



Examining the Impact of Gamification on Private Secondary Grade Students' Engagement, Motivation, and Learning Outcomes in English: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Addressed in this systematic review is the constant challenge of maintaining a secondary grader's engagement, motivation, and positively fulfilling the learning outcomes while teaching the subject English. By fusing a large array of empirical research published between 2010 and 2025, the study critically evaluates the impact of the implementation and execution of gamification – the application of game design elements in non-game contexts or utilization of specific gamified apps – for students aged 11 to 18, who often struggle with distractions and need engaging, interactive methods. A systematic review of the literature was the methodology, focusing majorly on studies within the secondary grades or teaching English context to provide a multi-layered, age-and subject-specific analysis. Important and many enhancements in affective and academic outcomes were observed. Findings consistently demonstrate that with gamification, both engagement and motivation can be promoted through mechanisms that fulfill the psychological needs for competence, independence, and relatedness. This is as framed by Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Furthermore, it has been observed that gamified instruction leads to improved learning outcomes across separate skills, including grammar mastery, speaking eloquence and vocabulary acquisition. The effectiveness is heavily dependent on conditions such as teacher training, integration of specific design elements' integration, how relatable the gamified instructions are, personalized paths and immediate feedback (e.g., in Quizizz or Duolingo) proving to be vital for sustaining intrinsic motivation compared to simple points and leaderboards (PBL). The review identifies critical gaps despite its incomplete efficacy: firstly, a lack of longitudinal studies over a widespread region and year range to confirm that positive results are seen even after the initial novelty effect, and secondly, significant implementation barriers related to adequate teacher training, resource constraints, mindset shift and the need for greater age-specificity in design. The integration of gamification in secondary grades to teach English, while powerful, requires a theoretically grounded instructional shift rather than mere technological adoption.

Introduction

In modern educational landscape, constant evolution can be seen, steered by the introduction and advancement of technology and requirement of such pedagogical approaches that click with modern-day students and their interests (Thurairasu, 2022). Keeping this context in mind, English language learning holds an important position worldwide, it is necessary to introduce such instructional strategies that can maintain a steady effort, interest, and high levels of student participation (Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli, 2021; Mohzana, 2023). However, traditional classroom approaches often face challenges in maintaining the consistent engagement and motivation of secondary grade students (Hong & Masood, 2014; Tursunbayevich, 2024), the age group that is quite assuredly prone to getting distracted and thus require a dynamic learning environment (Molumby, 2016; Al Jahdhami et al., 2021).

As a solution to the pedagogical challenge, Gamification has started to get popular in second language learning. Gamification is an approach for empowering users' motivations while engaging and helping them enjoy themselves in computer-mediated and non-gaming environments (Seaborn & Fels, 2015). It can also be defined as the application of game design elements in non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011; Kapp, 2014). It has been a widely adopted, yet complex, educational innovation (Kharizmi et al., 2024). According to Tivaraju et al. (2018), using educational technology in English language classrooms (via a game-based online learning platform called Kahoot!) fostered positive attitudes, and increased student motivation.

This systematic review focuses specifically on the secondary education level (Kaya & Sagnak, 2022), majorly incorporating ages 11-18, and the application of gamification within the subject of English. Aims of this review are to synthesize empirical evidence published between 2010 and 2025 to illuminate on the efficiency and execution of gamification, addressing a vital gap often present in broader reviews that mix diverse subjects and age groups (Zhang & Hasim, 2023).

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks of Gamification

Gamification's appeal is its ability to take advantage of motivational methods and fun elements from games, translating elements like points, badges, leaderboards, art designs, feedback given immediately, and narrative structures into educational activities (Chou, 2015; Marczewski, 2013). This method differs from game-based learning by primarily modifying the instructional framework rather than using a complete game (Nah et al., 2013; Szabó & Kopinska, 2023). The target objectives of it are not focused on just having enjoyment or fun, rather both of them are included in the learning process while students are experiencing games (Flores, 2015).

Students would be able to improve their 21st-century skills, including literacy, speaking, listening, critical thinking, digital literacy, and problem-solving skills. Student autonomy increases since they can correct themselves with low stress. Progress is done by learning at their own pace (Maloney, 2019). According to Aydın (2014), students participate more effectively thanks to this meaningful communication in foreign language education created by digital games. It allowed better perceptions and expectations of learners toward English learning for the future. Also, Morthy and Abdul Aziz (2020) suggested that language games enable students to learn the target language in a non-threatening learning environment successfully. Gamification's effectiveness is grounded in psychological theories, particularly Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In theory, it is said that gamified designs could boost intrinsic motivation by satisfying the fundamental human need for aptitude (achieved through challenge and progress feedback), autonomy (through choice and personalized paths), and relatedness (through collaborative or competitive social components) (Sailer et al., 2017; Sun & Hsieh, 2018). We have confirmed from

various studies across various contexts confirming that when implemented correctly—as outlining in sustainability models (Almarshedi et al., 2015) and frameworks (Tzouvara & Zaharias, 2013)—all these game elements change and can change routine learning into a highly engaging activity (Burke, 2014; Dominguez et al., 2013; Hew et al., 2016).

The Rationale for Gamification in Secondary English

English language acquisition for the necessary repetitive practice and exposure, gamification provides an effective environment (Abdulbaki et al., 2025; Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). Literature confirms the positive influence that gamified systems give the key factors for language success. Firstly, for motivation, demonstrated studies that gamification increases student motivation and positive attitudes towards learning (Adzmi et al., 2024; Alsawaier, 2018; Diana et al., 2025; Huseinović, 2024; Kharizmi et al., 2024). This upgrading of motivation is very importantly necessary for overcoming the barriers often discussed with mastering a foreign language (Anisa et al., 2020; Fitria, 2023). Secondly, we look at engagement in the studies. Gamified environments can be seen influencing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement, quite effectively reducing or removing the passivity (Cahyani, 2016; Khaleel et al., 2020; Nikmah, 2020). Tools like Quizizz, Blooket, and Kahoot! Can be seen to increased student focus and enjoyment, lead to a deeper involvement (Inayati & Waloyo, 2022; Zhang & Yu, 2022; Benhadj et al., 2019). Lastly, there are the learning outcomes. Consistently empirical studies shown that gamification can enhance performance cross specific language skills, not limited to and including grammar mastery (Koç & Sütçü, 2023; Hashim et al., 2019; Sharifuddin & Abdullah, 2023), vocabulary acquisition (Dindar et al., 2021; Tan, 2018), and overall academic achievement (García-López et al., 2023; Qadri Tayeh & Malkawi, 2024).

The Specific Focus and Research Questions

Benefits have been documented by various educational levels however (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020; Zimik et al., 2024), on secondary grade English language learning a highly focused synthesis is needed. This age group displays unique developmental needs (Molunby, 2016) and unique social learning preferences that might be affected in different ways by specific gamification mechanics (Hong & Masood, 2014). This systematic review aims is to critically synthesize existing empirical research (2010–2025) on the application of gamification in English language teaching for secondary grade students.

This review's guided by following research questions (RQs), designed providing a comprehensive and nuanced analysis:

1. What are the overall effects of gamification on secondary students' engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes in the subject English?
2. How do different gamification design elements (e.g., points, badges, leaderboards) and games/apps (e.g., online Kahoot, Quizizz, Blooket, Duolingo or physical) influence student outcomes in the subject English?
3. What are the gaps and limitations in existing authentic reviews on gamification in education?

The systematic collection and thematic analysis of data, as outlined in the methodology, will allow for a robust answer to these RQs, identifying not only the overall impact but also the specific implementation characteristics that drive successful outcomes in the secondary English classroom (Holmes et al., 2016; Thurairasu, 2022).

Analysis of Findings From Literature Review

This section carefully combined all of the evidence, gleaned from many papers. These sources were selected, and published between 2010, and 2025. A strong emphasis is put on the impact of adding Gamification to the learning of English language for secondary and high school students. The review structure analyses by using the primary questions being considered. This helps related discoveries to summarize related discoveries about student participation or about what they actually learn or want to learn, furthermore the platforms and mechanics used will all be integrated. Also looked at and examined will be learning outcomes and gamification.

Effects of Gamification on Secondary Students' Engagement, Motivation, and Learning

Most of the studies show positive link done on this topic between implementation of gamification and enhanced affective and cognitive results for secondary English language students, its capability as a assured transformative academic tool (García-López et al., 2023; Hong & Masood, 2014; Imron et al., 2024).

Enhanced Student Engagement

Conducive to achieving a "flow" state which translates to an immersive condition typically linked to deeply fulfilling activities, beyond the latent dimension of behavioural metrics, gamification enhances emotional engagement, making the learning experience more enjoyable, less stressful (Hamari et al., 2016). Research indicates that students experience much more enjoyment and enthusiasm when English content is explained and tested in a gamified format (Yazid et al., 2024; Zhang & Yu, 2022). Where language anxiety can serve as a major barrier to student participation, in secondary education, this boost in emotional engagement is particularly crucially important (Al Jahdhami et al., 2021). The competitive and enjoyable nature of various gamified platforms, as explored by Benhadj et al. (2019) and Zhang and Yu (2022), captivatingly effectivities the attention and interest of secondary learners and promotes a deeper immersive experience in the learning process (Sun & Hsieh, 2018).

Increased Student Motivation

In boosting student motivation, the findings stoutly support the role of gamification, particularly by appealing to both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers (Adzmi et al., 2024; Fitria, 2023). On the extrinsic side, the visible rewards, status, and recognition by points, badges, and leaderboards serve as tangible incentives for effort, persistence, and achievement (Kharizmi et al., 2024; Molumby, 2016).

Importantly, Self-Determination Theory is linked a lot through gamification effectively promoting intrinsic motivation by linking learning tasks to the major psychological needs outlined (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Quick feedback and the ability to track progress are boosting students' feelings of competence (Sailer et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2024). Furthermore, allowing students be autonomous and supporting their learning by to choose their tasks or the pace of their learning is supportive. Team challenges and public recognition through leaderboards satisfy individuals' need for social validation and relatedness (Dominguez et al., 2013; Huseinović, 2024). Research conducted by Anisa et al. (2020) and Diana et al. (2025) demonstrates a significant increase in students' willingness to learn more and better and a more positive attitude towards learning English due to these motivational factors. Furthermore, Tursunbayevich (2024) and BOUAMEUR Radja and T. S. (2025) highlight this increase in motivation within the EFL context.

Improved Learning Outcomes and Academic Performance

Beyond simply affective advantages, the most vital finding for teaching professionals is the convincing indication that gamification improves learning outcomes across a variety of language skills (Qadri Tayeh & Malkawi, 2024). Firstly, attaining grammar mastery has been a noticeable advantage. Several studies focused on secondary school students have found that teaching grammar can really boost their skills. For instance, Koç and Sütçü (2023) discovered that secondary school pupils showed significant improvement in their grammar proficiency. Additionally, research on using gamified learning to teach grammar, especially for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, has shown that it effectively enhances skills and reduces grammatical mistakes (Abdulbaki et al., 2025; Hashim et al., 2019; Rafiq et al., 2019). The overall effectiveness of this approach for teaching English as a second language is highlighted by Sharifuddin and Abdullah (2023). Secondly, gamified apps are really effective for learning new words because they let people practice and test themselves repeatedly (Dindar et al., 2021; Tan, 2018). Since you get instant feedback in these games, students can fix their mistakes immediately, which helps them remember how to use grammar correctly and also increase their vocabulary (Reynolds & Taylor, 2020; Zohud, 2019). Furthermore, studies employing longitudinal performance tracking or experimental designs consistently demonstrate that gamified instruction significantly enhances overall learning achievement (Imron et al., 2024; Qadri Tayeh & Malkawi, 2024). This observed improvement is not solely attributable to increased student effort; it is also facilitated by the conducive and non-intimidating learning environment created through gamified approaches (Abdel-Ghany Al-Sabbagh, 2023; Vathanalaoha, 2022).

The Influence of Different Gamification Design Elements and Apps

Not uniform is the impact of gamification; it is heavily mediated by the specific design elements chosen and the platforms used (Demirbilek et al., 2022; Holmes et al., 2016). This review identifies distinct influences from various components.

Points, Badges, and Leaderboards (PBL)

The classic PBL triad constitutes the foundation of many gamified systems (Deterding et al., 2011; Kapp, 2014). Firstly, especially amongst secondary school students, Leaderboards can be a great tool for motivating and competition (Hong & Masood, 2014; Khan et al., 2017). But there's a catch: while we see that they might inspire high achievers, they make lower-performing students feel discouraged and demotivated, which might lead to negative feelings or even performing badly. (Cakiroglu et al., 2017; Sailer et al., 2017). So, it's really important to promote competition to design these systems in a way that without losing sight of collaboration and personal growth (Sánchez-Martín et al., 2017).

Moreover, to give people quick and clear feedback on their progress, Points and badges offer a way, helping to meet our need for competence (Chou, 2015). Badges, in particular, act like little trophies, showing off achievements and status. This can encourage students to keep going, even when the material gets tough (Cahyan, 2016; Conley & Donaldson, 2015).

Specific Digital Platforms

The research review highlights several commercially available platforms and their influence on secondary grades' English language subject.

As can be seen from this, The first major platforms are Kahoot! and Quizizz. These are arguably the most widely studied gamification tools in teaching English (Permana et al., 2023; Zhang & Yu,

2022). For its flexibility and ability to promote both engagement and learning outcomes, Quizizz has been appreciated and exemplified, especially in online or blended environments (Inayati & Waloyo, 2022). Kahoot!, studied by Benhadj et al. (2019) and Reynolds and Taylor (2020), is proven to be highly effective for quick reinforcement of knowledge and boosting the energy in the classroom, strongly impacting emotional and behavioural engagement. And if we look here, the second group includes Duolingo and Hybrid Apps. Applications like Duolingo, or hybrid systems like the one studied by Berns et al. (2016), use a more sustained, long-form gamified experience, incorporating progressive challenges and personalized paths to make for consistent, long-term practice. This structure supports in dependence and intrinsic motivation, long-term language retention for necessary (Alkhalifah, 2022). Finally, the last one here is, in-person gamification in the classroom or physically. Despite digital tools' being widely used and known, research acknowledges the benefits of physically gamification. (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). With a greater emphasis on promoting connection amongst students and social engagement, they frequently include story components, team work, and non-digital rewards (Wu et al., 2014).

In short, According to DiTommaso (2011) and Klock & da Cunha (2015), the most effective gamification methods combine short-term excitement of competitive elements (leaderboards) with the long-term satisfaction of progress tracking (points/badges) and promoting autonomy.

Gaps and Limitations in Synthesized Reviews on Gamification in Education

A systematic analysis of the existing reviews and empirical studies, While the literature base is rich, reveals several critical gaps and limitations, framing the continuing necessity for targeted research (Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli, 2021; Zhang & Hasim, 2023).

Heterogeneity and Age Specificity

A major limitation in the broader field is the lack of consistency regarding the target demographic and subject matter, which this specific review aims to address (Kaya & Sagnak, 2022). Findings were combined in Many reviews from primary students (Sin & Said, 2020), secondary students, and higher education students (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020; De La Cruz et al., 2021; Huseinović, 2024). Since the cognitive, social, and emotional needs of a 12-year-old differ vastly from those of a university student, pooling these results muddies the true effect in the secondary context (Molumby, 2016). This lack of age specificity limits the practical applicability of findings for secondary educators.

Focus on Short-Term Affective Gains

For the long-term benefits of using gamification, there's a noticeable lack of research into in English language learning. While many studies have shown that combining lectures with gamification can quickly increase motivation and participation, we see these are these effects are typically assessed after just a few sessions. A major concern is that the initial excitement often fades over time. What most researchers are interested in whether that strong motivation can last throughout an entire school year or even longer. To really understand the impact of gamification on learning and motivation over time, future studies need to focus on longer-term research.

Implementation Challenges and Teacher Perceptions

One thing which have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of gamification is the practical aspects of implementation are often overlooked or not sufficiently detailed in many existing reviews (Aram, A. A.). Such challenges include the need for proper teacher training, the time commitment required for teachers to create and oversee gamified curricula, and technological

limitations (Demirbilek et al., 2022). According to Thuy and Hung (2021) and Permana et al. (2024), teachers' POVs sheds light on important topics like controlling classroom dynamics and students' intense reactions during times when intense competition and gamification integration are on the rise without compromising the depth of the curriculum. Moving from successful experiments to long-term classroom integration requires addressing these contextual factors (Fisher et al., 2013).

Methodological Rigor and Control

A solid methodology is missed on a lot of research on gamification in education. is. Many studies tend to rely on self-reported data for things like motivation and engagement without really checking it against other sources. This makes their findings pretty limited since they often don't use randomization or control groups (Dominguez et al., 2013; Holmes et al., 2016). According to Khaleel et al. (2020) and Koç and Sütçü (2023), future research should go beyond just stating that gamification helps and actually give examples of real-world and real-life teachers and students POVs to connect specific gamification elements to particular learning outcomes. This way, we can build more reliable teaching models. Overall, gamification seems to positively impact secondary English teaching by boosting motivation and engagement while also improving vocabulary and grammar. However we Still, we need to learn more about the age-specific benefits and how it holds up over the long term in classrooms.ge-specific benefits and how it holds up over the long term in classrooms.

Discussion

The systematic review's synthesized findings confirm that gamification is a powerful and effective pedagogical method to address the critical challenges faced in secondary grade in teaching English language classes. The specific concerns were with student engagement, motivation and learning outcomes. Interpreted in this discussion section are firstly, the collective results shown in the sections before, secondly, using educational theories already established, evaluating their implications and meanings, and thirdly, findings have been connected back to the specific research questions and methodological gaps identified in the literature.

Interpretation of Gamification's Impact on Affective Factors

The steady positive outcomes on engagement and motivation show the most robust finding of this review, offering crucial validation for the application of game mechanics in a demanding subject like English (Alsawier, 2018; Fitria, 2023)

Motivation and the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) Framework

The increase in observation of student motivation (Anisa et al., 2020; Diana et al., 2025; Huseinović, 2024; Kharizmi et al., 2024) is best understood through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The structure of gamified activities inherently supports the three psychological needs for intrinsic motivation.

Firstly, competence. Elements like which have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of gamification, level progression and instant feedback (for example in games like Quizizz or Duolingo or Kahoot!) provide instant, quantifiable evidence of progress, satisfying the need for competence (Berns et al., 2016; Inayati & Waloyo, 2022; Sailer et al., 2017). This feedback loop is superior to traditional, delayed grading, giving secondary students the immediate gratification and performance validation they seek (Sun & Hsieh, 2018; Yildirim, 2017). In this time and age when children view quick shorts and reels on social media, their attention span and the need for

fulfillment in quick bursts needs to be catered to and games or such gamification elements as compared to traditional correction in notebooks covers up that particular need.

Secondly, autonomy or independence. As we know and have seen, today's generation of children want independence from a much earlier age, and not just in simply what to do but also what to study and how to study. Successful gamified online games, apps or physical educational games during lessons often incorporate choice regarding what tasks to do, how to sequencing them, or challenges (Klock & da Cunha, 2015). Even the simple choice of an avatar or personalized progress path (Alkhalifah, 2022) grants students a sense of ownership over their learning journey, contrasting with the often-rigid structure of secondary curricula (DiTommaso, 2011). This perceived control significantly enhances intrinsic drive and creates motivation from within to work and study (Dominguez et al., 2013).

Thirdly, relatedness. A major lament of secondary students is that they are unable to relate to the topics being taught in school or in their subjects. They feel more connected when a teacher is able to relate the topic to their everyday lives, their interests, or to social media. Aspects such as team challenges or the collective experience of visible ranking on leaderboards, satisfy the need for relatedness and brings about competition with peers which is what they do all the time (Caton et al., 2014; Sánchez-Martín et al., 2017). While competition can sometimes lead to fights, disagreements and friendship breakups, the reviewed literature suggests that when moderated by a teacher and kept civil and not hyped up, the social interaction and collaborative problem-solving which is the basis of many gamified EFL tasks (Wu et al., 2014) foster a positive classroom community (Adzmi et al., 2024; BOUAMEUR Radja & T. S., 2025). The interpretation of findings from SDT suggests that gamification's success is not random; rather, it is a deliberate system designed to fulfill basic human psychology needs, therefore transforming the effort required to learn a language into a desirable activity (García-López et al., 2023; Kotob & Ibrahim, 2019).

Engagement and the Secondary Student Context

Particularly relevant for the secondary student population (ages 11–18) is the substantial boost in engagement (Cahyani, 2016; Khaleel et al., 2020; Nikmah, 2020). This age group is characterized by being partial to for digital interaction and a search for social status (Al Jahdhami et al., 2021; Hong & Masood, 2014; Molumby, 2016). Gamification, particularly through digital platforms like Kahoot! or Quizizz, meets students where their interests lie, making the subject matter more appealing (Benhadj et al., 2019; Inayati & Waloyo, 2022; Yazid et al., 2024).

Therefore, the use of gamification in English classrooms acts as an effective bridge, linking the familiar, rewarding mechanics of digital play with the academic requirements of language acquisition. This results in observable behavioral engagement (increased time on task) and essential emotional engagement (positive attitude toward learning the English language) (Zhang & Yu, 2022).

Specific Elements and Learning Outcomes (RQ2)

The impact on learning outcomes, as highlighted in this review, is strongly tied to the thoughtful selection of gamification elements and digital applications. Intentionally, alignment of specific mechanisms of gamification with the learning goals must be done, rather than just layering them onto existing instruction and hoping it just matches with the vibe of the class or the lesson. It needs to be thought out and properly woven in the lesson planning of that class (Holmes et al., 2016; Thurairasu, 2022).

Design Elements and Skill Development

The studies on grammar mastery (Abdulbaki et al., 2025; Hashim et al., 2019; Koç & Sütçü, 2023) suggest that gamification is best for those topics and subjects that requiring daily and a lot of practice but not with not much risk, and immediate corrective feedback which means it is not for essay writing or letter writing or summarizing tasks, as those require thorough reading and analysis. The systems effectively turn drill-and-practice or rote memorization or definition learning, which students find boring and avoid, into a rapid cycle of challenge and reward (Qadri Tayeh & Malkawi, 2024). This is specifically true in games such as Kahoot! Where students can be repetitively practicing for definitions or key concepts, yet in a gamified, exciting, competitive manner, so they would not notice its boringness. This is also evident in vocabulary acquisition research, where gamified repetition and retrieval practice lead to better retention (Dindar et al., 2021; Tan, 2018; Zohud, 2019).

On the other hand, some researchers have suggested teachers to be cautious of this addictive, yet highly psychologically impacting method of teaching. The findings on leaderboards (Hong & Masood, 2014; Khan et al., 2017) demand careful interpretation because many times students are very smart and decode certain aspects of the answers such as the longest option would be the correct answer or they may play it time and again in the real context. While they provide strong extrinsic motivation and structure for certain learners, educators must keep in mind the children not gifted with mega intelligence and keep the games varied and differentiated so as to avoid alienating lower-performing students (Cakiroglu et al., 2017; Sailer et al., 2017). The solution lies in designing hybrid systems that incorporate collaboration or focus the competition on small, measurable tasks rather than overall grade ranking (Sánchez-Martín et al., 2017).

Addressing Gaps and Implementation Challenges (RQ3)

The analysis of the literature's limitations reveals that the greatest challenges to maximizing gamification's benefits are not in how potentially beneficial it is, but in how to implement it practically to all students and to all classes and countries, and after that to ensure that the effects of it are sustained in the long-term by the students and not just a short-term dopamine.

The Issue of Generalizability and Age Specificity

A major gap identified is the heterogeneity of samples across existing reviews (Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli, 2021; Zhang & Hasim, 2023). While this current review is strictly focused on secondary grades (Kaya & Sagnak, 2022), much of the foundational literature struggles to separate effects clearly across age groups as there have always been mixed researches done as volunteers were of all ages (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020; Sin & Said, 2020). Secondary school students respond differently to peer competition, social presence, and digital complexity than younger or older students (Molumby, 2016; Vathanalaoha, 2022). Therefore, the positive findings must be interpreted through the lens of how teenagers behave and respond i.e. Developmental appropriateness. The success of Kahoot! (Benhadj et al., 2019), for instance, may reflect its suitability for the rapid, social, and slightly chaotic energy that appeals to this demographic.

Sustainability and the Novelty Effect

The lack of evidence supporting the sustainable impact of gamification is the most serious limitation in the research (Almarshedi et al., 2015). While initial enthusiasm initially is high (Yildirim, 2017), the "novelty effect" often wears off (Burke, 2014; Chou, 2015). Meaning the effect of it being a new and trendy and fun thing to do, children soon grow bored and want a new thing now. To achieve benefits that will continue long-term, gamification cannot remain a

superficial layer of points and badges. It must be deeply designed and woven into the instructional design, focusing on what Chou (2015) terms *meaningful gamification*. This requires designing systems that continually satisfy SDT needs, perhaps by routinely changing the type of game elements, increasing the difficulty and nitty gritty of challenges, or integrating new narrative elements to maintain intrinsic appeal (Kapp, 2014).

Pedagogical and Implementation Barriers

To shift from studying and researching it with a small manageable sample for a short period of time to implementing it on a large scale in a full school of sometimes strengths ranging from 500 to 2000 students is a ginormous barrier that must be scaled. (Aram, A. A.; Demirbilek et al., 2022). One major hurdle is to train the teachers, especially the ones who are not tech-savvy, or very involved with computers, internet or social media and have never really played video games and are of a temperament that the old way is the best way. Changing mindsets and habits takes time and effort and a huge deal of motivation. They lack the necessary training in game design and technology integration (Fisher et al., 2013; Thuy & Hung, 2021). Having such educators change their entire pedagogical approach for the effective application of gamification is no mere feat, and it requires more than just training regarding the apps; it's a whole mindset shift; from their easy and traditional comfort zone, to the risk-taking, complex design which would initially be a learning failure for many. (Holmes et al., 2016).

The second major hurdle is the constraint on resources, and the society's mindset. In many countries, the unstable internet, limited finances, non-cooperation of higher management, and limited accessibility to good digital resources makes gamification much more difficult, and a nuisance than a boon. Many parents still believe that bringing in games will only make students not study and that games and education are two different things and not the same side of the coin. This traditional, and sometimes cultural view is very difficult to be challenged and changed and cannot be persisted or insisted as they are the ones paying for their child's education. Bringing in games to the classroom has them questioning the integrity of the school. For many in the developing countries and even in the lower classes of society, limited personal finances also skew their judgement, as they are unable to provide for electronic devices to each of their children. These practical obstacles pose a lot of friction and resistance particularly in a diverse global setting. (Afifah & Priyana, 2024; Demirbilek et al., 2022). Permana et al. (2024) and Redjeki and Muhajir (2021) underscore the need for infrastructure and institutional support for teachers to successfully implement these 21st-century teaching methods.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

All of these findings together provide a way out and suggestions clearly for secondary English language teachers and researchers. When designing their lesson plans and curriculums and strategies, they must practically, the teachers, should move beyond the simple use of points and scores elements, and instead focus on designing such gamified experiences that maximizes student autonomy and competence in the long-term and also fosters intrinsic motivation to learn. They should be mindful and critical and choose specific apps/websites/games should be selected based on the language skill being targeted (e.g., quick-response tools for vocabulary review, individualized path tools for grammar mastery). The design must also actively manage competition to prevent student alienation (Rafiq et al., 2019; Sánchez-Martín et al., 2017).

As far as future research is concerned, studies must give more importance to longitudinal assessments to examine the sustainability of motivational and learning gains over extended

periods. There is also a vital need to research on the cost-benefit analysis of gamifications' preparation time for teachers versus its actual academic uplift.

Finally, mixed-method approaches should be used more in further researches to fully explore the qualitative dimension of student experience, capturing why certain elements are engaging and how different student subgroups (e.g., gender, initial proficiency level) respond to specific gamified interventions (Khan et al., 2017; Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Thus, as has been demonstrated, gamification offers an effective path to re-energizing the secondary English classroom, if only execution is done by trained teachers guided by the theoretical principles of SDT, caution for the addictiveness of the games, acute awareness of impact on the quiet students, and pragmatic awareness of the complex designs and institutional support required (Almarshedi et al., 2015; Kapp, 2014).

Conclusion

This systematic review, focused on studies published between 2010 and 2025, aimed to synthesize the evidence regarding the impact of gamification on secondary grade students' engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes in the subject of English Language. The age group chosen are the ones that have always needed some innovation in teaching abstract concepts or languages, especially nowadays with the advent of attention seeking internet and social media world. By examining unique developmental and academic context of this age bracket, the review provides a targeted and timely insight into gamification's pedagogical value. The collective findings clearly show that gamification is a highly effective strategy for reviving the secondary English classes, though its success relies on careful design and implementation.

Synthesis of Findings and Research Questions

The evidence gathered together and collected here in this research confirms a strong positive effect across all core outcome variables defined by the research questions.

As required by RQ1, the overall effects showcased by gamification consistently show that it has enhances student engagement (Cahyani, 2016; Khaleel et al., 2020; Nikmah, 2020) and motivation (Adzmi et al., 2024; Huseinović, 2024; Kharizmi et al., 2024) in secondary grades in learning English. Furthermore, it contributes significantly to improved learning outcomes which have been set in the curriculum, mostly in those individual skills, like mastery of grammar for instance (Abdulkaki et al., 2025; Koç & Sütçü, 2023) and acquisition of vocabulary (Dindar et al., 2021; Tan, 2018), and so validating its effectiveness in promoting measurable academic achievement (Imron et al., 2024; Qadri Tayeh & Malkawi, 2024).

Highlighted in the review with regards to the design elements and apps being asked about in RQ2, is that impact is non-uniform and directly varying with the design of the game or gamified elements, and with their alignment to learning goals. For example, high-energy, rapid-fire apps like Kahoot! and Quizizz (Benhadj et al., 2019; Inayati & Waloyo, 2022; Zhang & Yu, 2022) the best in boosting emotional engagement and providing formative feedback, while elements satisfying the SDT needs of competence and autonomy such as tiered challenges and progress tracking are key to sustaining intrinsic motivation (Berns et al., 2016; Sailer et al., 2017).

The last RQ3 relating to gaps and limitations in the studies reviewed showed that an important gap remains in understanding whether these techniques and methods keep interest and intrinsic motivation over the long term (Almarshedi et al., 2015; Yildirim, 2017). Furthermore, consistent integration challenges related to teacher training, resource allocation, and the complexity of managing highly competitive environments (Aram, A. A.; Demirbilek et al., 2022; Thuy & Hung,

2021) limit the seamless integration of gamification into the mainstream secondary curriculum. The lack of strict age criteria in many broader reviews also highlighted the need for continued, targeted research on this preteen and teenage population (Kaya & Sagnak, 2022).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The successful integration of gamification is Largely due to its effective utilization of Self-Determination Theory, is in secondary grades to teach English language (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Gamification transforms the learning experience from a compulsory, boring, monotonous chore into a chase of achievement and success by hiding the learning and acquiring of language as a voluntary, competence-building activity with a lot of social interactions and instant feedback (Burke, 2014; Dominguez et al., 2013).

For teachers teaching the secondary grades, the main implications are that gamification should be included and executed as a theoretically grounded instructional design strategy, not merely as a start of something new of technology (Kapp, 2014; Tzouvara & Zaharias, 2013). Teachers should prioritize designs that integrate collaborative elements, are relatable to the teens and provide meaningful choices to support autonomy, moving beyond apparent use of points and leaderboards to ensure the positive effects are sustained beyond the initial originality phase (Chou, 2015).

Future Research Directions

While the current body of work is compelling, addressing the identified gaps is crucial for advancing the field (Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Future research should focus on a couple of things. Firstly, future research should investigate the sustained impact of gamification over a period of time. Longitudinal studies are needed to ascertain whether motivation and learning occurs over long term periods or whether it is a short burst moment. The entire academic year or multiple years must be observed to determine its efficacy (Almarshedi et al., 2015). Secondly, there needs to be a comparative analysis conducted on the effectiveness of different specific commercial applications (for example, Kahoot vs Duolingo vs Blooket) for teaching specific English language skills (for example, vocabulary, grammar, speaking) within the secondary grades level (Reynolds & Taylor, 2020; Zhang & Yu, 2022). Finally, to conduct the above analysis, implementation of these applications must also be done so as to identify best practices and provide training models for other secondary teachers to effectively manage and integrate gamification elements, and alleviating themselves of the challenges identified (Demirbilek et al., 2022; Fisher et al., 2013). In conclusion, evidence from this review is in strong favour of gamification as a potential and powerful instrument for enhancing the affective and cognitive dimensions of English language in the secondary grades. By tapping into students' desire for challenge, recognition, social interaction, fun and instant feedback, it is successfully paving the way for engaging and effective learning process (Thurairasu, 2022; Yazid et al., 2024).

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