 2018). It refers to the use of gaming elements in non-gaming contexts to encourage learning and maximize student enjoyment (Alzuhair & Alkhuzaim, 2022). Wulantari and Mandasari (2024) describe gamification as an emerging educational and instructional method aimed at increasing students' engagement and enjoyment while capturing their interest in order to encourage lifelong learning. It does this by introducing game aspects into the classroom.

Game-based Learning

According to Trybus (2022), game-based learning is the process of applying gaming concepts to the real-life world in order to keep students interested. Because of the incentive psychology at work in game-based learning, students can interact with course materials in a lively and enjoyable way. Developing learning activities that may progressively teach concepts and direct students toward a final objective is known as game-based learning, and it goes beyond simply making games for students to play (Tayaa, 2022).

Playing games with specific learning objectives is known as game-based learning. In line with this description, Pede (2017) contended that the process of creating games for educational purposes involves striking a balance between the need to cover the subject matter and the goal of highlighting gameplay. However, game-based learning is also perceived as the use of real games in the classroom, usually to teach a particular skill or achieve a goal. With this approach, students may fully engage in the learning process and enjoy themselves in the process (Alexander et al., 2017).

In addition, Kapp (2012) argues that game-based learning utilizes real games to impart knowledge and skills to the students.

Speaking skills

According to Azzahra et al (2019) speaking abilities are the capacity to communicate verbally. As an alternative, speech is a natural way for people in the public to express their views to one another and as a social behavior.

2.2.2 The Components of Speaking

In this study, the researcher relies heavily on Brown's (2004) theory cited in Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) about the key components of speaking. These are vocabulary, grammar, fluency and pronunciation.

Vocabulary

Students strive to increase their vocabulary since it is still an indicator of competency in language acquisition. According to Bohari (2020), vocabulary is a total number of words that make up a language. The ideas that vocabulary refers to terms that are learned by memorization of brief definitions and that sentences are comprehended bottom-up by piecing together the meanings of individual words were also expressed (Tayaa, 2022).

Grammar

Grammar is frequently understood to be the rules of language used in written and spoken communication. It affects the accuracy of writing or speech. As a result, the majority of teachers make an effort to impart grammar knowledge and provide students with plenty of practice. But language is about much more than form, as Freeman et al. (2023) pointed out, and children suffer when they are only taught rules. In order to teach grammar successfully, most teachers now adopt a more communicative approach. Besides, Nunan (1998) claimed that "they make the task of developing technical skills impossible unless they give the learner the opportunity to explore grammatical structure in context.

Fluency

Enayati and Gilakjani (2020) defined fluency as the capacity to respond coherently through the use of stress and intonation, unambiguous pronunciation of sounds, and word and phrase construction. One aspect of speaking talent is fluency, which is the ability to communicate continuously while overcoming linguistic barriers to convey messages. Fluency signals therefore suggest that speakers are conversing without having to care about the linguistic details. As a result, the speaker must speak quickly and without much pause in order to be fluent in the language (Lackman, 2010).

Pronunciation

According to Kaur (2019), pronunciation describes how sounds are used in communication. Pronunciation is the most challenging aspect of speaking, whether you are a natural speaker or not. Every time a student wants to get better at pronouncing words correctly, they need to practice their vocabulary. Students need to understand the different sounds, as well as when to use rising and falling intonation and where in the word the emphasis should be placed. These elements support students' successful communication skills.

2.2.3 Types of Gamification

Digital Gamification Applications

Duolingo

According to Freeman et al. (2023), the application offers a wide range of activities to practice the essential integrated skills of reading, listening, writing, and speaking. It also covers vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and spelling conventions (with extra guidance for languages with different writing systems). More than 100 courses in over 40 languages are available on Duolingo, ranging from Navajo and Yiddish to Spanish, French, German, and Japanese (Freeman et al., 2023).

Duolingo is the language application. Multilingualism and bilingualism have several benefits. Multiple language proficiency, particularly in English, has been associated with improved social and economic opportunities, such as higher employability and mobility (Freeman et al., 2023; Vlad, 2021). Additionally, learning a language can improve one's creativity (Sarmiento et al., 2024).

The Duolingo Language application helps every learner by adjusting the level of the curriculum each learner is working with to suit their needs. AI-powered personalization modifies the degree of difficulty so that students continue to get language input that is manageable and understandable. For example, when students make grammatical errors, they receive explicit recommendations in simple language along with additional feedback (Freeman et al., 2023).

Kahoot

Kahoot is a platform that uses gamification techniques to create surveys, debates, and quizzes. After its creation in 2013, Kahoot quickly rose to prominence as a global brand in education. In terms of interactive, competitive gaming and teaching approaches, Kahoot has its own special qualities. The principle of Kahoot is to provide a platform of games so that students can learn in an enjoyable, engaging, and competitive way (Kaur, 2019). Kahoot is also defined as an online game that is used to gauge how well students comprehend route content. Teachers and students can participate in the leisure activity for free, although it does require a multimedia tool (Pede, 2017).

Fluent U

According to Altynbekova and Zhussupova (2020), FluentU is an online platform that combines authentic English videos with interactive subtitles, quizzes, and vocabulary-building exercises. FluenU contains authentic materials, including news, conversations, and speeches given in public and inspirational films. Fluentu transforms real content into courses for language learning. Every video contains particular vocabulary, which helps improve students' speaking skills.

Quizlet Live

Quizlet Live, a collaborative and competitive game mode, is designed to enhance speaking skills by encouraging repeated practice and reinforcement of English language concepts. Through multiple gameplay sessions, students frequently engage with English, which over time can significantly improve their fluency and proficiency in spoken English (Vanisree et al., 2024). This method leverages the benefits of gamification to create an engaging learning environment that promotes continuous language practice (Johnson & Anderson, 2024).

Babbel

Babbel includes conversation focused exercises where students engage in simulated dialogues and receive instant feedback. Babbel uses a straightforward approach to teach vocabulary, encompassing words, phrases, and even entire sentences. The learners are given the term in the target language, hear how it is pronounced, see an image of the vocabulary item, and receive an alternative translation of it in their source language (Nushi & Eqball, 2018).

In the study carried out by Nushi and Eqball (2018), Babbel is a language-learning tool that offers interesting activities and lessons to assist students in improving their proficiency in a number of languages, including English.

Speakly

Through advanced language learning platform of Speakly, it enhances English speaking skills, by learning the language as a whole and studying every facet of it at once, as a method for learning more efficiently. Speakly addresses every facet of the language simultaneously, in contrast to conventional learning methods that separate vocabulary and speaking, two fundamental components of language. Students can enhance their fluency and confidence in English by participating in a range of interactive exercises on the platform, such as speaking, listening, writing, and comprehension assignments (Terzioğlu & Kurt, 2022).

Quizizz

Quizizz serves as a game-based learning application that effectively promotes English speaking skills by engaging students in meaningful and interactive activities. Teachers can create and administer lessons and assessments that cater to both student-paced and teacher-paced learning. The Quizizz editor allows for the easy creation of quizzes, incorporating various question types such as multiple choices, open-ended and fill-in-the-blanks, along with media like pictures, videos, audio clips and recordings, which can be particularly beneficial for enhancing speaking skills (Johnson & Anderson, 2024).

Non-digital gamification tools

Non-digital gamification or offline gamification tools refer to the application of game-design elements and principles in non-digital, real-world contexts to engage and motivate students to attain their objectives.

Vocabulary Bingo

According to Sarmiento et al. (2024) Vocabulary Bingo is a game that helps students improve their ability to speak English by requiring them to actively practice a variety of vocabulary words in an entertaining and engaging manner. Vocabulary Bingo is an effective game for enhancing students' English speaking skills by requiring active practice with various vocabulary words in an engaging and entertaining way. Instead of traditional bingo cards with numbers, Vocabulary Bingo uses cards with a range of vocabulary terms or phrases. As a teacher reads words from a list, students mark the corresponding words on their cards. In order to improve their fluency and pronunciation, contestants must correctly recognize and pronounce the words when called upon (Ordu, 2021).

Story Building

According to Kristiawan et al (2022) story building promotes English speaking skills by encouraging participants to engage in collaborative storytelling, where they take turns contributing to the construction of a narrative. Story building helps participants improve their English speaking abilities. In a friendly and engaging setting, participants actively practice speaking English as they exchange ideas and provide descriptions of people, places, and events. They increase their pronunciation, tighten their grammar, and broaden their vocabulary as a result of this procedure.

Word chain

According to Brown and White (2024) word chain is a type of game designed to help students become more proficient with words or vocabulary. Similarly, playing word games helps create an interest in words and their spelling, which is also helpful.

In a study conducted by Trybus (2015) Word Chain is the entertaining language game where students must pronounce words that begin with the letter that comes after them in order to improve their English speaking skills. He also argues that students must think fast and imaginatively to come up with words on the spot, which encourages spontaneity and fluency in communication. Once more, it enhances listening skills since students have to pay close attention to one another's contributions to make sure their word follows the predetermined pattern (Zaric et al., 2021).

Role-Playing Scenarios

According to Lee and Kim (2024) when it comes to practicing speaking skills, teachers must choose methods that are suitable and promote verbal assignments that prioritize meaning over linguistic structure. By having students take on different characters and have English-language conversations, role-playing scenarios are a useful tool for improving English speaking skills. For instance, they might pose as someone requesting directions in a foreign location, negotiating a commercial deal, or placing an order at a restaurant (Vanisree et al., 2024). Through the simulation of authentic scenarios where they are required to use their English, this method helps students develop their communication skills and gain confidence.

Scavenger Hunt

Scavenger hunts require participants to engage with people, solve puzzles, and follow instructions in English; they are a great technique for improving speaking skills in the language (Pede, 2017). He continues to argue that participants must interact with peers, exchange ideas, and communicate clearly as they analyze information and strategize. This procedure strengthens their speaking and understanding skills by enhancing their capacity to comprehend and communicate instructions and hints in English.

Treasure Hunts

Treasure hunts are a highly effective way to promote skill in spoken English. Participants must communicate, share ideas, and cooperate to find the hidden treasure in order to solve clues and guide the hunt (Alabbasi, 2019). This lively and engaging environment promotes spoken communication, vocabulary growth, and improved English fluency because they require participants to work in groups or teams and converse continuously in English.

He continues to argue that treasure hunts are a fun and successful way to learn a language because they encourage participants to actively interact with the language via excitement and enjoyment. Students can improve their English speaking abilities in an engaging and immersive setting by taking part in these activities (Enayati & Gilakjani, 2020).

2.2.4 Effective Types of Gamification in Promoting English Speaking Skills

Schools and other educational institutions use the game-based learning platform Kahoot as instructional technology. Its learning games are user-generated multiple-choice tests that may be accessed using the Kahoot app or a web browser. Quba et al. (2024) indicated that students demonstrated both favorable and unfavorable views about using Kahoot in EFL classes. Yet, the majority of students agreed that Kahoot added interest to the English lesson. In a study on gamified learning (Kahoot) involving 2,645 Thai learners, Quba et al. (2024) came up with results that revealed its role in producing more achievements, increasing learners' performance, and raising their motivation.

In their study, Dearestiani et al. (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of using the Duolingo application as a teaching aid to enhance students' learning progress in the classroom and to help them become more proficient in speaking English. According to Jie et al. (2023), students stated that the speaking lesson's use of gamification made them more motivated to change their behavior in order to engage in the class activity. As a game-based learning application, students can therefore enhance their speaking skills by using the Duolingo application; students can practice speaking right away thanks to the microphone feature of the application. They will get points if every word they pronounce is accurate, which shows that they have improved and can now talk clearly.

Moodle may be made into a game-based platform by adding interactive elements and gamification elements that increase student motivation and engagement. Features that reward students for their accomplishments and growth, including leaderboards, badges, and points, can encourage rivalry and a sense of achievement among students (Johnson & Anderson, 2024).

Furthermore, Moodle remains one of the most frequently used platforms for managing online learning by teachers, providing tools to gamify the learning process (Hamari et al., 2024). Gamification elements in Moodle may run into a number of issues in the Rwandan setting. Among the issues are low levels of digital literacy among teachers and students, restricted access to reliable internet, and the ongoing need for infrastructure and technical assistance. These issues prevent Moodle's gamification features from being used and implemented effectively, which could have an impact on the desired results of high student motivation and engagement (Mahadi, 2023).

2.2.5 Students and Teachers' Perceptions towards the Use of Gamification

Alabbasi (2019) points out that students' perceptions of the usage of gamification in the classroom are influenced by a variety of factors, including learning styles, attitudes toward technology, prior experiences with gamified learning, and personal preferences. He also claims that teachers consider these different viewpoints when implementing gamification strategies and work to find a balance between student engagement and motivation and the integrity and effectiveness of the educational process. Furthermore, obtaining input from students and incorporating it into the development and implementation of gamified activities can help ensure that each learner finds the activities to be relevant, interesting, and meaningful.

The use of gamification in education has caught the interest of many scholars and researchers. Applying gamification systems in the classroom was examined in more detail. According to Lee and Hammer (2011), gamification is an approach used to infuse routine tasks or procedures with motivation and engagement principles based on the gaming concept, game mechanics, dynamics, and frameworks to encourage desirable behaviors. Gamification.

According to Zaric et al. (2021), gamification combines creativity and student choice, fosters peer competition, which improves engagement, and provides students with immediate feedback so they can monitor their progress toward the learning objective. Gamification has already offered solutions to some teachers' challenges in the classroom. (Mee Mee et al., 2020) believe that the lack of students' engagement to actively get involved in the learning process is one of the primary issues facing modern education. Therefore, the simplest way to introduce gamification into the classroom is to start with the idea that students are more naturally motivated to participate in learning activities because of the fun aspects of games. Zahra (2020) suggested that the use of game elements that stimulate intense concentration has been linked to the effectiveness of gamification in engaging learners. Gamification has

proven to be a perfect approach for controlling the educational process effectively and guaranteeing that students perform better and are more engaged (Vlad, 2021).

According to Terzioğlu and Kurt (2022), constructive competition in games has the potential to foster feelings of relatedness, thereby enhancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Moreover, gamification directly affects extrinsic motivation by utilizing extrinsic rewards. The only way that reward-based gamification can affect students' behavior is by giving them external rewards. Unless the motivation for the behavior change is internalized, reward-based gamification tends to condition behavioral change on the ongoing provision of extrinsic rewards.

There are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, which comes from within students and directs them toward things in which they are naturally interested or drawn, and extrinsic motivation, which is boosted by rewards like points and badges.

Gamification enhances teamwork and creates a feeling of direction by setting clear goals, targets, and feedback channels. Through competitive features such as leaderboards or team challenges, people are motivated to work together, share knowledge, and support one another in accomplishing shared goals. Besides, gamification encourages team members to communicate and engage socially, which develops a sense of friendship and trust. According to Law et al. (2020), the advantages of using online game-based learning can be used to help students enhance their collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and motivational skills, as well as their teamwork abilities. When students collaborated on game tasks, Bohari (2020) noted that the utilization of online game-based learning helped improve their oral and written communication abilities.

2.2.6 Challenges Associated with Implementing Gamification Approach

The findings of Nabangi's (2021) study indicated that a lack of time for lesson planning makes use of gamification techniques a barrier to the regular use of gamification in teaching and learning English speaking skills. It takes a long time for a language teacher to successfully develop and apply gamification. When the language teacher was asked how often he uses gamification in his lessons during the interview, for example, he responded to the researcher as follows: "I use it, but not on a daily basis because there's a lot of time in planning, which involves coming up with the questions that suit the objectives of your lesson." Thus, we can essentially use them three times a week because planning is necessary.

In his study, Mahadi (2023) found that using ICT in regular teaching is a highly complex procedure. There are certain challenges with using ICT to enhance teaching and learning. If teachers lack the necessary abilities to filter material for relevance or are unable to build a clear organizational principle, the almost infinite chances for access to information in an educational setting can actually be a serious risk of information overload. According to Hamari et al. (2024), both students and teachers may lack the necessary skills to access, process, and use information.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in five selected public high schools in Kicukiro, which are Kagarama Secondary School, GS Remera Protestant, GS Vincent Pallotti, GS Kicukiro, and GS Mburabuturo, a district located in the southeast of Kigali City. Kicukiro is one of the three districts (Gasabo, Kicukiro, and Nyarugenge) that compose the City of Kigali, and its geographical area of 166,7 km² appears to be second only to Gasabo (429.3 km²).

3.2 Research Design

This research adopted a concurrent mixed-methods research design that involved gathering both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time. Therefore, the data were collected using the observational method, guided interviews, and the *Gameful Experience Questionnaire* (GAMEFULQUEST). The study involved students from lower and upper secondary levels (S2, S3, S4, and S5) from five selected schools in Kicukiro district. Moreover, this study was also carried out using experimental research, where the main objective was to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between independent and dependent variables. Experimental research is done through experiments or observations. After identifying the independent variable as gamification and the dependent variables as English speaking performance, speaking fluency, and oral proficiency tests, the researcher started with the hypothesis that there is a causal relationship between poor English speaking performance and a lack of gamification.

3.3 Target Population

The target population for this study involved students from lower secondary levels, starting from senior two up to senior five, teachers, and school administrators from five selected secondary schools in Kicukiro district. A total of five schools, such as Kagarama Secondary School, GS Remera Protestant, GS Vincent Pallotti, GS Kicukiro, and GS Mburabuturo, were purposefully selected. The target population in these schools, respectively, consists of 336 participants from a population size of 2100 participants.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A sample size is a representative of all participants from five selected public high schools in Kicukiro district. The population size (N) is 2100 participants, level of confidence is 95%, error of margin (e) is 5%=0.05. The Taro Yamane's formula was used to calculate the sample size (n)

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{2100}{1 + 2100 * (0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{2100}{1 + 2100 * 0.0025}$$

$$= \frac{2100}{1 + 5.25}$$

$$= \frac{2100}{6.25}$$

$$n = 336$$

3.5 Data Collection Tools and Procedure

3.5.1 Gamefulquest

All gameful experience questionnaires administered to all 336 respondents were returned, and they were all filled in. The Gameful Experience Questionnaire (GAMEFULQUEST) is a tool for measuring the perceived gamefulness of system use (Högberg et al., 2019). Gameful Questionnaires were administered to gather quantitative data on teachers and learners' perceptions of gamification, English-speaking proficiency levels, and engagement in gamified learning activities.

3.5.2 Interview

The study adopted a structured interview. Structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences, attitudes, and challenges faced by learners participating in gamified English language learning sessions. The interview was therefore composed of a set of questions that refer to the research objectives, and the interview targeted the teachers of English and school administrators to give their insights on the effectiveness of gamification in learning to enhance learners' English speaking skills.

3.5.3 Classroom Observational Method

On Friday, May 10th, 2024, the researcher was welcomed to GS Kicukiro. It was in the afternoon, and the male teacher was preparing the teaching materials to go to the upper secondary class, which was S5 HEL. The researcher was seated in the backbenchers to observe how the lesson was going to take place. The teacher introduced a game-based activity to engage the students in a lesson with clear instructions before the game started. Consequently, the lesson was very interesting. First, the teacher was well prepared with a meaningful game-based activity that helped the students actively engage in the speaking activity prepared by the teacher. Second, all the students were eager to know what the game was about at the very beginning of a lesson. Third, every single student was very active in contributing to the outcome of the game and the lesson in general.

Friday, On May 14th, 2024, the researcher observed an English class at Kagarama Secondary School. The researcher noticed that the male teacher introduced a gameful activity that does not require internet connectivity to teach spelling in a senior two classroom. In the morning of the second period, all the students and the teacher were present. The teacher opened up his computer thanks to the free internet that was introduced in many public schools; he opened a Duolingo to engage the students in a lesson. After, he played a very short video with some subtitles, and all the students willingly followed a three-minute video clip, which was overwhelmingly amazing to them. The teacher paused a moment and asked the students to read the words displayed on the screen. Every single student was given a chance to read at least one word. The teacher tried to correct some mispronounced words and guided them to the correct spelling.

On Thursday, May 23rd, 2024, when the researcher visited GS Remera Protestant, the female teacher introduced Word Chain as a simple game in her English lesson to motivate students to practice pronunciation by

repeatedly speaking words aloud in the chain. This helps students practice correct pronunciation and improve their speaking fluency.

On Tuesday, May 28th, 2024, the researcher set off to GS Saint Vincent Pallotti. It was in the last period before the students went to have their lunch. The male teacher introduced a gameful activity, but he did not manage to give clear instructions on how the game was going to be played. The game was a lot mundane to the extent that the lesson was confusing and indifferent. As a researcher approached the teacher, he was asked what went wrong with the lesson. The teacher said that he did not have enough time to prepare. As a result, the lesson was boring.

On Friday, May 30th, 2024, the visiting school was GS Mburabuturo. The teacher was well equipped with some important materials. In the last period, the students were organized and ready to study. The teacher introduced a gameful activity, which is a role play with the purpose of teaching speaking skills. This game involved two or more people acting in such a role to explore a given scenario. The results of the lesson were very impressive. The researcher realized that the gameful activity generated advantages for students' English-speaking skills by looking at how the students were very active and engaged.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Assessing Students' English Speaking Skills

Table 1 illustrates that confidence in speaking has increased to 90% ever since the students got involved in gamification. English vocabulary acquisition has increased to 80%, pronunciation has increased to 65%, grammar has reached 65%, and fluency has increased to 55%.

Table 1

Assessing Students' English Speaking Skills

English speaking skills	Frequency	Percent
Vocabulary	16	80
Pronunciation	13	65
Fluency	11	55
Confidence in speaking	18	90
Grammar	13	65

4.2 Statistical Analysis of Assessments

Table 2 below compares the pre-test and post-test scores of a group of students to evaluate their performance improvement over time. Here's an interpretation of the table 2.

Table 2

Statistical Analysis of Assessments

Group Pre-test scores		Post-test scores	
M	S.D.	M	S.D.
42.25	8.42	81.21	8.56

The provided table indicates data from an experimental group consisting of 336 participants, demonstrating their pre-test and post-test scores. The pre-test scores had a mean of 42.25 with a standard deviation of 8.42, while the post-test scores had a mean of 81.21 with a standard deviation of 8.56. This marked an average increase of 38.96 points from the pre-test to the post-test with the mean difference (MD) (post-test - pre-test): 81.21 minus 42.25 = 38.96. The standard deviations indicate that the variability in scores remained relatively consistent before and after the intervention, implying that the intervention had an impact across the participants.

To statistically assess the significance of this improvement, a paired sample t-test was used. This test compares the means of the pre-test and post-test scores to determine if the observed increase is statistically significant. According to the statistical analysis and the substantial mean difference, if the p-value is less than the significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected.

4.3 Students' Viewpoints on Gamification

Table 3 below indicates the students' opinions on the effectiveness of gamification on their English-speaking skills. S.A. strongly agrees, A. agrees, S.D. strongly disagrees, and D. disagrees.

Table 3*Students' Viewpoints on Gamification*

Statement	S.A	A	S.D	D
Games make me feel interested in practicing English	56%	21%	11%	12%
Learning games help develop English speaking skills	43%	33%	8%	16%
Games give me the feeling that time passes quickly	21%	49%	18%	12%
Games cause me to stop noticing when I get tired	19%	28%	31%	22%
Games make me feel like I'm developing new things	38%	16%	28%	18%
Games make learning enjoyable and fun	33%	41%	11%	15%
Games make students feel immersed to give feedback	23%	28%	34%	15%
Games motivate me to progress in learning	40%	21%	13%	26%
Gamification is a waste of time	0%	1%	45%	54%
Gamification is childish	2%	0%	41%	57%

Table 3 provides a comprehensive understanding of attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of gamification and video games to improve English-speaking skills. The responses from the gamefulquest showed that gamified learning had been received generally well, with varying levels of agreement and disagreement on different aspects.

Games increase respondents' interest in learning their English, as indicated by the strong agreement of 56% of respondents and the agreement of 21% of respondents. This shows that students' interest in language practice may be aroused and sustained by playing video games. Similar to this, there is general agreement on the educational advantages of learning games, with 43% strongly agreeing and 33% agreeing that they help in the development of English-speaking skills.

Games have a significant influence on how time is perceived and how engaged one is. A total of 70% of participants expressed the opinion that playing games causes time to pass quickly, indicating strong levels of immersion and involvement. Opinions diverge more when it comes to identifying tiredness. While 47% of respondents think that playing games helps them forget when they're tired, 47% disagree, indicating that games' captivating qualities might not always be able to conceal mental or physical exhaustion.

A significant 46% of respondents disagree with the 54% who believe that games aid in the acquisition of new skills. This disparity would suggest that although a large number of students believe that playing games helps them acquire new skills, others might not think that gaming and skill development go hand in hand. With 74% of respondents agreeing, the data nevertheless demonstrates considerable support for the idea that games enhance learning enjoyment and fun.

Table 4*The Outcomes from Observation Period*

Observational Criteria	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Engagement level	145	45.8
English language use	93	29.4
Pronunciation and fluency	78	24.6
Total	316	100

The table 4 above shows that the engagement level is 45.8% of the respondents, English language use was 29.4% and pronunciation is 24.6% of the respondents. This shows that many of respondents are far more engaged. However, English language use, pronunciation and fluency for the students are relatively low in percentages.

4.4 Effective Types of Gamification in Promoting English Speaking Skills

The first objective was to investigate effective types of gamification in promoting English speaking skills among high school learners. The results illustrated that confidence in speaking has increased to 90% ever since the students got involved in gamification. English vocabulary acquisition has increased to 80%, pronunciation has increased to 65%, grammar has reached to 65% and fluency has increased to 55%. This was also emphasized by Jie et al. (2023) students stated that the speaking lesson's use of gamification made them more motivated to change their behavior in order to engage in the class activity. This chart presents the students' preferences on the usage of these digital gamified applications.

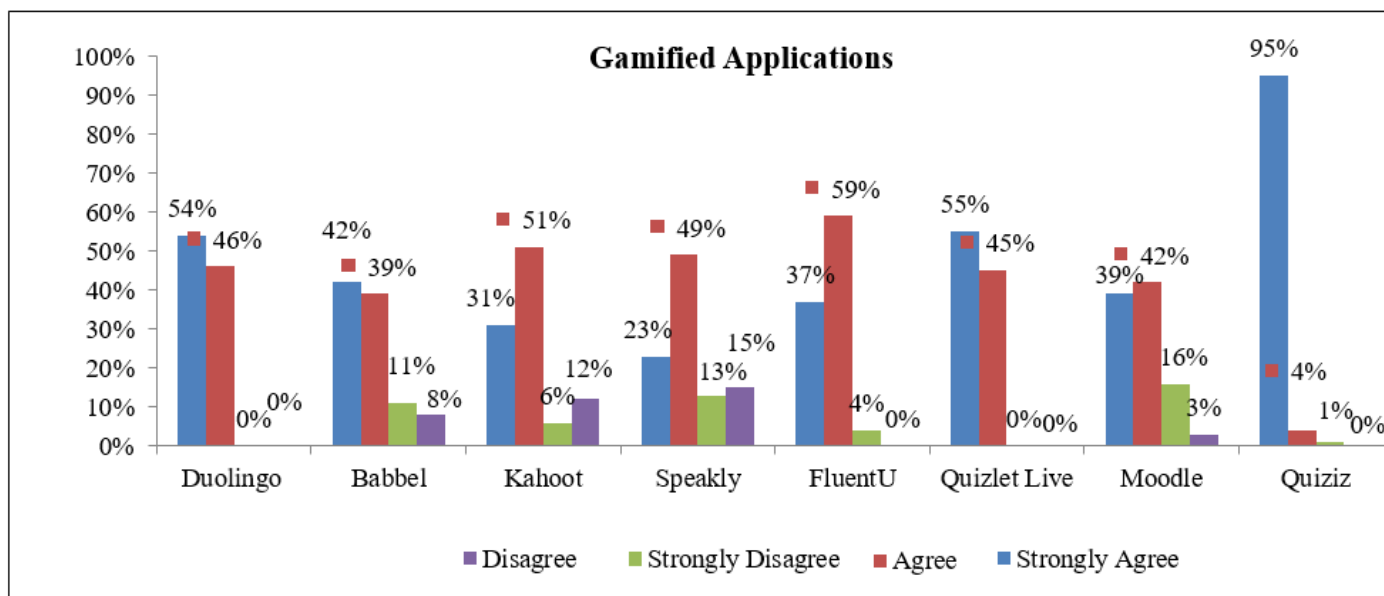


Figure 1
Digital Gamified Applications

The results revealed that effective applications include Duolingo and Quizlet Live. Duolingo achieved a combined satisfaction of 100% (54% strongly agree and 46% agree), while Quizlet Live likewise achieved 100% (55% strongly agree and 45% agree). It appears that students are generally satisfied with these platforms because there were no strongly disagree or disagree comments. Babel, Kahoot, and Speakly show a wider range of students' satisfaction. Babel's data indicates that while 81% of respondents are satisfied (42% strongly agree and 39% agree), 19% are not (11% strongly disagree and 8% disagree). Terzioğlu and Kurt (2022) are in agreement that schools and other educational institutions use the game-based learning platform Kahoot as instructional technology. Its learning games are user-generated multiple-choice tests that may be accessed using the Kahoot app or a web browser.

The results indicated that a significant number of respondents (38%) highly believe that they practice speaking English while playing video games, yet there is some disagreement among them (22% strongly disagree). For enhancing speaking skills, a majority (71%) agrees to some extent, with 44% firmly believing that playing video games improves their speaking abilities. Quba's (2024) study concluded that gamification has demonstrated its role in improving motivation, engagement, and language skill development in English language learning. Students' attention is captured, a sense of accomplishment is fostered, and active engagement in the learning process is encouraged through the use of digital gamification applications, interactive activities, and immersive experiences.

4.5 Students and Teachers' Perceptions towards the Use of Gamification

The second objective of this study was to examine the high school students and teachers' perceptions towards the use of gamification in English language learning. It has been discussed and suggested that gamification can help students become more motivated to study since they receive encouraging feedback, which pushes them forward and increases their level of interest and stimulation to learn. Gamification has the potential to significantly increase students' motivation to learn and read more (Maji et al., 2022). The use of games in the classroom encourages students to participate actively in the lesson and supports a deep learning approach (Law et al., 2020). Even though gamification is expected to have many positive effects, these effects will probably depend on the users of the gamification as well as the context in which it is used (Hamari et al., 2024).

Because gamification makes the process more interesting and enjoyable, gamification of English language instruction, in particular, was often seen favorably by students. Learning becomes dynamic and interactive with the addition of game components like leaderboards, badges, and points; this can boost engagement and motivation. The results indicated that gamified exercises boosted students' confidence and strengthened their language skills since they offered instant feedback and a sense of accomplishment. Additionally, gamification accommodates a variety of learning preferences and fosters a cooperative atmosphere where students are motivated to practice and advance their English in the classroom setting and outside.

The results indicated that students can use gamification to apply their knowledge and skills in practical settings. Gamified environments facilitate the transfer of learning by integrating learning content into pertinent and meaningful scenarios. This allows students to apply their knowledge to real-world circumstances and problem-solving (Sarmiento et al., 2024). Gamification facilitates instant and ongoing feedback, enabling students to track their development, pinpoint areas in need of enhancement, and modify their approach to learning accordingly.

The teacher of English responded: *“Yes, gamification is an effective method of teaching that greatly improves the capacity of students to communicate in English. This method fosters constant practice, which is essential for language acquisition, and raises student motivation and engagement. Because gamified activities are engaging and encourage active involvement, students can practice speaking in a positive and enjoyable setting. Furthermore, gamification offers instant feedback and self-assessment possibilities, enabling students to promptly recognize and rectify their errors, accelerating their learning and progress.”* The findings of this study are in agreement with the study of Wulantari and Mandasari (2024) that speaking skills are practiced voluntarily by motivated learners, and this results in noticeable gains in competency. Motivation also sharpens students' focus and attention, enabling them to pay closer attention to course materials, understand linguistic concepts more fully, and use efficient methods of learning.

The results of the study also indicated that the high engagement level suggests that students are motivated to participate in classroom activities or learning processes. Several factors could contribute to this, such as the use of engaging instructional methods, interactive learning tools (e.g., digital resources), or a conducive learning environment. High engagement is generally associated with positive learning outcomes, suggesting that students are receptive to learning and actively involved in the educational process.

The results of this study were also supported by the study conducted by Ordu (2021), which concluded that gamification facilitates the development of an enjoyable and stimulating learning environment in the classroom, encourages students to consistently finish assignments, helps them become more engaged and aware of what they are studying, and fosters constructive peer competition. This was also emphasized by Trybus (2015), who, for instance, investigated how to incorporate gamified online language exchanges into language courses. They established an online gaming environment where students participated in language exchange activities and communicated with native speakers. In addition to improving students' speaking skills, the gamified language exchange platform encouraged meaningful connections with native speakers and intercultural interaction. Similarly, the results suggested that while students are engaged, many struggle with the oral aspects of English, including articulation and fluidity in speech. This may be due to several factors, such as insufficient opportunities for speaking practice, inadequate corrective feedback, or low proficiency levels. The emphasis on reading and writing skills in some educational contexts might also contribute to the lower focus on oral fluency.

4.6 Challenges Associated with Implementing Gamification Approach

The third objective was to explore and analyze the challenges associated with implementing a gamification approach to the development of English-speaking skills among students. As it was discussed in the interview with the teacher of English, the teacher revealed that many students do not regularly have access to computers or smartphones, which makes it more difficult to use digital gamification tools.

In order to combat this, we concentrate on low-tech gamification techniques that don't require advanced technology, such as board games and role-playing games. The inconsistent internet connectivity, especially in rural areas, is a serious problem. We overcome this by pre-downloading content while internet access is available and playing instructional games offline. The study conducted by Dichev and Dicheva (2017) proved that the challenges of using gamification are accelerated by negative situations, including a lack of technology, a problem with the internet connection, a lack of game software for specific courses, a lack of hardware infrastructure in the classroom, and difficulty locating educational computer games that cover the subject in the native language. Barriers that reflected the teacher's self-perceptions included their lack of technical expertise, their inability to purchase certain important games due to financial constraints, and the amount of time they had to devote to creating, selecting, and/or implementing the use of these games (Lee & Kim, 2024).

There are crucial considerations and challenges to take into account when applying gamification. Quba et al. (2024) also argued that to guarantee alignment with learning objectives, integration with the current curriculum, and accessibility for all students, design principles should be carefully studied. The successful implementation of gamification in language learning requires teacher training and assistance, in addition to the availability of suitable technical infrastructure (Pede, 2017). All things considered, gamification is a promising and useful tool for language learning. Research and implementation efforts should not stop until gamification is successfully incorporated into educational settings, improving students' language proficiency and creating a supportive environment for learning.

The results showed that the pre-test scores had a mean of 42.25 with a standard deviation of 8.42, while the post-test scores had a mean of 81.21 with a standard deviation of 8.56. This marked an average increase of 38.96 points from the pre-test to the post-test with the mean difference (MD) of 38.96. Therefore, T-test results indicated that the gamification approach introduced to the same peers at different times impacted a lot more on the students' prior knowledge of the effectiveness of gamification.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Gamification has a demonstrably positive impact on improving learners' English-speaking skills, as it enhances motivation, engagement, and active participation in the learning process. By integrating interactive elements such as role-playing, real-time feedback, and immersive dialogues, gamified learning environments create a more engaging atmosphere where students feel encouraged to practice speaking English. Numerous studies have shown that these gamified approaches, along with educational games, lead to significant improvements in learners' speaking abilities. This is especially relevant for high school students in Rwanda, where the transition to English as the primary medium of instruction has posed challenges. Gamification not only reduces the anxiety associated with speaking a foreign language but also promotes confidence and proficiency in English.

5.2 Recommendations

To enhance English-speaking skills, the Rwandan Ministry of Education should prioritize gamification in the curriculum, investing in digital infrastructure and gamified learning systems. The Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) should fund the development of gamified environments and provide comprehensive teacher training. Head teachers must emphasize gamification in English instruction and support professional development. Language policy implementers should incorporate gamification into teaching strategies. Further research and ongoing professional development are crucial for maximizing the impact of gamification on students' learning outcomes.

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