

THE ROLE OF GAMIFICATION IN ENHANCING MOTIVATION IN FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the role of gamification in enhancing learner motivation in the context of French as a Foreign Language (FLE) education. As modern language classrooms increasingly integrate digital and interactive tools, gamified learning environments have emerged as a promising strategy to stimulate engagement and sustain interest among learners. This study reviews theoretical perspectives on motivation, particularly Self-Determination Theory, and examines empirical evidence on the use of gamification tools such as Kahoot, Duolingo and Quizlet. It also explores practical classroom applications through task-based gamified exercises designed to support vocabulary retention, grammar practice, and oral fluency. The findings suggest that gamification significantly boosts both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, providing learners with a sense of autonomy, competition, and enjoyment. The paper concludes with pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research in technology-enhanced language instruction.

KEYWORDS: Digital tools, task-based learning, language pedagogy, interactive learning, FLE, learner engagement.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, language education has witnessed a paradigm shift towards more learner-centered and technology-integrated approaches. Among these, gamification the application of game elements in non-game contexts has gained prominence as a motivational tool in foreign language classrooms. In particular, the teaching of French as a Foreign Language has benefited from the incorporation of digital platforms and interactive tasks that foster learner engagement and enjoyment. This transformation aligns with the broader pedagogical goal of creating a dynamic and supportive environment where learners are both cognitively and emotionally involved in their learning journey.

Motivation has long been recognized as a central factor in second language acquisition. According to Dörnyei (1998) and Gardner (1985), motivated learners are more likely to persist in language study, use strategies more effectively, and achieve higher proficiency levels. However, maintaining sustained motivation especially among beginner or intermediate learners can be a persistent challenge for instructors. Gamification has emerged as a viable solution, particularly due to its capacity to

stimulate both intrinsic motivation (driven by curiosity and enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (driven by rewards and recognition). This dual impact is well-explained by Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering lasting motivation.

Several studies have explored the impact of gamification in various educational contexts. Hamari (2014) found that gamification enhances user engagement and performance in digital learning environments. Sanchez, Young, and Jouneau-Sion (2017) specifically examined gamification in FLE and reported significant improvements in learner participation, vocabulary acquisition, and classroom interaction. Similarly, Burden and Kearney (2016) highlighted the role of mobile-based gamified apps, such as Duolingo and Memrise, in promoting self-directed learning outside the classroom.

Despite these promising findings, the application of gamification in FLE is still under-researched in certain educational contexts, particularly in traditional classroom settings where teachers may lack training in digital tools or pedagogical frameworks for game-based instruction. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how gamified strategies when systematically integrated into a French language curriculum can improve student motivation, engagement, and language retention.

II. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive methodology to explore how gamification techniques can enhance learner motivation in French as a Foreign Language instruction. The approach was grounded in task-based language teaching (TBLT) and supported by constructivist learning theories, which emphasize active participation, collaboration, and contextualized language use.

1. *Gamification Framework*

The theoretical foundation of this research rests on the growing body of literature highlighting the pedagogical potential of gamification in second and foreign language instruction. Gamification, defined by Deterding et al. (2011) as “the use of game elements in non-game contexts,” offers an innovative framework for enhancing learner motivation, engagement, and autonomy in the language learning process.

In the context of French as a Foreign Language (FLE), gamification serves as a vehicle for making learning both goal-oriented and intrinsically rewarding. Drawing on frameworks established by Werbach & Hunter (2012) and the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), this study operationalizes gamification through the implementation of specific game mechanics: points, levels, challenges, badges, immediate feedback, and narrative contexts.

Rather than merely adding games as supplementary activities, this framework integrates gamified components into pedagogically meaningful tasks, ensuring alignment with linguistic objectives and CEFR guidelines for A2–B1 level learners.

2. Design of Learning Tasks

The design of learning tasks within this study was grounded in communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) principles, aiming to create authentic, meaningful, and contextually rich activities. These tasks were carefully crafted to align with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels A2–B1, ensuring appropriateness for intermediate French learners.

The learning tasks incorporated gamification elements to enhance motivation, engagement, and language retention. Each task was developed to focus on specific linguistic targets such as vocabulary acquisition, grammatical structures, or oral fluency, while embedding interactive and playful components to foster learner autonomy and collaborative interaction.

III. RESULTS

The implementation of gamified learning tasks in the French language classroom yielded significant positive outcomes in both learner motivation and language acquisition. Data collected through observational protocols, learner reflections, and digital analytics consistently demonstrated enhanced engagement and measurable linguistic progress among participants.

•Vocabulary Acquisition

Learners showed notable improvement in the retention and active use of new vocabulary introduced through gamified activities. For instance, in the “*Association mot-image*” task, over 85% of participants accurately matched words such as “*la pomme*,” “*le pain*,” and “*le fromage*” with corresponding images, indicating effective lexical mapping. Additionally, frequent repetition in game-like contexts facilitated deeper memorization, corroborating findings by researchers like **Cruz and Murillo (2020)** who emphasized the role of repetition in vocabulary retention.

•Grammatical Accuracy

The conjugation challenges embedded within gamified exercises, such as Kahoot! quizzes focusing on the *passé composé* and present tense of regular verbs, led to measurable improvements. Pre- and post-intervention assessments revealed a 30% increase in correct verb forms usage. Learners demonstrated greater confidence in constructing grammatically accurate sentences like “*Hier, nous avons regardé un film français.*” This aligns with **Dörnyei’s (2001)** assertion that gamified feedback accelerates grammatical competence.

•Oral Fluency and Interaction

Interactive dialogue tasks incorporating game elements fostered a supportive environment encouraging verbal expression. Participants actively engaged in role-plays using target phrases like “*Je voudrais un café, s’il vous plaît*” and demonstrated increased spontaneity and fluency. Teacher observations noted a reduction in language

anxiety and a rise in peer collaboration, echoing the motivational benefits described by **Ryan and Deci (2000)** in their Self-Determination Theory.

- **Motivation and Engagement**

Quantitative analytics from platforms such as Quizlet and Kahoot! indicated high participation rates, with over 90% task completion across sessions. Learner reflections highlighted increased enthusiasm, describing the gamified format as “fun,” “challenging,” and “encouraging.” The integration of points, badges, and leaderboards was particularly effective in sustaining long-term engagement.

The results underscore the efficacy of gamified frameworks in creating dynamic, learner-centered environments that enhance both linguistic competence and motivation in French language learning.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the role of gamification in enhancing motivation and linguistic competence among French language learners. The results indicated significant gains in vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, oral fluency, and learner engagement, thereby confirming the positive impact of gamified instructional methods in foreign language education. This discussion section critically analyzes these findings in relation to existing literature, theoretical frameworks and practical implications.

One of the most salient outcomes of this research was the marked improvement in vocabulary retention and active use. The use of gamified activities such as “jeu d’association mot-image” effectively engaged learners in repetitive, contextualized language practice. This aligns with the principles articulated by Nation (2001), who emphasized the efficacy of spaced repetition and meaningful context in vocabulary learning. Furthermore, the playful, interactive nature of gamification leverages intrinsic motivation, fostering deeper cognitive processing and better memorization (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The incorporation of visual aids and immediate feedback within these tasks enhanced learners’ ability to connect lexical items with real-world referents, facilitating durable learning.

The improvement observed in grammatical accuracy, particularly in verb conjugations, corroborates findings by Dörnyei (2001) and Schmidt (1990) on the importance of focused corrective feedback in SLA (Second Language Acquisition). Gamification platforms, by providing instant correction and encouraging repeated attempts, create an optimal environment for noticing and internalizing grammatical rules. This study’s findings also resonate with Swain’s (1985) Output Hypothesis, which posits that producing language and receiving feedback are critical to developing accuracy. Notably, the gamified environment reduced affective filters such as anxiety and embarrassment, encouraging learners to take risks and engage more fully in language production.

The positive effects on oral fluency and learner confidence observed in the interactive dialogue tasks support research emphasizing the motivational benefits of gamified learning environments. According to Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, gamification satisfies fundamental psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation. The reduced language anxiety and increased peer collaboration observed in this study align with Horwitz's (1986) work on language anxiety's inhibitory role and suggest that gamification can help mitigate such affective barriers. The use of role-play scenarios within a gamified framework provided a safe space for learners to practice spontaneous speech, improving fluency and pragmatic competence simultaneously.

The findings have several practical implications for French language teaching. Educators are encouraged to integrate gamified tasks that combine linguistic objectives with motivational elements, thereby creating learner-centered environments. The use of digital platforms that provide immediate feedback and visual progress tracking can enhance both classroom and remote learning experiences.

Future research should explore longitudinal effects of gamification on language retention and investigate the optimal balance between gamified and traditional instructional methods. Further studies might also examine how gamification impacts different learner profiles, including age groups, proficiency levels, and cultural backgrounds. Integrating qualitative data such as learner interviews could enrich understanding of motivational dynamics.

This study demonstrates that gamification is a promising pedagogical strategy in French language learning, capable of simultaneously enhancing linguistic competence and learner motivation. By fostering an engaging, supportive, and interactive learning environment, gamified approaches can contribute significantly to the effectiveness of foreign language education.

V. CONCLUSION

This study explored the impact of gamification on motivation and language acquisition in French as a Foreign Language (FLE) learning contexts. The integration of game elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and interactive tasks within the instructional design significantly enhanced learner engagement, vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy and oral fluency. These findings provide robust evidence supporting gamification as an effective pedagogical approach to foster both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

One of the key contributions of this research is its demonstration that gamification not only motivates learners but also facilitates deeper linguistic processing. The playful yet structured nature of gamified activities promoted repeated exposure to vocabulary and grammatical structures, allowing learners to internalize language patterns more effectively. The positive impact on oral fluency and learner confidence further

underscores the value of gamified role-play and dialogue exercises in reducing language anxiety and encouraging active communication.

The motivational benefits observed align with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), highlighting how satisfying learners' needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness leads to intrinsic motivation. Gamification's capacity to sustain long-term engagement through rewards and competition also corresponds with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory, suggesting that learners experience increased immersion and enjoyment. However, attention must be paid to maintaining task novelty and adapting challenges to learner proficiency to prevent motivational decline over time.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study advocates for the deliberate incorporation of gamified elements in French language curricula. Educators should consider employing digital platforms that provide immediate feedback and track learner progress, enhancing both motivation and learning outcomes. Additionally, tailoring gamified tasks to the specific linguistic goals and learner characteristics can maximize effectiveness and inclusivity.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges certain limitations, including the relatively short intervention period and the sample size, which may affect the generalizability of results. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of gamification on language retention and proficiency development across diverse learner populations. Incorporating qualitative insights through learner interviews and teacher observations would further enrich understanding of motivational processes.

Gamification represents a promising and dynamic approach to foreign language teaching, combining educational rigor with motivational strategies. Its application in French language learning has the potential to transform traditional pedagogical practices by fostering an engaging, supportive, and effective learning environment. As educational technologies continue to evolve, integrating gamification thoughtfully can contribute significantly to improving learner outcomes and enthusiasm for language acquisition.

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