RECONCEPTUALIZING EFL SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH GAME-BASED PRACTICES IN ALGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION*

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Abstract

As technology continues to evolve rapidly, many educational platforms have emerged online, offering open access to their users. Blended learning has become the primary instructional model, increasing online course delivery while reconsidering conventional teaching approaches. Nevertheless, students have reported difficulties in balancing the dual demands of online and in-person teaching/learning, despite acknowledging the flexibility offered by both modes. To address these challenges, incorporating gamification strategies through in-class game-based activities can enhance students' participation, motivation, and language retention, particularly in the EFL context. By incorporating game-like tasks, university lecturers can make foreign language learning more engaging and student-centered. These engaging techniques were implemented to support 250 third-year students at Ibn Khaldoun University in Algeria to improve their speaking skills within an in-person EFL classroom context. Data were collected through a structured survey alongside task performance records and classroom observation in both semesters. These activities, such as interactive scenarios, impromptu speech, riddles, "what am I?", and analogy games, helped to increase active participation, reduce speaking anxiety, and made the learning process more enjoyable. While students appreciated the flexibility of gamified speaking activities, they initially faced difficulties with communication and in-person participation. Therefore, enhancing student and teacher competencies in gamified instructional design can further improve engagement and speaking proficiency in Algerian EFL classrooms.

Key words: *Foreign language, Gamification, Higher education, Learning speaking skill, Student engagement.*

1. Introduction

Despite the importance of the speaking skill in EFL classes, most students are still hesitant to participate orally, revealing all forms of stress, anxiety and lack of

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self confidence. Today's learners have a digital profile. They are raised in a world where the launch of digital platforms is frequent; this advantage has revolutionized learning and helped the current generation to address their learning styles and preferences. In parallel, the traditional approaches are no longer effective to address Gen Z learning needs. With this new attitude to learning, their monotony in the classroom becomes so quick. Teachers in tertiary and higher education are facing new challenges that should be solved to improve the learning process and successfully meet the students' needs, and requirements. Blended learning is expanded in higher education, combining online and face-to-face classes. While it offers flexibility, many EFL students still struggle with low motivation and limited participation. The use of games in teaching helps to solve this problem by making speaking activities more fun and engaging. Gamification encourages students to speak more, reduces fear, and creates a learning environment that is active, supportive, and student-centred. Modern pedagogical paradigms in education, supported by ICT's use, create an eclectic approach that is adapted to meet the needs of a digitally inclusive environment. Gamification is one of these new trends.

This study reveals the benefits of gamification and provides a comprehensive understanding of its integration in education. This study aims to examine the effect of students' attitudes toward the use of gamification on two key dimensions of classroom engagement, mainly skill engagement and participation. These aspects are relevant in the context of oral expression module, where active involvement and communicative competence are essential. More importantly, this study introduces students concentration and engagement as moderating variables, especially during the use of gamified teaching methods through the existing literature and in a real context in higher education, thus the study contributes both theoretically and practically with the objective to assess the impact of gamified activities, within an onsite EFL classroom context, on students' attitudes in oral expression. To proceed, this work is guided by the following questions:

Question 1: To what extent do students' attitudes toward gamification influence their engagement and participation in oral expression tasks?

Question 2: How do gamified activities in face-to-face classroom setting impact students' attitudes toward gamification?

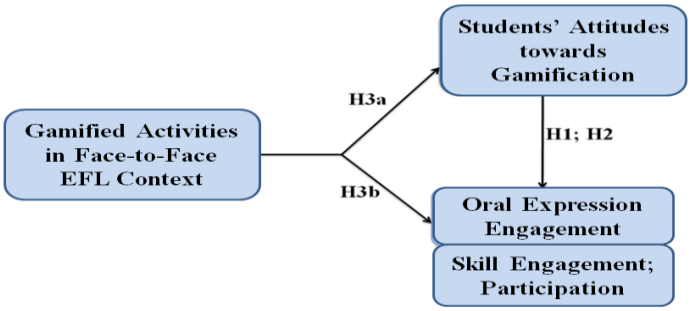

Figure 1. Conceptual Research Model

As shown in Figure 1, the model visually represents the four hypotheses proposed in this study, where students' attitudes towards gamification are expected to influence their skill engagement and participation (H1 and H2) in a positive way. Additionally, gamified classroom activities are assumed to improve the attitudes and engagement of our selected sample (H3a and H3b).

2. Theoretical Framework

Student concentration in the EFL classroom is a necessary aspect of learning. Concentration refers to the ability of learners to focus on an activity or assignment that requires their full attention, cognition, and engagement (Aguilar-Cruz, 2022). Their lack of interest entails their lack of focus and boredom, but oral games are important tasks which boost the students' excitement and fluency *"language is best learned when attention is focused on meaning not on form"* (Krashen, 1982, p. 66) This latter is one of the characteristics of Generation Z, who are well versed with several online platforms, from digital smartphones to virtual apps and social media, that are fulfilling their learning preferences. These limit their ability to concentrate in the classroom, without mentioning the launch of AI platforms with its multiple services that are highly used to perform varied tasks anytime and anywhere (Chou & Tsai, 2019; Garrison, & Kanuka, 2004). Therefore, prioritizing their concentration skills is compulsory to address understanding, memorization, and information retention *"at every level of language proficiency, learners should try to be fluent with what they already know"* (Nation, 2008-2009) Educators in higher education attempt to adopt various strategies to increase the level of concentration in the classroom and maximize participation, but they still face challenges in fully integrating their approaches to learning (Partovi & Razavi, 2019; Allehaidan & Wan Zainon, 2024; Adzmi, Bidin, Selvaraj, & Saad, 2024).

2.1. Gamification as a Pedagogical Approach

Throughout the incorporation of educational apps, online platforms, or gamification, educators can help students be engaged while also promoting active participation, *"one of the benefits is the development of skills and competencies in terms of problem solving, communication, cooperation, decision-making, new narratives, and lateral thinking, among others"* (Fonseca *et al*., 2023, p. 7). Hence, integrating activities by means of group work or mono presentations on topics of their interest can help capture the attention of students and enable them to think deeply and be creative. Such activities stimulate their senses and encourage them to actively participate in their learning. Scenarios, for example, encourage students to actively listen to their peers' suggestions of an unexpected ending or solve problems in these scenarios in their own way, with the ability to listen to each other to convince their peers of such a solution. As maintained by Allehaidan and Wan Zainon (2024):

> *Educators are encouraged to consider not only the incorporation of gamification into their teaching practices but also the creation of an environment conducive to sustained concentration. For instance, instructors could implement gamification techniques aligned with structured learning*

> *activities, such as using rewards and challenges that require critical thinking and sustained effort, thereby promoting deeper engagement* (p. 6).

Gamification refers to the incorporation of game-like elements, like rewards and competition, into non-gaming settings to motive students in the classroom (Adzmi *et al.*, 2024). Several frameworks offered valuable insights into the efficacy of gamification and gamified approaches in language learning. Scholars like Gee (2003) and Fonseca, Caviedes, Chantré, and Bernate, (2023) examined learning theory, suggesting that immersive environments created through games promote deep engagement, essential for learning. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) puts autonomy, competence, and self-esteem in gamified environments at the forefront, creating a challenging context that is collaborative and interactive. These frameworks offer a robust theoretical foundation for the application of gamification in language learning. Despite the fact that gamification promotes classroom engagement, there are challenges and considerations that educators should take into consideration. One of these challenges is to ensure that gamification is integrated in a way that is aligned with the course objectives. The addition of games to a lesson without setting the purpose behind such selection could lead to superficial inclusion, where students will concentrate on gaining rewards or extra points more than learning (Han & Chen, 2024; Kazu & Kuvvetli, 2024; Aguilar-Cruz, 2022).

The word “game” holds a universally clear denotation for learners, irrespective of their gender, age, or educational background. Students now view learning as an enjoyable experience rather than merely following the rigid structure of textbooks with predefined objectives and rubrics. Game-based learning encourages them to perceive themselves as active participants who assume responsibility for their learning process, progressing at their own pace (Rodríguez, 2018). It is noteworthy to mention that gamification acts as a mechanism that is based on the Goal-Setting Theory, demonstrating that human behaviour can be influenced by specific goals, these latter explain that individuals can be motivated by appropriate goals and feedback (Carrier, 2019). Goal-setting theory is pioneered by Locke and Latham in the 1960s; they have explained why and how goals have an impact on human behavior. As Locke and Latham (1990) stated *"goals affect performance through four mechanisms: by directing attention, mobilizing effort, increasing persistence, and motivating strategy development"* (p. 11) The theory is relevant to game based tasks, where elements like achievement, levels, and even points align well with its principles to boost students' inclusion and engagement. Gamified learning enhances students' engagement through behavioural, emotional, and cognitive pathways mediated by the flow experience (Thomas & Baral, 2023).

2.2. Benefits of Gamified Learning

This pedagogical tool has many benefits that promote the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, especially in language education as outlined below.

- ✓ Increases student motivation and engagement by tapping into students' intrinsic and extrinsic rewards systems.
- ✓ Reduces speaking anxiety in language learning.

- ✓ Encourages active participation through interactive, game-based activities that promotes learner involvement
- ✓ Makes learning student-centered and enjoyable, promoting autonomy and personalized learning experiences.
- ✓ Supports Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, considering learning as a social and collaborative process.

While some interactive games could motivate active learners, they could create tension or anxiety among students, especially those who have problems with self-esteem or have a fear of public speaking, as maintained by Marin-Pacurucu and Argudo-Garzón (2022) *"games motivate people to improve themselves since they increase interest in certain subjects, reduce the dropout rate among students, improve grades, improve their cognitive abilities, and reduce stress and depression within the learning process"* (p. 83) Teachers in higher education should keep a certain balance between collaboration and competition, especially in a classroom where active learners and vertical learners exist, where all students are equally encouraged and valued. For example, team-based challenges where groups of students collaborate to solve problems boost a sense of camaraderie in the class, which is particularly beneficial for students who find individual competition or participation difficult (Alonso-Sánchez *et al.,* 2025; Han & Chen, 2024).

Moreover, the literature has investigated the connection between technological affordances and language acquisition/ learning outcomes, highlighting the importance of a balanced approach that uses digital tools while understanding their limitations (Balalle, 2024; Greenhill, 2010; Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988). It is shown that games are one of the best techniques for teaching English as a foreign language because, while students engage in play and have fun, they often do not realize they are studying. This helps them to learn new terms or grammatical structure in a natural, authentic and inclusive way (Dicheva *et al*., 2015).

2.3. Speaking Fluency Strategies

Several techniques to improve fluency in speaking, including recordings through digital recorders, where the speaker will be able to reflect on their speech and consciously recognize the gap in accuracy, fluency, and pace (Nation & Newton, 2009). This can be done individually in the classroom, where performance is authentic, through recordings, and any form of stress, fear, or anxiety could be seen in the recording, besides other behaviors that were unconsciously practiced. Another suggested technique is 'the ask and answer' technique (Simcock, 1993, as cited in Nation & Newton, 2009), whereby learners read a given passage or text and work in pairs and discuss the questions raised by the teacher and respond accordingly, comparison between their answers in important to detect the level of each, the purpose of this task is to detect the rates of fluency and accuracy in front of their peers.

Another technique is labelled 'the rehearsed talk or pyramid procedure', it is a technique described by Nation and Newton (2009). It is a step-by-step approach used to help learners not only improve their fluency in speaking, but also build their self-confidence before taking the initiative to speak in front of the whole class, as stressed by Thornbury (2005) *"speaking is a skill, and as such, needs to be developed*

and practiced independently of the grammar curriculum" (p. 1); which confirms the use of oral games as educational tools to foster engagement. The steps of the technique are structured in a pyramid. Step one is the individual preparation where ideas key points are organized, step two is to practice with a classmate, one student only, where stress can be controlled better and where feedback is provided, step three is to practice in a small group, of 3 up to 5 classmates to get used to moderately high number of class peers, then the last step is to present to the whole class, where their preparation is the previous steps could be seen in public and recorded when necessary. The teacher at this level evaluates not only the final performance, but the whole process from preparation to performance. A widespread activity used in EFL classrooms involves a scripted or monologue dialogue that students perform in front of their classmates. This speech is often prepared in advance and mostly involves reciting a script. This type of activity can be used to enhance oral communication skills, especially fluency, pronunciation, and public speaking confidence, due to the fact that students use a foreign language to share true information about themselves (Herazo-Rivera, 2009). Depending on the classroom context, students will either perform in pairs or individually, while the teachers' role is to evaluate through pre-task modeling and post-performance feedback. Additionally, through repeated practice of the foreign language, students will train themselves in automatization, i.e., shifting from controlled processing to automatic processing.

2.4. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the ZPD

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a well-known concept developed by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky during the late 1920s; its exploration continued until he died in 1934. In his work, "Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes", Vygotsky (1978) defined the zone of proximal development as "*the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"* (p. 86). Vygotsky's study is inspired by Sociocultural Theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which highlights the gap between what learners can do alone and what they could achieve with guidance.

Through structured game-based speaking activities, students' learning is scaffold to help them move beyond their abilities, with peer support and teacher pedagogical intervention. The idea supports the fact that individuals improve best when they work collaboratively with others; they develop their language skills and begin to internalize new concepts and psychological tools (Shabani *et al.*, 2010). Learning which targets developmental levels already attained is of limited effectiveness; authentic learning should be directed toward the next developmental stage, the level that surpasses the learner's current abilities (Vygotsky, 1978). The sociocultural perspective, as explained by Vygotsky (1978), suggests that language development is connected to social interaction. In the context of oral expression, this perspective emphasizes the importance of communication to improve the higher-order thinking skills (Tiu *et al.*, 2023). The figure below show how the ZPD, supported by peer collaboration and teacher

scaffolding, can be implemented via gamified oral tasks to promote higher order thinking skills and ensure accuracy through constant practice.

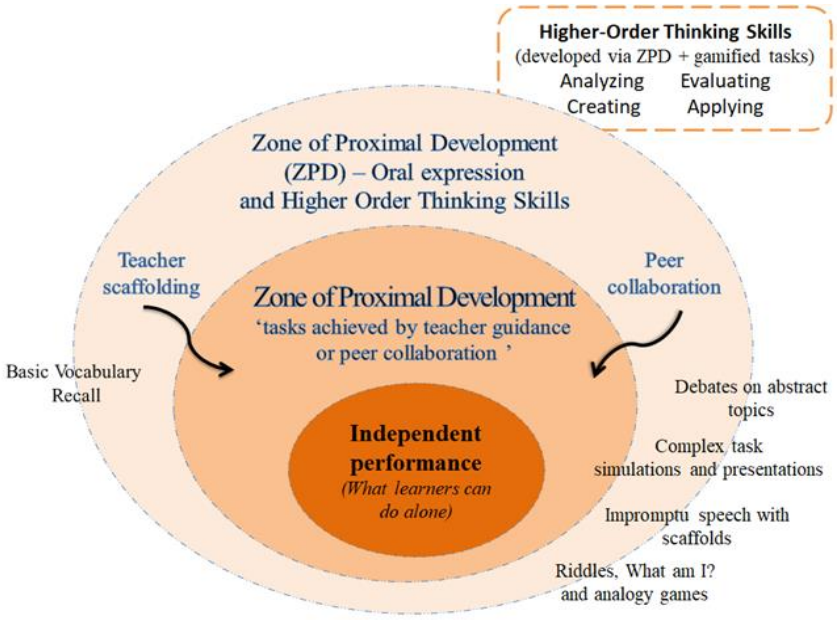

Figure 2. ZPD and Gamified Tasks for Oral Expression and Higher-Order Thinking Skills

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and methodological design

This study was conducted at the University Ibn Khaldoun, Algeria, involving 250 third-year BA students who are enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses. A game-based approach to teaching oral expression was employed to evaluate the rate of progress in communication skills, focusing on fluency and accuracy, besides exploring their attitudes towards the incorporation of game-based activities in the EFL classroom.

3.2. Instructional activities

This approach focused on enhancing speaking proficiency through engaging tasks such as analogy games, riddles, impromptu speeches, and interactive role-play scenarios, all implemented within an in-person EFL setting. Although smartphones are widely used among participants in an academic context to facilitate the quick access of information, their use was intentionally restricted in this study. This decision aimed to assess students' creativity and ability to engage in real time communication without relying on any digital platform.

3.3. Rationale

The integration of GBL approach in my EFL classroom aimed to reduce speaking anxiety, promotes self-esteem, and encourages active participation. Games

were more than just fun — they became powerful tools for real communication. Activities such as riddles and impromptu speeches helped students build fluency, boost confidence, and reduce anxiety. Through purposeful play, learners engaged more freely and progressed naturally, when play becomes purpose, progress follows. Students value flexibility, however, they face many challenges to maintain motivation, communicate with confidence, express their thoughts and ideas in formal, academic English, participate in onsite sessions, and demonstrate fluency and accuracy in speaking.

3.4. Data collection

Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey in which interaction, involvement, motivation, attention, and emotional satisfaction were involved. Data for performance for each gamified task were identified and recorded as success/failure rates. Observational data were used as a complementary tool to capture the changes in involvement in both semesters. The survey responses were descriptively analyzed and the participants' responses were compared across the types of activity.

4. Results

The survey results provided a detailed understanding of students' experiences with gamified learning activities, focusing on learners' interaction, active involvement, motivation, attention, and engagement, as well as emotional satisfaction. For learner interaction, 28 % of students selected “Sometimes”, when interacting with their teacher, while 50 % chose "Always". Regarding peer interaction, the most common response was "Sometimes" at 38 %, indicating moderate engagement with classmates during gamified activities. When it comes to active involvement in gamified tasks, 44 % of students reported “Always” participating in gamified learning activities in general, while 50.4 % reported they “Always” participated in gamified speaking activities, revealing strong engagement levels. However, a small proportion, 17.5 % selected “Never”. Regarding “Motivation”, results were balanced, 44 % responded “Always” and 34 % “Sometimes” for staying motivated to improve their speaking skills, while 40 % selected “Always” for staying committed, even when the activities were challenging. As for attention and engagement, 36 % of learners reported being always focused, and 48 % felt involved in oral expression tasks. This also proposes a positive trend in cognitive and emotional engagement. Finally, the results of emotional satisfaction with gamified learning were strong, with 40 % of learners stating they always enjoy such lessons, 38.4 % look forward to them, assuring their interest and attraction to the gamified content. These reveal that game based activities are effective in teacher-student interaction than in peer interaction, emphasizing the teacher's efficient role in engagement. The higher rate, 50.4 shows that the selected speaking challenges are motivating. Nevertheless, the 17.5 % "Never" participation rate exhibit the need for more strategies to grab the attention of students whose self-confidence is low. While motivation and enjoyment and high per rate, lower attention rates were scored;

forwarding our attention for the need to restructure the tasks' pace, timing, and format to maintain concentration in the classroom.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Learners' Interaction and Motivation in Gamified Oral Activities

Parameters	Questions	Frequency Scale					
		Never		Sometimes		Always	
Learner Interaction	1. How frequently do you engage in gamified learning activities with your peers?	75	30 %	95	38 %	80	32 %
	2. How often do you interact with your teacher during gamified learning tasks?	55	22 %	70	28 %	125	50 %
Active Involvement	1. How often do you actively participate in gamified learning activities?	60	24 %	80	32 %	110	44 %
	2. How often do you participate in gamified activities that are designed to improve your speaking skills?	44	17.5 %	80	32 %	126	50.4 %
Motivation	1. How motivated do you feel to improve your speaking skills during gamified learning tasks?	55	22 %	85	34 %	110	44 %
	2. How likely are you to keep participating in gamified activities even when they are challenging?	60	24 %	90	36 %	100	40 %
Attention and engagement	1. How often do you feel fully focused during gamified learning activities?	65	26 %	95	38 %	90	36 %
	2. How involved do you feel when participating in gamified oral expression tasks?	35	14 %	95	38 %	120	48 %
Emotional satisfaction	1. How much do you enjoy learning through gamified activities in your language class?	49	19.6 %	101	40.4 %	100	40 %
	2. How often do you look forward to gamified lessons because they are fun or interesting?	70	28 %	84	33.6 %	96	38.4 %

Figure 3 below demonstrates the rate of success and failure of our selected participants in four main gamified learning tasks: Impromptu Speech, Analogy Games, Riddles, and What I AM? As demonstrated, the data is categorized in two separate colors, mainly blue and brown. The Impromptu Speech has the highest failure rate with 86 % and 14 % success. This reveals that students found this activity difficult and cognitively stimulating, and more stressful as we saw that they were blocked and not able to express themselves and their ideas. Analogy games received

a high rate, 80 % and a low rate of failure (20 %). Riddles were incorporated too, the activity reached 72 % success rate and 28 % failure.

Meanwhile, What I am activity received balanced feedback, with 56 % success and 44 % failure, this task in particular require two important elements, verbal articulation and inferencing skills, which our participants lack the most. Analogies and Riddles are the type of activities that involve structured thinking; they have received better rates more than those which require immediate performance like the case of Impromptu Speech. The findings reflect varying cognitive requirements, i.e., improvisation and fluency in verbal communication are challenging more than word puzzles and logic-based tasks. This latter entails an urgent need to scaffold the oral tasks, like warm-ups before impromptu speaking.

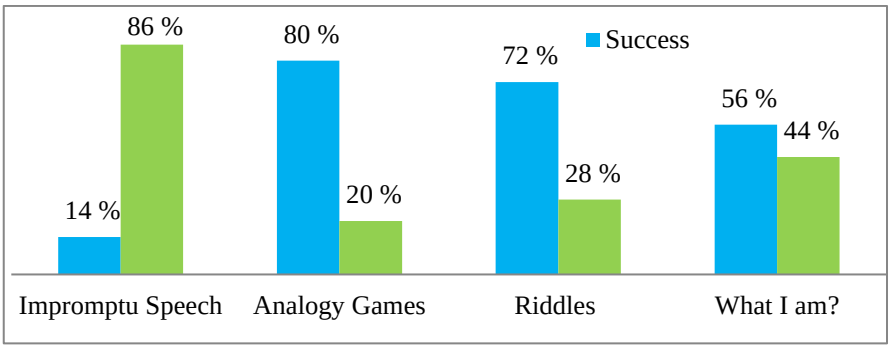

Figure 3. EFL Students' Performance in Game-Based Speaking Activities

The aim of the activity was to assess students' creativity and active involvement through scenario completion tasks. This chart illustrates the proportion of students' improved engagement in interactive scenarios across two semesters; the pie chart reveals 39 % of improvement of students' engagement in the first semester which is below average, while in the second semester, the rate of improvement increased to reach 61 %. This improvement reflects a positive impression of the sample's interest in the selected activities; they became accustomed with the gamified context, as well as becoming confident and familiar with their learning expectations. As observed in the oral class, the progress of participation was not immediate, but progressive and continuous after each activity there were efforts to be involved and motivated to share ideas and play the game, showing greater comfort with language use and more willingness to engage.

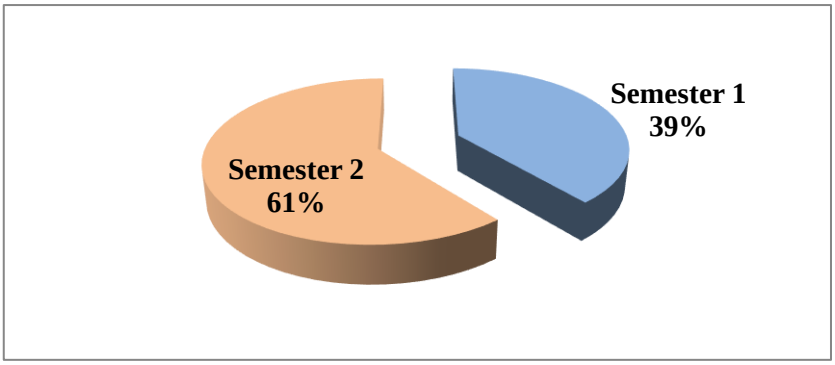

Figure 4. Interactive Scenarios Student Creativity & Involvement

5. Discussion of Findings

The results of this research reveal that the integration of gamified tasks has a positive influence on students' engagement, motivation, and emotional satisfaction in the EFL context. High rates of active involvement and motivation show that the GBL approach stimulated learners' participation. These results align with Hamari *et al.* (2014), who argue that gamification enhances motivation by fostering autonomy and competence. According to their framework, gamification can be considered from three perspectives: first, the implemented motivational affordances, second, the psychological outcomes, and third, the subsequent behavioral outcomes. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that peer interaction was moderate, with 38 % of our sample engage with their classmates during activities. This assumes that while GBL could promote participation, more games that stress collaboration may be important for sustained interpersonal communication.

Moreover, data exhibit the difference between structured thinking (analogy games, riddles) and improvised speaking activities (impromptu speech). The former achieved high rates of performance (80 % and 72 %), which supports the idea that structured games provide effective scaffolding that helps language production (Nation, 2008). On the contrary, the low performance rate of the impromptu speech (14 %) reflects the absence of competence or skills to perform an unprepared speech or the presence of competence, but the psychological aspect intervenes; this aligns with previous studies that associate these tasks with high levels of cognitive load and stress (Thornbury, 2005). When comparing both semesters, data on interactive scenarios reinforce the stance of the GBL approach to learning. Students' engagement was raised from 39 % in the first semester to 61 % in the second semester, revealing that familiarity with GBL approaches and scaffolding, besides repeated exposure, gradually decreased students' affective filters and raised their willingness to step outside their comfort zone.

Despite the positive feedback that was received in the EFL context, a number of challenges were encountered during their implementation. At the beginning, some students show hesitation to participate and collaborate in groups; a pattern also observed by Aguilar-Cruz (2022). In their study, they found that initial reluctance

stems from unfamiliarity with student-centered approaches. The shift from passive e-learning to active in-person tasks was challenging for some students, which reflects Garrison and Kanuka's (2004) findings on the cognitive and affective requirements of blended learning settings. In the speaking tasks where open-ended discussion is the key, many students reveal limited creativity in their answers, and their responses were repetitive. This aligns with Nation's (2008) argument that structured scaffolding is a prerequisite before learners can confidently perform fluently and accurately in tasks that require improvisation.

Confidence issues were prevalent. Many participants struggle to express their ideas fluently, a pattern which is consistent with Adzmi *et al.* (2024), who claim that low self-esteem truly limits oral performance even with gamified tasks and teachers' pedagogical support. Hamari *et al.* (2014) note that such an emphasis on positive reinforcement through rewards may compromise course objectives if not appropriately balanced with strategies that foster intrinsic motivation. These challenges exhibit that, despite the fact that game-based learning can strengthen students' engagement; its effectiveness depends on systematic scaffolding and training in gamified instructional design. The results of this study confirm H1 and H2, revealing that participants' positive attitudes toward game-based tasks are associated with increased skill engagement and participation in the oral expression module. In line with H3a and H3b, the findings propose that gamified tasks, when deliberately scaffolded, can be more effective in face-to-face and online learning contexts. Based on the study's findings and challenges, we put forward the following recommendations:

a) Introduce students gradually to speaking through games to reduce anxiety and fear
b) Adjust game-based tools to fit the Algerian EFL context ‘interactive scenarios was the best choice ’
c) Integrative the use of digital platforms to improve interactive language learning.
d) Foster peer collaboration through team-based speaking games
e) Implement continuous feedback after each activity to rate their progress.
f) Initiate each speaking session with a short warm-up game (e.g., riddles or analogies) to reduce anxiety and increase participation in the classroom.
g) Balance cognitive and affective demands through the combination of varying activities such as using riddles or analogies as a warm up before speech takes place
h) Design future courses with incremental task difficulty while paying attention to the students' progress.

6. Conclusion

Games' inclusion in EFL classrooms can reduce speaking anxiety, increase student engagement, and turn the traditional EFL setting into a flexible, learner-centered experience. Within a face-to-face classroom setting, gamification not only supports language retention but also improves social interaction. With Vygotsky’s

Zone of Proximal Development, these strategies offer scaffolded support that enables students to perform beyond their linguistic capabilities. Gamification is an effective pedagogical tool in EFL classes, aligning well with the requirements of Generation Z and Alpha. Its integration in higher education programs should be responsive to the students' cognitive skills; it is not perfect, though. The observed weaknesses were cognitive and psychological; students exhibited passivity and mental blockage with certain activities, while they showed readiness and excitement in others. These opposite reactions reflect the weaknesses and strengths in the participants' language skills, learning styles, and preferences. In this regard, further research could bridge the gaps in EFL, especially in a world where hybrid content is at the crossroads. Future research could benefit from bibliometric mapping software like VOSviewer to visualize the relationships between engagement; oral communication and game-based learning. These visualizations provide a rigorous insight into the thematic density of the topic in the field of applied linguistics and TESOL.

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