

# Students' Experiences and Perceptions on Using Gamifications within TESOL Classrooms in China

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## ABSTRACT

Traditional TESOL classes, which are teaching English as a foreign language in countries that do not have English as native language, often prefer a more teacher-centered style of classroom management. Technology was not often integrated in TESOL classrooms. The field of technology-integrated TESOL education continues to change as new technologies are developed, and as research continues to demonstrate which teaching methods are most effective at promoting language acquisition. Gamification has positive effects on English language learners' motivation and vocabulary. English language learners expressed gamified lessons as their preferred technique. Thus, this study aimed to study English language learners in TESOL classrooms in China's experiences and opinions about gamification, in order to inform the field the necessities of integrating gamification in TESOL classroom in China.

**Keywords:** Education, ESL, TESOL, Gamification Teaching Method

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) classes, which are teaching English as a foreign language in countries that do not have English as native language, often prefer a more teacher-centered style of classroom management [1]. Technology was not often integrated in TESOL classrooms. The field of technology-integrated TESOL education continue to change as new technologies are developed, and as research continues to demonstrate which teaching methods are most effective at promoting language acquisition [2][3]. Gamification has positive effects on English language learners' motivation and vocabulary [4]. English language learners expressed gamified lessons as their preferred technique [4]. In the traditional English class, the teacher stands in front of the class to teach new knowledge. The students sit in their seats and record the teacher's knowledge in their notebooks. Young people's attention is hard to keep in a traditional classroom, and their attention may be drawn to novel things, such as a classmate's new pencil box or new toys, this may allow them to miss some of the teachers in the classroom knowledge points. Game teaching method is a kind of teaching method based on young students' psychology. It can change the dull learning atmosphere in the traditional classroom, to stimulate students' enthusiasm for English

learning and improve students' level of exploration ability. Some shy students have a low sense of participation in the traditional classroom because they are afraid of making mistakes. The game teaching method can relieve the students' psychological pressure and enable them to participate well in the classroom. We find that applying game teaching method to TESOL classes can help students learn English well. Gamification can make students interested in the learning, thus may stimulate the engagement. Compared with traditional teaching methods, this kind of teaching method can make it easier for students to understand, remember and apply new knowledge, thus improving the quality of classroom teaching. Thus, this study aimed to study English language learners in TESOL classrooms in China's experiences and opinions about gamification, in order to inform the field the necessities of integrating gamification in TESOL classroom in China.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Definition of Gamification

Analysis of Gamification in Education considered gamifications as a teaching method. Gamification is considered as applying a variety of game applications into

education settings [5]. Many researchers and teachers have already had experiences of effectively applying gamification in the educational context to increase student motivation and achievement [5]. Besides, Deterding [6] defined gamification as At its heart, gamification is about taking elements from games and applying them to non-game settings.

## **2.2. Different gamification strategies/software/application in TESOL classrooms**

The first example to illustrate the use of Gamification is Kahoot. Kahoot, is a popular e-learning tool that can be easily used for providing meta-cognitive support, liveliness in class and student attendance in higher education which needs limited lecturers and student education [7]. Kahoot has many attractions. First, it is a free learning platform. Teachers and students do not have to pay for it. Secondly, it has many functions; Kahoot is an educational software example using a game-based strategy that has the potential for preparing online questions, discussions or examples as well as providing students to cooperate in terms of research topics [7]. Kahoot is the embodiment of the Gamification of teaching methods. It not only helps students review after class, but also makes them learn knowledge from the joy of the game; At the same time, the use of games in the classroom will also improve students' enthusiasm to participate in the classroom.

The second example is not using game software for teaching, but to set up some small games directly in the classroom. In the article *Increasing Class Participation In College Classrooms With The Good Behavior Game* the author set up a game to reward participants. The instructor displayed and read the following rules before each competition-plus-reward class period: you have been divided into two teams; when I ask the class a question, if a person on your team raises his or her hand and answers correctly, I will give your team two tally marks; if that person answers the question incorrectly, I will give a person on the other team a chance to answer; if the other team answers the question correctly, I will give them one tally mark; if no one gets it right then nobody gets tally marks, but I will explain the correct answer [8]. Setting rewarding games will enable students to actively participate in the games and focus on the classroom for a long time, which will improve the participation of the classroom.

## **2.3. The Effects of Gamification in TESOL Classrooms**

Teachers make full use of modern teaching methods and flexible teaching methods. Teachers use writing, recording, performing and other ways to teach, enrich the learning form and can create a pleasant teaching

atmosphere. Diversified teaching methods can enrich English classroom learning and improve students' learning enthusiasm and initiative. Therefore, gamification is also widely used in TESOL classrooms and research generally showed positive effects. For example, Myhre [9] mentioned that language gamification are often used to enhance student's morale and motivation in classroom. This is due to its engagement element and its features that are similar in nature with the games played by students at home. Students can take the initiative to participate in class activities, students can observe other students' classroom performance, and students who want to be lazy cannot succeed, so that students can fully learn the knowledge. In this learning environment, students can overcome their fear of English and their shyness in speaking English. Only by overcoming this barrier can they study English smoothly, arouse their enthusiasm in learning English, and exert their initiative in learning English, and in the process of learning to feel happy, feel respected and valued.

## **2.4. English Language Learners' Perspectives on Gamifications in TESOL classrooms**

Bicen, H., & Kocakoyun, S. analyzed the data on English language learners' perspectives on gamifications in TESOL classrooms, and they found students improved themselves through gamification in areas that they feel deficient in by observing their achievement status [10]. Students considered gamification methods make them take on more responsibilities to become more successful in the lesson. Students think gamification methods enable them to learn difficult topics while having fun. Research also showed that the gamification method improves the students' interests in the classroom and the students get more success through the gamification method. In addition, competition in the classroom can enhance students' motivation

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT**

ZPD is defined by Vygotsky as "the distance between the actual developmental 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" [11] (p. 86). In TESOL classroom using game teaching: the process of students learning English language is an exploration between ZPD. For their unfamiliar English language knowledge, they need teachers or more professionals to guide them in order to help them learn more knowledge. Therefore, if the teachers can provide them with better guidance, they will get better learning results. Game teaching is a kind of guidance provided by teachers for students. This guidance method is more innovative and can improve

students' classroom participation, so students will achieve better results.

#### 4. METHODS

In this study on the impact of game teaching methods on TESOL classroom participation, the method used by this study was a questionnaire survey. First of all, before issuing the questionnaire, we designed the questions after group discussion. We set up a total of 8 questions, each with a different purpose. The first question was to ask the age of those people who were filling the questionnaire, which can help us better grasp the views of people of all age groups. At the same time, we can also more accurately catch the results in the age group who is receiving TESOL education now. The second question asked the gender of the filling in person, which can help us to study a question we raised before, whether the participation of boys will be higher than that of girls. The third question was "have you ever played games in TESOL class?", only those who answered yes will be asked to continue to complete the questionnaire. The fourth question was "if so, what types of games are you involved in?" we hope to find out what most of the game modes in the classroom are through this question. The fifth question was "if not, do you think it is necessary to add games to English classes?", the sixth question was "if so, do you prefer TESOL classes with games or without games?" If so, which way do you think your participation was higher in a TESOL class, with games or without games? "this question intuitively showed the impact of the game-based classroom on students' influence. The last question was" if you think games have increased your participation in class, what percentage was it? ", this question concretized the previous question and digitized student participation. After the questionnaire design, we made a poster with a QR code and then published the poster to our social media platform. Most of our friends on our social platform are adolescents, studying in high school or university now, which is exactly the group we would like to focus on. Thus, we chose to publish the questionnaire to our social media platform and asked them to fill it out. Our questionnaire was launched for about 4 days, and 102 valid questionnaires were collected. After 4 days, we closed the filling channel and began to sort out the data. After the survey responses were collected, three participants who had completed the survey were randomly selected and invited for a brief semi-structure interview. The interviews were transcribed and translated into English as soon as the interviews were complete. Thematic analysis were conducted to reveal the patterns across participants.

## 5. FINDINGS

### 5.1. Survey Responses Results

*Q3: Have you ever played games in an English class?*

*Q4: If so, what types of games are you involved in?*

The data showed that 74.51% of participants have played some games in their English classes. 25.49% of participants indicated that they had not played games in their English classes. Among the 74.51% participants that have played some games in their English classes, they revealed that 75% is Phonics, 64.47% is Memory game, 39.47% is Song Teaching, 15.79% is Guessing game and 5.26% is other.

*Q5: If not, do you think it is necessary to add games to English classes?*

The data showed that 61.54% participants considered adding games to English classes is necessary. 34.62% of participants indicated that they considered adding games to English classes is unnecessary. 3.85% of the data is invalid.

*Q6: If so, do you prefer English classes with games or without games?*

The data showed that 94.74% participants preferred English classes with games. 5.26% of participants indicated that they preferred English classes without games.

*Q7: If so, which way do you think your participation was higher in an English class, with games or without games?*

The data showed that 96.05% of participants considered games can increase engagement in English classes. 2.63% of participants considered games cannot increase engagement in English classes. 1.32% of the data is invalid.

*Q8: If you think games have increased your participation in class, what percentage was it?*

The data showed that 15.07% of participants considered games to have increased their participation in class by 80% to 100%. 30.14% of participants considered games have increased their participation in class by 60% to 80%. 30.14% of participants considered games have increased their participation in class 40% to 60%. 19.18% of participants considered games have increased their participation in class by 20% to 40%. 5.48% of participants considered games have increased their participation in class from 0% to 20%.

### 5.2. Interview Findings

The first participant indicated that the game improved the memory of knowledge in class. She learned knowledge in a relaxed environment. She argued that

games were not widely used in English classes. Because there are many students in China, only very few classes use games in class. Finally, she suggested that educators can design games according to their students' English level.

The second participant had a lot of experience in playing games in class. Her professor once asked them to use Quizlet to participate in class. She considered that the competition of the game would help her better participate in the classroom. She indicated that she would remember vocabulary through the game and practice oral English. She believed that games could attract students' attention and enable them to better participate in the classroom, so game teaching should be widely used. However, the second participant also suggested that teachers should use different kinds of games to exercise students' different abilities, and students should understand these games in advance before class.

The third participant often plays some word solitaire and song guessing games in English class. Game teaching can make her more interested in English and speed up her speed of remembering words. She believed that game teaching can make the classroom atmosphere more relaxed and active, so it should be widely used. She suggested that teachers should be more flexible in using game teaching.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The survey results of this study demonstrated that most students had positive experiences with gamifications in TESOL classrooms. Through the teaching method of the game, they can learn the English knowledge better in class. This teaching method can make most students actively participate in the classroom and will increase their classroom participation. Most participants also believed that games in TESOL classrooms could increase their motivation and participation in English language learning. Gamification teaching increases the students' ability to use English. This teaching method also cultivates the students' own exploration ability. However, interview data indicated some negative experiences. First, participants indicated that gamifications were not widely used in TESOL classrooms in China. Some teachers will occasionally use this teaching approach in the classroom. Also, the games they were exposed to are mostly remembering games, competition games, guessing games, and word games, which lack variety. The kinds of games they were exposed to are also outdated and did not fit into the definition of gamifications.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Thus, in order to apply more gamifications in TESOL classrooms in China, we suggest:

Chinese teachers are generally used to using traditional teaching methods. They only use the podium and blackboard, but ignore the participation and concentration of students in the classroom. Moreover, they rarely use game teaching method or never use it. What's more, I didn't take the initiative to learn how to use game teaching software. Students rarely use games to learn in class, although they also think that game teaching can help them make progress, and more of them choose to follow the traditional teaching methods of teachers.

Based on the above, more trainings on gamifications should be included in the teacher education programs on how to integrate gamifications organically in the classrooms due to the fact that students in China and also TESOL teachers were not exposed to a variety of games. The government department in charge of education should organize special training sessions on game teaching every month. The government can hire developers of game teaching software to teach teachers.

Teachers' schools should also invest special construction funds for game teaching to buy some game teaching equipment and materials in batch, so as to help teachers prepare basic tools for game teaching. If the schools themselves have insufficient funds, they can also seek the help of the government. More funding should be provided to the local schools to purchase effective gamification tools.

Schools or governments should introduce and promote more effective gamification tools. Government can also subsidize software companies to collaborate with local school districts in making the tools more accessible for schools and students. The Chinese government and schools should actively negotiate with some overseas game software companies. They can not only seek some technical guidance to develop similar game teaching software, but also directly buy some free accounts for students to use. Moreover, school or government leaders also can purchase the copyright of some overseas game teaching software, so that students and teachers can easily use that software in China. This way will be more convenient and fast.

Students should also help promote the development of game teaching in China. Students should not blindly adapt to the classroom using only paper and pen. They should take the initiative to seek change. You can start learning how to use game teaching software in your spare time. They can also put forward suggestions to their schools or teachers to use games for learning, which will help their schools and teachers think about whether they should change the traditional teaching methods.

The development and expansion of game teaching in China needs the joint efforts of all parties. The government, schools, teachers and students should pay more attention to game teaching. Everyone plays a vital role in the development of game teaching.

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