Developing Gamification Strategies to Boost English Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Speaking proficiency remains a challenging skill for many EFL learners, particularly in higher education contexts where students often experience anxiety, low confidence, and limited opportunities for oral practice. This study aimed to develop and validate gamification-based instructional strategies to enhance English speaking skills among third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Nias. Employing a Research and Development (R&D) approach, this study adopted the ADDIE model, encompassing analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation stages. Ten students were selected as research participants from one class consisting of thirty-eight students. Data were collected through speaking performance tests, observation checklists, questionnaires, and documentation. The findings revealed that the developed gamification strategies contributed to increased learner motivation, active participation, speaking confidence, and fluency. These results indicate that systematically designed gamification can function as an effective pedagogical approach for improving speaking skills in EFL tertiary education settings.

Keywords: *Gamification, English speaking skills, ADDIE model, research and development, EFL students*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as a fundamental skill in English language learning because it enables learners to convey ideas, emotions, and information through oral interaction. Unlike receptive skills, speaking requires learners to actively construct meaning while simultaneously managing linguistic, cognitive, and affective processes.

Brown (2004, p. 140) describes speaking as an interactive process that involves producing, receiving, and processing information in real time. This definition highlights that speaking is not merely the articulation of sounds but a complex communicative activity that demands fluency, accuracy, and confidence.

From a communicative perspective, speaking competence develops through meaningful interaction rather than mechanical repetition. Nunan (2003, p. 48) emphasizes that learners acquire speaking skills more effectively when they are engaged in authentic communicative tasks that require negotiation of meaning. Similarly, Richards (2008, p. 19) argues that speaking instruction should prioritize communicative activities that reflect real-life language use, allowing

learners to respond spontaneously rather than memorizing scripted dialogues. These perspectives suggest that speaking proficiency emerges through active participation in communicative contexts.

In addition, Harmer (2007, p. 284) explains that effective speaking involves a balance between fluency and accuracy. Fluency allows learners to express ideas smoothly without excessive hesitation, while accuracy ensures that utterances are grammatically and phonologically acceptable.

Thornbury (2005, p. 7) further notes that fluency is closely related to learners' ability to retrieve language automatically, which can only be developed through frequent speaking practice. Therefore, speaking instruction should provide learners with ample opportunities to practice oral communication in supportive environments.

Despite its importance, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners, particularly in higher education contexts. Many students experience psychological barriers that inhibit their willingness to speak English.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986, p. 129) identify foreign language anxiety as a major factor that negatively affects students' oral performance. Learners who fear making mistakes or being negatively evaluated often avoid speaking activities, resulting in limited practice and slow progress.

This phenomenon is further explained by Krashen's (1982, p. 31) affective filter hypothesis, which posits that emotional variables such as anxiety, low motivation, and lack of confidence can block language input from being processed effectively. When learners experience high levels of anxiety, their affective filter rises, preventing optimal language acquisition. In speaking contexts, this often manifests as hesitation, frequent pauses, and avoidance of participation.

MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998, p. 547) introduce the concept of willingness to communicate, suggesting that learners' decision to speak is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by psychological readiness. Learners with low confidence and high anxiety may possess adequate language knowledge but still choose not to speak.

Ur (2012, p. 121) also notes that insufficient vocabulary and limited exposure to spoken English further contribute to students' reluctance to engage in oral communication.

These challenges indicate that improving speaking skills requires instructional approaches that address both linguistic and affective factors. Traditional teacher-centered methods, which emphasize accuracy and error correction, may unintentionally increase learners' anxiety and discourage participation.

Therefore, innovative teaching strategies that promote motivation, engagement, and a low-anxiety learning environment are urgently needed. One instructional approach that has gained increasing attention in recent years is gamification. Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, and Nacke (2011) define gamification as the application of game design elements in non-game contexts to enhance user engagement.

In educational settings, gamification involves integrating elements such as points, badges, levels, challenges, and rewards into

learning activities to motivate learners and encourage active participation.

Gamification enhances both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by providing clear goals and immediate feedback. This perspective is supported by Kapp (2012), who argues that the integration of game-based elements such as points, challenges, and rewards can transform routine learning activities into engaging experiences that stimulate learners' sense of achievement and progression. By structuring tasks as achievable challenges, learners become more actively involved in the learning process and demonstrate greater persistence in completing instructional activities.

From a motivational perspective, gamification aligns with self-determination theory, which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in learning motivation. Sailer, Hense, Mayr, and Mandl (2017) report that gamification elements such as badges and leaderboards can enhance learners' perceived competence and social interaction, which are essential for maintaining motivation in collaborative learning environments.

Gamification has been widely recognized as an instructional approach that can enhance learner engagement and motivation when applied meaningfully in educational contexts. Empirical evidence suggests that the effectiveness of gamification depends on how game elements are integrated into learning activities rather than on the elements themselves. This view is supported by Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa (2016), who found that gamification tends to produce positive learning outcomes when it aligns with learners' needs and instructional goals.

In the context of language learning, gamification has been shown to create a supportive environment that encourages learners to take risks and participate actively. Munday (2016) explains that gamified language activities reduce learners' anxiety by shifting the focus from performance evaluation to task completion. Similarly, Pho and Dinscore (2015, p. 45) argue that game-based learning promotes meaningful interaction by encouraging learners to communicate naturally while completing tasks.

Reward-based speaking activities have been shown to increase students' willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms. The use of structured incentives and interactive challenges encourages learners to participate more actively in oral tasks and reduces hesitation during communication.

Empirical findings indicate that when learners perceive speaking activities as achievable and rewarding, their confidence tends to improve. O'Brien (2020) reported that reward-oriented speaking tasks significantly enhanced students' willingness to communicate in English language classrooms.

In addition, the integration of gamified tasks has been found to strengthen learner engagement and participation, which are essential components of speaking development. When speaking activities incorporate competitive and collaborative elements, learners are more likely to interact with peers and sustain attention throughout the task. Domínguez et al. (2013) suggest that well-designed gamification can enhance active involvement and classroom participation.

These findings imply that gamification may serve as an effective approach for addressing common speaking challenges such as anxiety, low confidence, and limited participation. However, despite the increasing number of studies examining gamification in language learning, most research primarily focuses on classroom implementation rather than on systematic instructional development. Many studies explore outcomes without detailing the process of designing and validating gamified learning materials. Consequently, limited research has applied a Research and Development approach to create structured gamification strategies specifically tailored for speaking instruction in higher education EFL contexts

Many studies examine the effects of gamification as an instructional strategy without detailing the process of designing and validating gamified learning materials. Furthermore, limited research has applied a Research and Development (R&D) approach to develop gamification strategies specifically for speaking skills in higher education EFL contexts, particularly in Indonesian universities.

Research and Development is a methodological approach that aims to produce and validate educational products. Borg and Gall (2003, p. 570) state that R&D research emphasizes the systematic design, development, and evaluation of instructional materials. To ensure systematic development, instructional design models such as ADDIE are commonly employed. Branch (2009, p. 2) explains that the ADDIE model consists of five stages: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation.

This model provides a structured framework for developing instructional strategies that are aligned with learners' needs and instructional goals. By integrating gamification into the ADDIE framework, educators can design speaking activities that are not only engaging but also pedagogically sound. The analysis stage allows researchers to identify learners' speaking problems, while the design and development stages focus on creating gamified speaking tasks. The implementation and evaluation stages enable researchers to assess the effectiveness of the developed strategies and make necessary revisions.

Based on the theoretical perspectives and previous studies discussed above, there is a clear need to develop gamification-based instructional strategies for improving English speaking skills using a systematic R&D approach. Therefore, this study aims to develop gamification strategies to boost English speaking skills among third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Nias through the ADDIE model.

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by providing an empirically grounded model for integrating gamification into EFL speaking instruction in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a Research and Development (R&D) approach with the purpose of designing, developing, and evaluating gamification strategies to enhance English speaking skills. Research and Development is commonly used in educational studies that aim to produce instructional products rather than merely describing phenomena.

Borg and Gall (2003, p. 570) explain that R&D research focuses on systematic procedures that involve analysis of needs, development of instructional products, and evaluation of their effectiveness in real learning contexts. In line with this view, Sugiyono (2019) states that R&D allows researchers to refine educational products through continuous evaluation and revision based on empirical data.

To ensure a structured development process, this study was guided by the ADDIE instructional design model, which includes analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Branch (2009, p. 2) notes that ADDIE serves as a flexible framework that helps instructional designers align learning objectives, materials, and assessment. The ADDIE model was chosen because it supports systematic development while allowing adjustments based on learners' responses during implementation.

At the analysis stage, the researcher examined learners' speaking difficulties, classroom conditions, and instructional needs. Needs analysis is considered a crucial phase in instructional design because it identifies discrepancies between current learner performance and expected outcomes. Dick, Carey, and Carey (2015) argue that instructional effectiveness depends largely on accurate identification of learners' needs. In this study, analysis was conducted by observing speaking activities and identifying issues such as limited participation, speaking anxiety, and lack of confidence among students.

Based on the results of the analysis, the design stage focused on planning gamification-based speaking activities. Morrison, Ross, and Kemp (2011) emphasize that instructional design should clearly specify learning objectives, learning procedures, and evaluation criteria. Accordingly, speaking objectives were formulated, and game elements such as points, levels, and rewards were integrated into communicative speaking tasks to encourage active engagement.

During the development stage, the planned gamification strategies were transformed into instructional materials and classroom activities. Branch (2009) explains that this stage involves producing learning resources that are aligned with instructional goals. In this research, the development process resulted in a set of gamified speaking activities designed to promote interaction, reduce anxiety, and improve oral performance.

The implementation stage involved applying the developed gamification strategies in an actual classroom setting. The study was conducted with third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Nias, where ten students were selected from one class consisting of thirty-eight students. Participant selection was based on purposive sampling, which allows researchers to choose participants who are most relevant to the research objectives. Creswell (2014, p. 189) explains that purposive sampling is appropriate when the researcher needs participants who possess specific characteristics related to the study.

 In addition, the lecturer responsible for the speaking course was involved as an observer to provide instructional insights during classroom implementation.

To collect data on the effectiveness of the developed gamification strategies, multiple data collection techniques were

employed. Students' speaking performance was assessed through speaking tasks conducted before and after the implementation of gamified activities. According to Brown (2004, p. 172), performance-based speaking assessment is effective for measuring learners' oral proficiency because it reflects actual language use. Students' speaking performances were evaluated using a rubric adapted from Harmer (2007, p. 286), focusing on fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and confidence.

Classroom observations were also conducted to document students' participation and engagement during speaking activities. Creswell (2014, p. 166) notes that observation enables researchers to capture authentic learning behaviors as they occur. In addition, questionnaires were distributed to gather students' perceptions and responses toward the gamification strategies. Dörnyei (2010, p. 7) states that questionnaires are useful instruments for exploring learners' attitudes and motivational changes.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive analysis to interpret changes in students' speaking performance and learning behavior. Speaking test results were compared to identify improvements after the implementation of gamification strategies. Observation and questionnaire data were analyzed to identify patterns related to motivation, confidence, and participation.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) explain that descriptive analysis allows researchers to interpret qualitative and quantitative data systematically by identifying recurring patterns and meaningful changes. This analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of how the developed gamification strategies influenced students' English speaking skills.

Before implementation, the developed gamification materials were validated by two experts in English language teaching and instructional design. The validation results indicated that the materials were highly appropriate with an average feasibility score of 3.6 out of 4.0. Minor revisions were made based on the experts' suggestions before classroom implementation.

FINDINGS AND DISSCUSSIONS
FINDINGS

The results of the speaking pre-test showed that the students' average score was 58.4, which indicated low speaking proficiency. After the implementation of the gamification strategies, the post-test average score increased to 74.6, showing an improvement of 16.2 points. This improvement demonstrates that the developed gamification strategies had a positive effect on students' speaking performance.

The findings of this study are presented based on the stages of implementation of the developed gamification strategies and the observed changes in students' English speaking performance. The data were obtained from speaking tasks, classroom observations, and students' responses during the implementation of gamified speaking activities.

The initial speaking performance of the students indicated several common problems. Most students demonstrated limited fluency, frequent pauses, and hesitation when expressing ideas orally. Pronunciation errors and restricted vocabulary use were also observed, which affected the

clarity of their speech. In addition, students tended to avoid voluntary participation and showed low confidence during speaking activities. These conditions suggested that students experienced both linguistic and affective challenges in speaking English.

After the implementation of the gamification strategies, noticeable changes were observed in students' speaking performance. Students became more willing to participate in speaking activities, particularly during game-based tasks that involved points, levels, and collaborative challenges. Classroom observation data showed that students were more active in initiating responses and interacting with peers. The competitive yet supportive nature of the gamified activities appeared to reduce students' fear of making mistakes.

In terms of fluency, students demonstrated smoother speech production with fewer long pauses. Although minor hesitation was still present, students were able to maintain speech continuity during speaking tasks. Improvements were also observed in pronunciation and vocabulary use, as students attempted to use new expressions introduced during gamified activities. These improvements indicated that students were more confident in experimenting with language forms.

Students' motivation toward speaking activities also increased during the implementation stage. Questionnaire responses revealed that students perceived the gamified speaking activities as enjoyable and less stressful compared to conventional speaking exercises. Many students reported feeling more confident when speaking English because the activities emphasized participation and task completion rather than error correction.

Overall, the findings indicate that the developed gamification strategies contributed positively to students' engagement, motivation, and speaking performance. While not all linguistic problems were fully resolved, the implementation of gamification created a more supportive learning environment that encouraged students to practice speaking English more actively.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that gamification strategies can positively influence students' English speaking skills by addressing both linguistic and affective dimensions of speaking.

The observed increase in students' participation and confidence supports the view that speaking development is closely linked to learners' emotional readiness and motivation. Brown (2004, p. 140) explains that speaking performance improves when learners are provided with opportunities to use language in meaningful and low-anxiety contexts. The gamified activities in this study created such contexts by shifting students' focus from accuracy to communication.

The improvement in students' willingness to speak aligns with the concept of willingness to communicate proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 547), who argue that learners' decision to speak is influenced by situational factors and perceived confidence.

The game elements incorporated in the speaking activities appeared to lower students' anxiety and increase their readiness to communicate. This finding supports Krashen's (1982, p. 31) affective filter

hypothesis, which suggests that reducing anxiety facilitates language acquisition.

The increase in speaking fluency observed in this study can be explained by repeated exposure to speaking practice through gamified tasks. Thornbury (2005, p. 7) states that fluency develops through frequent opportunities to retrieve language spontaneously. By engaging students in repeated speaking challenges, the gamification strategies allowed students to practice oral production in a relaxed environment. Similarly, Harmer (2007, p. 284) emphasizes that fluency-oriented activities encourage learners to speak more freely without excessive concern for errors.

From a motivational perspective, the positive student responses toward gamified activities are consistent with the principles of gamification theory. Kapp (2012, p. 10) explains that gamification enhances learning motivation by incorporating elements such as goals, feedback, and rewards. In this study, points and levels functioned as immediate feedback, which helped students monitor their progress and remain engaged. Werbach and Hunter (2015) also argue that gamification promotes sustained engagement by fostering a sense of achievement and progression.

The findings also support previous research suggesting that gamification can reduce speaking anxiety in EFL contexts. Munday (2016) notes that game-based learning environments allow learners to focus on task completion rather than linguistic perfection, which reduces fear of negative evaluation. Similarly, Pho and Dinscore (2015, p. 45) argue that gamified language activities encourage natural communication and collaborative interaction. These perspectives help explain why students in this study became more active and confident during speaking activities.

In terms of instructional design, the effectiveness of the gamification strategies can be attributed to the systematic development process guided by the ADDIE model. Branch (2009, p. 2) emphasizes that instructional products developed through ADDIE are more likely to align with learners' needs because they are based on careful analysis and iterative evaluation. The analysis stage allowed the researcher to identify students' speaking problems, while the design and development stages ensured that gamification elements were integrated meaningfully into speaking tasks.

The findings of this study are also consistent with Borg and Gall's (2003, p. 570) view that R&D research enables continuous refinement of instructional products based on empirical evidence. The observed improvements in students' speaking performance suggest that the developed gamification strategies were pedagogically appropriate for third-semester EFL students. However, it is important to note that gamification does not eliminate all speaking difficulties. As Richards (2008, p. 19) suggests, speaking competence develops gradually and requires sustained practice over time.

Overall, the discussion indicates that gamification, when systematically developed and implement can serve as an effective instructional strategy for enhancing English speaking skills in higher education EFL contexts. The integration of motivational elements with communicative speaking tasks supports both language development and

learner engagement.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
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Despite the positive findings, this study has several limitations. The number of participants was relatively small and limited to one university context, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Future studies are recommended to involve larger samples, longer implementation periods, and experimental research designs to obtain more comprehensive evidence of the effectiveness of gamification in improving speaking skills.

This study aimed to develop gamification strategies to enhance English speaking skills among third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Nias using a Research and Development approach guided by the ADDIE model. Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the developed gamification strategies contributed positively to students' speaking performance, particularly in terms of participation, fluency, and confidence.

The implementation of gamified speaking activities created a more engaging and supportive learning environment, which encouraged students to actively participate in oral communication. Students demonstrated increased willingness to speak, reduced hesitation, and greater confidence when expressing ideas in English. These improvements indicate that gamification can effectively address both linguistic and affective challenges commonly experienced by EFL learners in speaking classes.

Furthermore, the systematic development process ensured that the gamification strategies were aligned with students' learning needs and instructional objectives. The integration of game elements into speaking activities shifted students' focus from fear of making mistakes to meaningful communication, allowing them to practice speaking more freely. Although the improvement in speaking skills was gradual, the overall learning experience became more positive and motivating for students.

In conclusion, gamification-based instructional strategies developed through a structured R&D framework can serve as an effective alternative approach for improving English speaking skills in higher education contexts.

SUGGESTION

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that English lecturers incorporate well-designed gamification strategies consistently into speaking classes to enhance students' motivation, participation, and confidence. Game elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, and role-based missions should be aligned with clear learning objectives so that the focus remains on improving speaking accuracy, fluency, and interaction rather than merely on competition. Lecturers are also encouraged to combine digital platforms and classroom-based games to create varied and engaging speaking activities that stimulate authentic communication. Furthermore, institutions should provide training

and technological support to ensure the effective implementation of gamified learning environments.

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