BEYOND ROTE DRILLS: PROPOSING NOVEL GAMIFICATION FRAMEWORKS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EFL CLASSROOMS

Mohammed El Messaoudi [1] iD **Mohammed Larouz[2]** iD
[1] The Faculty of Art and Human Sciences, Moulay Ismail University (Morocco)
moh.elmessaoudi@edu.umi.ac.ma
[2] The Faculty of Art and Human Sciences, Moulay Ismail University (Morocco)
m.larouz@flsh.umi.ac.ma

Abstract

Traditional EFL instruction, rife with rote drills and dull textbooks, often leave students disengaged and demotivated. To address this quandary, this conceptual paper not only traces the roots of boredom, demotivation, and disengagement in EFL classrooms, but also suggests a roadmap to push the teaching-learning process to the next level and rekindle motivation. Grounded in a comprehensive literature review and theoretical analysis, the paper goes beyond listing a mere catalogue of "gamification mechanics" and proposes two novel frameworks. The study frameworks probe into the core principles and processes that underpin successful gamified EFL learning experiences, revealing the state-of-the-art mechanisms that fuel intrinsic motivation, active participation, and collaborative learning. Bridging the gap between theory and practice, the paper equips educators with research-informed in-class implementation strategies. It pinpoints critical factors for maximising student engagement, identifies key components for building impactful gamified EFL environments, and proposes a set of research hypotheses for future empirical exploration. Moreover, it offers tailored theoretical and practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and researchers, empowering them to combat student disengagement in EFL classrooms. The paper at hand advocates for the integration of AI-powered Learning Management Systems (LMS) as a new vision to reimagine EFL classrooms as lively ecosystems, wherein learning English becomes a transformative odyssey, not a rote drill.

Keywords: Game-based approaches; gamified learning; student disengagement; student engagement

1. Introduction

Quite recently, considerable attention has been paid to how learning takes place in various educational settings. Several publications have appeared in recent years, documenting that learning is an active process which necessitates engagement to initiate and sustain the learning journey (Baron & Corbin, 2012; Lessard et al., 2008; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Trowler, 2010; Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). However, learner engagement can become problematic when the purpose of a learning activity is not sufficiently clear. This crisis of engagement poses a significant challenge for educational institutions as it is associated with low academic

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[1] **Corresponding author:** Mohammed El Messaoudi / https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6236-5254

performance, demotivation, disruptive behavior patterns, and high dropout rates. In a recent survey conducted by the Gallup Student Poll (2016), only half of the student population was found to be engaged, with 10% classified as both discouraged and disengaged, and 5% actively disengaged. The study reports that the issue of student disengagement is prevalent across all schools, where institutions struggle to create a participative and actively engaged learning environment (Dei et al., 1997; Lessard et al., 2008). A plethora of previous studies has shown that the significance and critical role of engagement in the academic experience cannot be understated, as it serves as a determining factor for effective learning (Lund Dean & Jolly, 2012; Wang et al., 2017; Washor & Mojkowski, 2014).

Worldwide, traditional paper-based education is being overshadowed by modern forms of instruction based on digital technologies. In relation to this, it has been reported that the rapid advancements in technology have brought about changes in the roles of students and teachers, subsequently leading to physical transformations in classrooms and schools (Gilakjani, 2017; Haddad & Draxler, 2002). A number of scholars point out that web technologies significantly influence student experiences, with online and offline interactions in modern educational environments bringing about considerable changes in students' feelings, values, beliefs, and behaviours (Selwyn, Nemorin, Bulfin, et al., 2017; Selwyn, Nemorin, & Johnson, 2017). Recent studies (Bennett, 2012; Bennett et al., 2008; Dingli & Seychell, 2015; Kivunja, 2014) note that digital natives, referring to the generation born in the 1990s commonly known as the Games Generation, Generation Me, or Generation Y, exhibit distinct interactions with the world compared to previous generations, including the Millennial Generation (born 1980-1989). Being unique, digital natives are reported to demonstrate a preference for tactile-oriented and hands-on activities, possesses strong technological literacy, and are often labelled as "technophiles" (Bennett, 2012; Bennett et al., 2008; Dingli & Seychell, 2015; Prensky, 2005). On this premise, educators face the challenge of reconstructing an education system that is supposed to cater to the needs of digital natives in precise terms (Selwyn, Nemorin, & Johnson, 2017).

For all intents and purposes, the problem (disengagement) lies in the fact that instructors continue to employ outdated educational approaches that fail to address the present needs, wants, and interests of today's students. It is against this background that Prensky (2005) previously aptly points out the absence of programming, genomics, bioethics, nanotech, and other subjects relevant to the digital era in the current curriculum. More recent studies give the nod that when the curriculum fails to align with student needs, teachers across all educational levels risk losing student interest (Balwant, 2018; Baron & Corbin, 2012; Li, 2022). Unanimously, a large number of studies hoist the white flag, acquiescing that this doomed reality necessitates a revaluation of how students learn and why learning processes have changed in recent times. By all accounts, it is alleged that the traditional school system does not cater to the learning preferences of digital students, highlighting a gap or mismatch between millennials and traditional instructional methods (Lessard et al., 2008; Lund Dean & Jolly, 2012; Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). Henceforth, the task at hand involves discovering means to harmonise these contrasting aspects and establish an educational environment that not only sustains students' engagement but also cultivates a perpetual thirst for knowledge.

Earlier studies indicate that embracing game-based learning as a potential solution emerges as a promising approach. Discussions surrounding game-based learning have sparked more debates and research on the most effective game elements for facilitating positive learning experiences. These inquiries have led to the emergence of the concept of gamification in education (Kapp, 2016). The author further states that although the term "gamification" may initially seem unfamiliar or daunting, its underlying concepts are increasingly gaining

momentum. Even though the efficacy of gamification has been proved empirically worldwide, there is a dearth of studies on how to implement gamification in EFL classrooms in Morocco.

1.1. The Problem Statement

Morocco's education system has consistently ranked poorly in terms of quality and performance. The learning crisis in a developing country such as Morocco, is attributed to a lack of information about students' learning progress and retention levels (Boutieri, 2016; Llorent Bedmar, 2014; Mondiale, 2008). In response, alternatively, gamification has been offered as a promising way to engage students and enhance the learning experience based on global evidence. In tandem, previous research (largely explorative in nature) supports the idea that gamification principles can positively impact cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of learning in Moroccan classrooms (Dehbi et al., 2023; Lamrani & Abdelwahed, 2020; Ouahbi et al., 2021).

1.2. The Purpose of the Study

This paper aims at offering pointers on how to incorporate various technology components, such as mobile learning and computer-based tools, to investigate how gamified learning experiences can improve student engagement, language achievement, behavior, and cooperative learning. Succinctly, this paper is geared towards putting forwards two novel conceptual and theoretical frameworks in order to guide and structure research in gamification and report empirical evidence in EFL classrooms in Morocco and abroad.

2. Literature Review

Invoking previous reports and studies, gamified learning experiences hold great promise for enhancing student engagement and developing diverse skills within the realm of education. Armed with gamification principles and innovative tools like gamified platforms, educators worldwide have a remarkable opportunity to reshape the future of language teaching. This approach contributes to our understanding of how technology can improve learning outcomes, as supported by existing research in the field (Majuri et al., 2018). Confusion and misinterpretations can plague the implementation and effectiveness of gamified learning experiences. To navigate this murky terrain, a thorough understanding of gamification principles and applications in education is essential. The prospective review will shed light on these crucial aspects by:

1) *Defining gamification and its rationale in educational settings.*

2) *Unpacking the complex relationship between motivation, engagement, and gamification.*

3) *Evaluating the impact of gamification on learning outcomes.*

4) *Delving into practical strategies for successful implementation.*

2.1. Defining Gamification

Unequivocally, the term "gamification" was coined in 2002 but gained mainstream recognition in 2010, becoming a viable trend in various contexts. It involves the introduction of game elements into non-game settings to make activities more enjoyable and engaging (Deterding et al., 2011). In this respect, multiple definitions have been proposed, emphasising the use of game design elements, the creation of gameful experiences, or the process of making activities more game-like (Khaitova, 2021). It is important to note that gamification is not

directly associated with knowledge and skills but influences student behaviour, commitment, and motivation, leading to improvements in learning outcomes (Yohannis et al., 2014).

In the literature, gamification is considered an emerging technology with significant potential in technologically advanced schools, bridging the generation gap between teachers and students (Kapp, 2016). Its versatility has been recognised in various educational contexts, such as lectures, homework assignments, exams, and main learning activities, to motivate students, improve skills, and maximize learning (Mora et al., 2015). Before judging the rationale for integrating gamification in education, it is essential to highlight its potential benefits, such as increased student motivation, engagement, and retention (Kiryakova et al., 2014; Marín et al., 2018).

2.2. Rationale for Integrating Gamification in Education

Gamification in education seeks to create an attractive and enjoyable learning environment for learners, providing them with diverse and engaging experiences. Research suggests that strategically incorporating game elements can result in high levels of active engagement and motivation, leading to positive outcomes in cognitive, emotional, and social areas (Brull & Finlayson, 2016). Various studies highlight its impact on student motivation, engagement, learning outcomes, cooperative learning, and behavior change (Groh, 2012; Khaitova, 2021; Pappas, 2014). In the context of foreign language education, integrating gamification is particularly relevant. When gamification is applied to language education, it expands opportunities for experiential, self-paced, and lifelong learning (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2021; Gilakjani, 2017; Wulantari et al., 2023).

The primary advantages of gamification in language education lie in the "four freedoms of play": the freedom to fail, experiment, assume different identities, and exert effort (Legaki et al., 2019). The authors further underscore that by incorporating these freedoms, gamification allows learners to make mistakes, explore new strategies, gain different perspectives, and engage in varying levels of activity. In tandem, failure in games is reframed as an opportunity to gain experience, practice, and improve, fostering resilience and perseverance in the face of challenges. Understanding the rationale for integrating gamification in education sets the stage for exploring the relationship between motivation and engagement within this context. It has been reported that traditional instruction can feel like a slog, but gamification infuses learning with intrinsic motivation. Through game-like features, students experience the thrill of progress, unlocking rewards and achievements that drive them forward, not just external pressures (Sailer & Homner, 2020). Examining the connection between motivation and engagement within gamification helps to unravel how these factors mutually reinforce each other, leading to enhanced learning outcomes.

2.3. The Relationship between Motivation and Engagement in Gamification

Numerous literature reviews demonstrate the positive impact of gamification on motivation and engagement in educational settings. Students perceive gamified courses as more motivating, interesting, and conducive to learning compared to traditional courses (Buckley & Doyle, 2016). Gamification elements have the ability to transform mundane tasks into engaging and enjoyable experiences (Khaleel et al., 2020). Emotional outcomes such as motivation, attitude, and enjoyment are commonly reported through interviews and questionnaires (Huang et al., 2020). Educational institutions are increasingly incorporating gamification features to boost student motivation and participation, including the use of digital badges to validate course completion and involvement in extracurricular activities (Bouchrika et al., 2021).

Research studies indicate that gamification increases student engagement and participation in both classroom and online environments (Nistor & Iacob, 2018; Saleem et al., 2022). Elements such as experience points, levels, leaderboards, challenges, and badges are widely used and contribute to greater engagement (Dehganzadeh & Dehganzadeh, 2020). The integration of game elements and mechanisms into learning activities captures students' attention and absorption, promoting a higher level of engagement without requiring specific game knowledge (Alsawaier, 2018; Baiden et al., 2022; Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020).

On balance, the literature supports the efficacy of gamification in fostering motivation and engagement among learners. Educational institutions can inject learning with excitement and depth by embracing game-like features. These elements craft an immersive landscape where students actively participate, driving engagement and boosting both their experience and academic success. The relationship between motivation and engagement in gamification is symbiotic, with motivation acting as a driving force for engagement, and engagement fuelling motivation. When students are motivated, they actively participate in gamified learning experiences, which in turn increases their engagement levels. Understanding this interplay is crucial to explore the impact of gamification on learning outcomes, as it provides insights into how gamification can enrich students' knowledge acquisition, skill development, and overall academic performance (García-López et al., 2023).

2.4. The Impact of Gamification on Learning Outcomes

Numerous studies have explored the correlation between gamification and learning outcomes, highlighting the positive effects of incorporating game elements into educational experiences (Denny et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2020). Gamification has been found to develop cognitive, emotional, and social domains, ultimately leading to improved performance and learning achievements (Zainuddin et al., 2020).

One key aspect of gamification is its ability to develop problem-solving skills by presenting players with challenging tasks that match their skill levels. Through active exploration and discovery within a complex system of rules, learners are encouraged to overcome obstacles and expand their capabilities (Kladchuen & Srisomphan, 2021). The social aspect of gamification plays a significant role as well. When students publicly claim their achievements and receive recognition, their social standing blossoms. The public acknowledgement validates their efforts, offering a warm glow of appreciation that might otherwise remain hidden (Hamari & Koivisto, 2015; Meske et al., 2017). This social dimension enhances motivation and engagement in learning processes (Meske et al., 2017).

Research suggests that gamification positively impacts cognitive learning outcomes. Incorporating gamification elements has been found to enrich learning achievement, procedural and declarative knowledge, and higher-order thinking skills (Mullins & Sabherwal, 2020; Turan et al., 2016). Gamification has shown effectiveness in improving outcomes for lower-risk assignments, such as quizzes and practical activities, as well as overall course performance. As stated, the literature supports the notion that well-designed and properly implemented gamification strategies can lead to improved learning outcomes across various contexts. Gamification offers a promising approach to enhance educational experiences, providing learners with engaging and immersive environments that promote active learning, skill development, and positive emotional experiences. Recognising the impact of gamification on learning outcomes sets the stage for discussing its potential as a catalyst for behavior change.

2.5. Gamification as a Catalyst for Behaviour Change

Gamification deploys intrinsic motivation, rewards, and goal-oriented gameplay to encourage desired behaviours and habits in learners. Gamification, with its focus on leveraging competition and motivation, has the potential to encourage behavior change by promoting productive behaviours and discouraging unproductive ones (Aini et al., 2019; AlMarshedi et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2017). Gamification uses game elements as motivational affordances to enhance intrinsic motivation, leading to various psychological states that can drive behaviour change.

More than just points and prizes, gamification ferrets about in the intrinsic gratification of mastering challenges and fulfilling needs. It understands the complex back-and-forth of physical exertion, psychological reward, and social connection, empowering students to drive their own learning journey (Bassanelli et al., 2022; Morford et al., 2014; Nurtanto et al., 2021). The application of gamification principles, characterized by reward systems and progressive goals, has been shown to capitalize upon individuals' intrinsic desire for advancement and accomplishment, thus serving as a catalyst for positive change. It employs psychological shortcuts and well-established motivational strategies to turn behavior modification into a rewarding, game-like journey. It offers a powerful approach to promote positive behaviours, foster intrinsic motivation, and achieve desired outcomes in various contexts (Morford et al., 2014). This paves the way to discussing strategies for integrating gamification into the curriculum, selecting appropriate game mechanics, and designing effective gamified learning experiences to optimise student engagement and achieve desired educational outcomes.

2.6. Implementing Gamification in Education

Implementing gamification in education in general and in EFL classrooms in more particular involves the intentional integration of game elements and mechanics into the learning process to boost student engagement and motivation. Instead of dry worksheets and lectures, educators can sprinkle classrooms with playful elements like rewards, challenges, and progress tracking. This playful approach harnesses students' natural love for exploration and turns learning into an immersive adventure. This approach holds the potential to transform traditional education, making it more dynamic, interactive, and effective in fostering knowledge acquisition, skill development, and overall student success (Lee & Hammer, 2011).

Educators worldwide have embraced gamification in education and observed positive outcomes. The incorporation of game elements can induce deep engagement and a sense of flow, making learning more captivating (Nurtanto et al., 2021). The key aspect of gamification is the inclusion of tasks that learners must perform, leading to the accumulation of points, progression to higher levels, and the achievement of predetermined learning objectives (Aini et al., 2019). The selection of gamification elements depends on the defined objectives, with individual activities earning learning badges and social interactions fostering a sense of community, often through leaderboards (Lee & Hammer, 2011).

Gamification features have been integrated into various Learning Management System (LMS) platforms. For example, Docebo's Gamification App allows administrators to create badges and awards for learners who complete activities within the LMS (Dehganzadeh & Dehganzadeh, 2020; Kiryakova et al., 2014). Accord LMS offers social features that promote cooperation and team building, with leaderboards and badges rewarding student contributions. Blackboard incorporates an achievements tool, enabling students to earn recognition for their work (Somova & Gachkova, 2022). Rewarding students with badges and certificates, set by customizable criteria, fuels motivation and empowers both learners and teachers (Glover, 2013).

In brief, effective implementation of gamification in education holds significant promise for revolutionising the learning experience. Well-designed gamified learning, aligned with both objectives and passions, fosters deeper engagement, motivation, and knowledge retention. Leveraging the power of gamification to create dynamic and interactive educational environments can lead to improved learning outcomes and better prepare students for success in a constantly changing world.

3. Methodology

The current study followed a systematic approach to investigate the affordances of gamification in student learning, aspiring to unveil its impact on engagement in future empirical studies. The methodology employed for this research paper included the following steps:

1) **Research Question Identification:** The research question was clearly defined to provide a focus for the study. The primary objective was to explore the effects of gamification on student engagement in learning.

2) **Literature Review**: A comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine existing scholarly works related to gamification in education. Key theories, concepts, and empirical studies relevant to the topic were identified and analysed. This step helped establish the foundation of knowledge and identified gaps or controversies that this research could address.

3) **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework Development**: Based on the findings from the literature review, two robust theoretical and conceptual frameworks were developed. Relevant theories, models, or concepts were selected and integrated to form the basis for analysis and interpretation.

4) **Research Hypotheses or Propositions**: Building upon the theoretical conceptual frameworks, specific research hypotheses (or propositions) were formulated.

5) **Scope and Delimitations**: The scope and boundaries of the research were clearly defined. Specific aspects or dimensions of gamification in student learning were identified, focusing on the impact on engagement. Limitations and constraints that may have affected the study were also acknowledged.

6) **Data Analysis and Interpretation**: As this research was conceptual in nature, primary data collection was not conducted. Instead, data analysis involved critically examining existing literature, synthesising information, and drawing connections between theories and concepts. This process facilitated a deeper understanding of both the research topic and the research problem.

7) **Supporting Arguments with Evidence**: The development of conceptual and theoretical arguments was supported by evidence gathered from the literature review. Relevant studies, theories, and empirical findings were cited to strengthen the validity of the arguments presented.

8) **Drawing Conclusions and Implications**: Based on the analysis conducted, conclusions were drawn regarding the research question and the broader theoretical implications of the findings. The contributions of this research to existing knowledge were discussed, and recommendations for future research or practical applications were identified.

Procedurally, translating the steps above into practice, the researchers have embarked on a process of constructing the Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks. These frameworks have been developed from scratch, drawing upon the researchers' extensive knowledge and expertise in gamification. They involve a meticulous analysis and synthesis of various elements,

such as defining the key components of gamification in the context of education, identifying its potential benefits, and addressing the specific challenges that arise during its implementation. This research establishes a bicameral framework and structured approach to understanding gamification role in learning in general and EFL instruction in more particular.

4. Results

4.1. The Theoretical Framework

Notably, numerous theories have contributed to the understanding of gamification in education, including the works of McGonigal (2011) and Wu, Hsiao, Wu, Lin, & Huang (2012). However, the theoretical framework purely developed in this study integrates concepts from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Johnson & Johnson's cooperative learning theory, Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory, and Bandura's social cognitive theory. This theoretical framework offers a broad perspective on the research problem and supports the rationale for examining the variables of interest. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed theoretical framework.
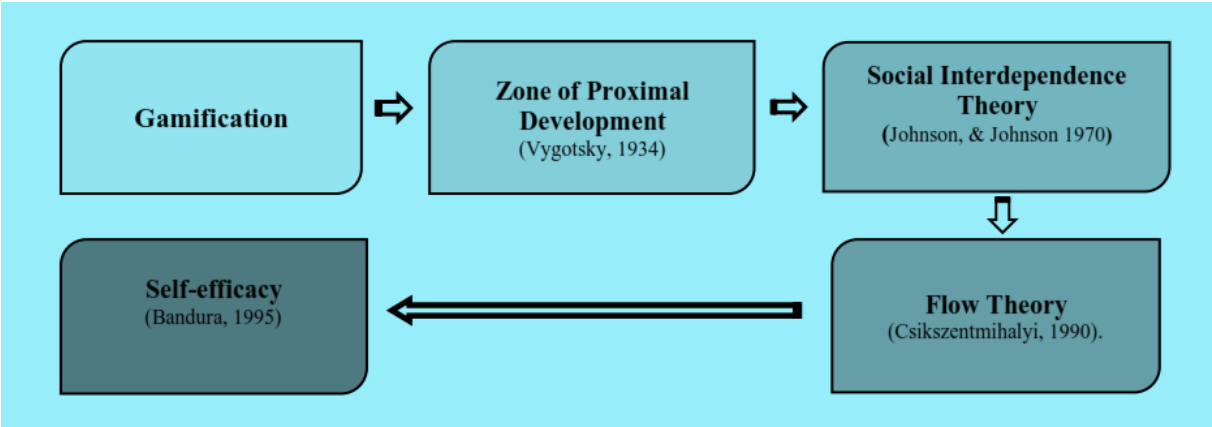

Figure 1: The Proposed Framework

4.1.1. Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as conceptualised by Vygotsky, refers to the learner's current level of development and the potential for advancement with the help of appropriate tools, such as language, cultural signs, and guidance from capable adults or peers. In this theoretical framework, the gamification approach employed aims to provide learners with an experience that aligns with their specific zone of proximal development (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Adaptive learning systems elevate gamification, scaffolding student progress within their zone of proximal development for optimal growth (Iliev, 2019; Tang & Kay, 2014). This scaffolding approach facilitates their learning journey by providing appropriate support and guidance tailored to their individual needs.

With recourse to the framework conceptualization, the researchers stipulate that using gamification as a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding strategy establishes a strong link between learning theory and practical implementation. Indeed, gamified activities can be designed to provide challenges and tasks that are within the ZPD, allowing learners to stretch their abilities and achieve optimal growth. In addition to this, gamification can serve as a scaffolding tool by providing supportive structures, feedback, and guidance to learners as they progress through the learning process. This combination of ZPD and scaffolding within gamification helps create a dynamic and adaptive learning environment that promotes learner autonomy and facilitates continuous skill development.

4.1.2. Social Interdependence

Building upon the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding, integrating social interdependence into gamified learning experiences further enhances the learning process. Collaboration, cooperation, and competition in gamified learning foster social connection, peer support, and shared learning experiences. The Social Interdependence Theory suggests that the success of individuals is influenced by the actions of others (Johnson & Johnson, 2002, 2009; Renard & Davis, 2019). This theory is demonstrated in the context of cooperative learning, which involves students with varying abilities working together in small groups towards a shared objective (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). The authors argue that there is compelling evidence that cooperative team activities promote higher-level thinking and better retention of information compared to students working independently.

It has been reported that gamification and Social Interdependence Theory share strong and compelling ties that can revolutionise the learning experience (Riar, 2020; Star, 2015). At its core, the Social Interdependence Theory emphasises the positive impact of collaborative and cooperative interactions among individuals. Gamification, with its ability to foster collaboration, competition, and social interaction, aligns perfectly with the principles of Social Interdependence Theory. Gamified learning environments spark teamwork and motivate collaborative efforts, uniting learners towards shared goals. This synergy between gamification and Social Interdependence Theory not only enhances student engagement and motivation but also cultivates important skills such as teamwork, communication, and empathy (Meske et al., 2017).

4.1.3. Flow Theory

Consistent with Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009), when individuals are engaged in meaningful and challenging work, they often experience a state of total immersion, losing track of time and experiencing high levels of enjoyment and engagement. This optimal state is referred to as "flow." Gamification and serious games incorporate the key elements of flow, and researchers have drawn connections between flow theory and the use of gamification and serious games (Bressler & Bodzin, 2013; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Flow theory emphasises the importance of high levels of engagement (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009), which aligns with the findings that serious games and gamification can significantly enhance engagement. In accordance, learning becomes a joyride, not a chore. Gamification unlocks a state of flow where students fully immerse themselves in activities, relishing the challenge and effortlessly absorbing knowledge. Engagement deepens, time seems to disappear, and the pursuit of learning becomes inherently rewarding.

Briefly, the researchers' reason that the link between gamification and the flow theory highlights the powerful potential of game-like elements in enhancing engagement and immersion in various activities. Gamification magic lies in crafting experiences with laser-sharp goals, instant feedback loops, and just-right challenges. This delicate balance ignites a state of flow, where individuals become one with the pursuit, driven by intrinsic reward and fully immersed in the journey. Whether in education, work, or personal development, gamification offers a promising approach to fostering optimal experiences, increasing motivation, and improving overall performance. Combining gamification and flow theory can offer a powerful way to design EFL learning experiences that are both engaging and motivating, helping students reach their full potential.

4.1.4. Self-Efficacy

Building upon the connection between the flow theory and gamification, another significant relationship exists between gamification and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in a specific task or domain. Gamified elements like progress tracking, rewards, and social comparison boost self-efficacy by showcasing achievements. This enhanced belief in one's capabilities fuels motivation, perseverance, and confidence to tackle new challenges.

Self-efficacy, as defined by the renowned psychologist, Albert Bandura, refers to an individual's personal assessment of their ability to effectively perform actions required to handle potential situations (Bandura & Wessels, 1994). Numerous studies have shown a positive correlation between self-efficacy and achievement in foreign language learning (Cubukcu, 2008; Mahyuddin et al., 2006; Mills et al., 2007; Sun et al., 2021).

On the previous lines of reasoning, gamification offers opportunities for mastery experiences by initially setting the game at a low difficulty level, allowing players to experience success, and gradually increasing the level of difficulty. Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement in foreign language learning (Rachels & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2018). In addition, studies have found a connection between self-efficacy and gamification (Banfield & Wilkerson, 2014; Chinchua et al., 2022; Polo-Peña et al., 2021; Rachels & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2018).

Otherwise stated, and referring back to the theoretical framework, the researchers cogitate that the positive correlation between gamification and self-efficacy highlights the transformative potential of incorporating game-like elements into various activities. Fueled by opportunities to track progress, earn rewards, and engage in friendly competition, gamification nurtures a sense of self-efficacy, the belief in one's own abilities. This strengthened self-belief becomes the engine behind enhanced motivation, resilience, and a willingness to tackle new challenges. As the interplay between gamification and self-efficacy is further explored, exciting possibilities emerge for empowering individuals and unlocking their full potential across diverse domains.

4.2. The Conceptual Framework

In recent years, student disengagement has been plaguing schools worldwide, but gamification has emerged as a promising remedy. Integrating game elements into EFL learning was proven to captivate attention, boost motivation, and elevate student achievement.

To this end, a proposed conceptual framework has been meticulously crafted to capacitate EFL teachers with innovative avenues to enhance student learning outcomes through the strategic use of gamified approaches. This comprehensive conceptual framework outlines the dependent variables, comprising the interactive platforms of **Class Realm, Duolingo**, and **Khan Academy**, while also encompassing the key dependent variables, which include **student behaviour**, **language achievement**, and **collaborative learning**. Attempting to unveil the back-and-forth between gamification, engagement, and motivation, this conceptual framework describes pathways to optimal EFL learning. By so doing, EFL teachers can enable students to climb the ladder of achievement, unlocking proficiency and forging collaborative communities within EFL classrooms. Figure 2 highlights the proposed conceptual framework.
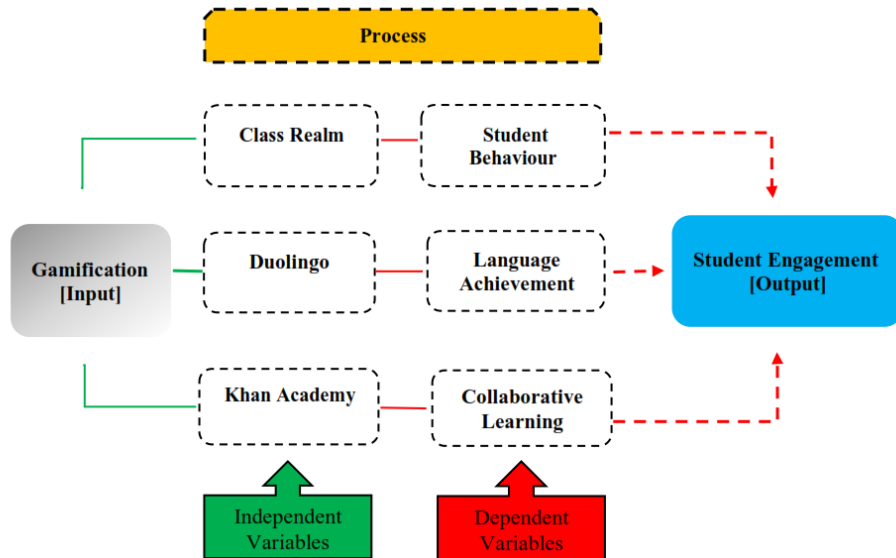
Figure 2: *The Proposed Conceptual Framework*

The figure above presents a conceptual framework designed to prescribe gamification as a panacea for improving student engagement. The framework proposes the integration of specific gamified platforms, including **Class Realm**, **Duolingo**, and **Khan Academy,** as input to facilitate the process and elevate student engagement. This conceptual framework offers a systematic approach to address student disengagement and enhance educational experiences. It underscores the importance of integrating gamification techniques as a powerful strategy to promote student engagement. The framework encompasses three primary components: input, process, and output.

4.2.1. Input

The input stage involves selecting and deploying specific gamified platforms tailored to address different aspects of student engagement. In this framework, three platforms are suggested: Class Realm, Duolingo, and Khan Academy. Each platform plays a distinct role in promoting student engagement in various areas.

1) **Class Realm:** This gamified platform focuses on tracking student behaviour patterns. Class Realm transforms classrooms into interactive hubs, fueling positive behaviour, collaboration, and friendly competition. The platform offers rewards, points, and leaderboards to motivate students and foster a sense of achievement.

2) **Duolingo:** With its focus on language learning, Duolingo provides an engaging and interactive interface to improve language achievement. Through gamified language lessons, students can enhance their vocabulary, grammar, and language proficiency. Duolingo's adaptive learning algorithms and game-like elements create an enjoyable and immersive language learning experience, leading to increased engagement and improved language skills.

3) **Khan Academy:** Khan Academy offers a comprehensive and gamified platform to promote collaborative learning. Khan Academy ignites the learning spark by offering interactive exercises, captivating videos, and personalised journey. The platform allows students to collaborate, share knowledge, and engage in group activities, fostering a sense of community and enhancing their overall learning experience.

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4.2.2. Process

The process stage of the conceptual framework involves the implementation and deployment of the selected gamified platforms. In relation to this, EFL instructors are invited to integrate these platforms into their practices. The process is supposed to be dynamic, interactive, and aligned with the specific goals and objectives of each platform.

4.2.3. Output

The output of the conceptual framework focuses on upgrading student engagement. This framework bridges the gap between engaging gamified platforms and their effective integration into classrooms, paving the way for a surge in student motivation, active participation, language gains, collaborative learning, and a satisfying sense of accomplishment. The output stage measures the impact of the framework on student engagement and serves as a basis for ongoing assessment, feedback, and further refinement.

To put it briefly, the proposed conceptual framework provides a structured approach to utilise gamification to enhance student engagement in educational settings. Gamified platforms like **Class Realm**, **Duolingo**, and **Khan Academy** offer a treasure trove of game-like elements to motivate, engage, and boost language skills. This framework incorporates impactful features of gamification, transforming classrooms into dynamic, interactive spaces where engagement thrives, and education becomes an enriching journey.

4.3. Research Hypotheses

A crucial step in conducting a conceptual paper is the development of research hypotheses that can be tested empirically in future studies. In the case of this study, seven research hypotheses were generated to guide and shape future investigations.

H1: The utilisation of gamified platforms in the classroom positively influences student engagement levels, leading to increased motivation and active participation in learning activities.
H2: Gamification enhances students' perception of the learning process by creating a more immersive and enjoyable educational environment, thereby positively impacting their engagement and academic outcomes.
H3: The incorporation of gamified elements in classroom activities promotes collaboration, cooperative learning, and social interaction among students, contributing to higher levels of engagement and improved learning outcomes.
H4: Gamification strategies, such as points, rewards, and leaderboards, stimulate healthy competition among students, driving their engagement and intrinsic motivation to excel in their academic pursuits.
H5: The integration of gamified platforms in language instruction specifically improves students' engagement and language proficiency, as it provides interactive and immersive experiences that facilitate language learning and practice.
H6: The effectiveness of gamification in enhancing student engagement may vary based on factors such as age, cultural background, and prior gaming experience, suggesting the need for personalized approaches and adaptations to optimize engagement outcomes.
H7: Long-term implementation of gamified platforms in educational settings fosters sustained engagement, leading to improved academic performance, increased retention of knowledge, and a positive impact on students' general educational journey.

These hypotheses serve as informed predictions about the potential outcomes and relationships between variables within the context of gamification in student learning. The study lays the groundwork for future empirical research to gather data and evidence that either support or reject these predictions. This process is vital for advancing knowledge and understanding in the field, as it provides a framework for systematic exploration and investigation of the impact of gamification on student engagement, learning outcomes, and other relevant factors. The resulting insights from testing these hypotheses will contribute to the existing body of literature and inform educators, policymakers, and researchers about the potential benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of gamified approaches in educational settings. It is important to note that these research hypotheses are provided as examples and should be further refined and tailored to the specific research context and objectives of future studies.

4. Discussion

Primarily, the current study ventured to dissect existing literature and theory to build robust frameworks, revealing the core principles, dynamics, and inner workings of a transformative approach in EFL instruction. Laconically, this research paper sought to unlock the untapped potential of game-based approaches in education through the development of two comprehensive theoretical and conceptual frameworks, advocating for the remarkable affordances of gamified learning, boasting an arsenal of playful elements and mechanics.

4.1. The Theoretical Framework Interpretation

As sttaed previously, classrooms often struggle with student disengagement, but gamification offers a promising solution. Its ability to spark interest is backed by a wealth of educational theories.Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) finds echoes in gamification's carefully scaled challenges. Like a sturdy ladder, it offers tailored support, helping students climb towards new linguistic heights. Similarly, Johnson's cooperative learning theory resonates with gamification's emphasis on collaborative tasks. Students, united by the spirit of the game, ascend together, their achievements woven into a shared tapestry of progress. Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory adds another dimension. The immersive nature of gamified learning can propel students beyond the confines of traditional classrooms, transporting them into a state of deep engagement. This heightened participation fosters a vibrant ecological environment, nurturing positive interactions, productive habits, and a genuine love for learning. Finally, Bandura's framework for self-efficacy development finds fertile ground in gamification. Mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and emotional arousal – all find expression in well-designed games. Students witness their own progress, learn from peers, bask in encouragement, and experience the thrill of accomplishment, their confidence blossoming with each playful step.

Taken together, this approach has the power to upgrade the teaching-learning process by fostering student engagement, encouraging collaboration, creating immersive experiences, and even boosting self-confidence. In the next section, we will pinpoint a new conceptual framework that acts as a powerful lens to explore this potential (the affordances of gamified learning). This framework paves the way for innovative teaching practices and impactful interventions that can unleash the full potential of EFL learners.

4.1.2. The Conceptual Framework Interpretation

Probing into the complex issue of student disengagement, this study proposes a novel conceptual framework centred around gamification and its potential to revolutionise learning. Recognising the contested terrain of student motivation and engagement theories, the framework meticulously defines and interweaves these concepts, providing a robust foundation for rigorous research. It outlines key components and strategies, encompassing curriculum design, instructional methods, assessment techniques, and technology integration, all orchestrated to build an optimal environment that ignites student interest and fuels engagement. This is not a mere temporary fix, but a long-term solution anchored in established research and driven by a passionate belief in gamification transformative power.

The framework thoroughly explores the complex connection between gamification and student engagement, identifying effective approaches, recommended practices, and effective strategies designed for EFL educational settings. Ultimately, this framework aims at reigniting student passion for learning and contributing to their holistic linguistic development within the school environment, transforming disengagement into a relic of the past.

4.2. The Study Implications and Limitations

This study aspired to expose the multiple affordances of gamification in education in general and in EFL instruction in more particular by developing two novel theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will guide educators, policymakers, and researchers in this regard. Through rigorous analysis of literature and evidence, the researchers explored how game-based approaches can effectively boost student engagement and propel positive outcomes. The research, at hand, holds significant promise for stakeholders. Educators will gain practical insights with respect to how to integrate gamified elements into their practices. Policymakers will also be equipped with evidence-based strategies to craft informed educational policies. And researchers, as well, will discover new avenues for academic probe in this dynamic field. The frameworks, in question, uncover the full potential of game-based approaches, paving the way for innovative and impactful practices that will promote student engagement and EFL learning ultimately. The resulting implications and recommendations will serve as catalysts for advancing gamified learning strategies and their successful integration within educational settings.

Nevertheless, some limitations are to be acknowledged. The study primarily focuses on specific gamified platforms improving engagement in online classroom activities. While this is crucial, engagement encompasses other facets like language achievement, student behaviour, and collaborative learning. The objective, here, is to explore whether gamified platforms further engagement across these dimensions. Furthermore, the current study investigates student engagement with gamified software compared to traditional activities like textbook work, group work, and project-based learning. While this allows for rigorous investigation, other factors and activities also contribute to engagement and learning outcomes. Irrevocably, the study does not directly measure the long-term effects of gamification on academic performance or other aspects of the educational journey. While immediate engagement is crucial, considering potential long-term benefits and drawbacks of gamified platforms would be valuable.

These implications and limitations combined stress the need for further research on gamification full impact in Moroccan EFL classrooms. This, in turn, will clarify both the potential (affordances) and challenges of integrating gamified platforms in EFL instruction, paving the way for more informed and effective implementation strategies.

5. Conclusion

This article challenges the traditional paradigm of rote memorisation and disengaged learners in EFL classrooms by venturing into the fertile ground of gamified learning. Through the development of two novel conceptual and theoretical frameworks, the authors deconstruct the key elements of successful gamified EFL experiences, unveiling the intricate root systems of intrinsic motivation, active participation, and collaborative learning. More than simply theoretical models, these frameworks irradiate the critical factors that optimise student engagement, pinpointing the fundamental components that foster vibrant gamified environments. The significance of this work extends beyond theoretical discourse, laying the groundwork for robust research hypotheses and empirical exploration. Its implications resonate with educators, policymakers, and researchers alike, urging each stakeholder to play a vital role in realizing the transformative potential of gamification. This work stands not only as a rigorous academic contribution, but also as a call to action. It invites stakeholders to become architects of captivating quests, transforming the tedious rote chore into a landscape of meaningful EFL learning adventures.

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