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TEMA:

*GAMIFICACIÓN Y MATERIALES AUTÉNTICOS EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL
INGLÉS EN EL NIVEL DE EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA: ESTUDIO
BIBLIOGRÁFICO SOBRE MOTIVACIÓN Y ADQUISICIÓN DEL LENGUAJE*

Autor:

ROSA MARÍA DOLORES GALARZA ARREAGA, ANGELA GEANINE VALENCIA MORENO,
ABIGAIL PAOLA YACELGA LISINTUÑA.

Tutor:

MSc. ANGULO VELEZ DANIEL ANDRÉS
Milagro, 202

RESUMEN

La enseñanza del inglés en el nivel de educación primaria enfrenta desafíos significativos relacionados con la motivación de los estudiantes y la efectividad de los procesos de aprendizaje, especialmente en contextos donde predominan enfoques tradicionales poco vinculados con experiencias significativas. En este escenario, el presente estudio tiene como propósito analizar, desde una perspectiva bibliográfica, el rol de la gamificación y el uso de materiales auténticos en la motivación y la adquisición del lenguaje en clases de inglés de nivel elemental. La investigación adopta un enfoque de revisión bibliográfica, sustentado en un análisis temático de literatura académica especializada, que incluye artículos científicos, revisiones sistemáticas, libros académicos y documentos institucionales publicados en bases de datos reconocidas. El análisis de las fuentes seleccionadas permitió identificar patrones recurrentes en la literatura, evidenciando que la gamificación favorece la participación activa, el compromiso y la motivación de los estudiantes, mientras que los materiales auténticos contribuyen a una exposición más significativa al idioma y al desarrollo de competencias lingüísticas contextualizadas. Asimismo, los hallazgos sugieren que la integración de ambas estrategias potencia sus efectos individuales, al articular experiencias lúdicas con contenidos lingüísticos reales. Como aporte, este estudio ofrece una síntesis teórica que orienta la práctica docente y el diseño de estrategias pedagógicas innovadoras para la enseñanza del inglés en educación primaria.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Gamification; authentic materials; English as a foreign language in primary education; motivation; language acquisition.

ABSTRACT

Teaching English as a foreign language at the elementary level presents persistent challenges related to learner motivation, engagement, and meaningful exposure to the target language. In this context, this study aims to analyze, from a bibliographic perspective, the role of gamification and authentic materials in supporting motivation and language acquisition in elementary EFL classrooms. The study adopts a structured literature review design based on a thematic analysis of academic sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, academic books, and institutional documents retrieved from recognized databases. The analysis of the selected literature revealed consistent patterns indicating that gamification enhances learner motivation, engagement, and active participation, while authentic materials contribute to meaningful language input and the development of contextualized linguistic skills. The findings also suggest that the combined use of gamification and authentic materials

strengthens their individual effects by integrating playful learning experiences with real-world language content. By synthesizing existing evidence, this study offers a theoretical contribution that informs pedagogical decision-making and supports the design of innovative strategies for English language teaching at the primary education level.

KEYWORDS

Gamification; authentic materials; elementary EFL; motivation; language acquisition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language at the elementary level presents persistent challenges related to learner motivation, engagement, and meaningful exposure to the target language. Young learners are still developing cognitive and affective capacities such as attention span, memory, and linguistic awareness, which may limit their ability to benefit from traditional, form-focused instructional approaches. Research indicates that insufficient exposure to contextualized language use and low motivational engagement can hinder effective language acquisition in primary education contexts (Khamroeva, 2023).

Within this educational landscape, gamification has emerged as a pedagogical approach designed to increase learner motivation and participation through the incorporation of game elements such as challenges, rewards, feedback systems, and interactive tasks. Empirical and theoretical studies suggest that gamified learning environments foster enjoyment, sustained attention, and active involvement among elementary EFL learners, supporting both affective engagement and language development (Marin-Pacurucu & Argudo-Garzón, 2022). Recent bibliographic analyses further identify gamification as a promising strategy for enhancing vocabulary development and overall communicative skills in young learners (Cortez Erraez et al., 2025).

Alongside gamification, the use of authentic materials has been widely recognized as a valuable resource in foreign language instruction. Authentic materials—defined as texts and resources originally created for real communicative purposes—expose learners to natural language use and meaningful sociocultural contexts. Their integration into EFL classrooms has been associated with increased learner interest, improved comprehension, vocabulary growth, and stronger connections between classroom learning and real-world language use (McKiernan, 2013; Gómez Gómez, 2018). Furthermore, technological developments have expanded access to authentic materials, facilitating their incorporation into interactive and gamified instructional environments (Perniola, 2024; Hammoodi, 2025).

Despite the growing body of research examining gamification and authentic materials as independent instructional strategies, fewer studies have synthesized how these approaches interact in elementary EFL contexts from a bibliographic perspective. While numerous empirical interventions report positive outcomes, limited integrative analyses examine how motivation, meaningful input, and instructional design converge when both strategies are combined. Addressing this gap through a structured review of the literature is therefore relevant to clarify conceptual overlaps, identify recurring patterns, and highlight limitations in the existing body of knowledge.

In response to this research gap, the present bibliographic study is guided by the following research question:

How does existing literature explain the role of gamification and authentic materials in enhancing motivation and language acquisition in elementary-level EFL contexts?

The general objective of this study is to analyze how current literature conceptualizes and reports the role of gamification and authentic materials in supporting motivation and language development in elementary EFL contexts. To achieve this purpose, the study pursues the following specific objectives: (1) to identify key theoretical perspectives underpinning the use of gamification and authentic materials in elementary EFL instruction; (2) to examine how previous studies describe the impact of gamification on motivation and engagement among young learners; (3) to analyze the role attributed to authentic materials in enhancing meaningful language input and learner motivation; and (4) to synthesize convergences, limitations, and research gaps related to the combined application of these strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gamification and Motivation in Elementary EFL Learning

The literature identifies gamification as a pedagogical strategy that incorporates game elements—such as challenges, goals, feedback, and rewards—into educational contexts to enhance learner engagement. In elementary EFL settings, these elements are particularly effective due to young learners' natural preference for interactive and play-based experiences. Research consistently reports that gamified instruction fosters positive attitudes toward English learning, increases classroom participation, and reduces anxiety during communicative tasks.

Motivation plays a central role in early second language acquisition, especially in primary education where affective factors strongly influence engagement. Gamified environments support both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation by promoting autonomy, competence, and social interaction. However, the

literature cautions that excessive reliance on external rewards or highly competitive dynamics may weaken long-term motivational sustainability if not aligned with clear instructional objectives.

Authentic Materials and Language Acquisition in Elementary EFL Contexts

Authentic materials defined as texts, audio, and visual resources originally created for real communicative purposes are widely recognized as valuable tools for supporting language acquisition. In elementary EFL classrooms, authentic input exposes learners to natural linguistic structures, contextualized vocabulary, and genuine discourse patterns. This exposure contributes to the development of listening comprehension, lexical growth, and pragmatic awareness.

Beyond their linguistic contribution, authentic materials also have a strong motivational dimension. When instructional content reflects familiar contexts, cultural references, or meaningful communicative purposes, young learners demonstrate increased interest and sustained engagement. Nevertheless, scholars emphasize the importance of careful selection and pedagogical scaffolding to prevent cognitive overload or frustration due to linguistic complexity.

Integrating Gamification and Authentic Materials in Primary Education

Recent research highlights the complementary potential of combining gamification and authentic materials in elementary EFL instruction. While gamification provides a motivational framework structured around purposeful challenges and feedback, authentic materials offer meaningful linguistic input grounded in real-world contexts. When thoughtfully integrated, these strategies create learning environments in which authentic language exposure is embedded within engaging and structured tasks.

Bibliographic evidence suggests that this integration enhances communicative competence, increases persistence during complex language tasks, and strengthens emotional engagement with learning. However, the literature also reveals a limited number of studies that explicitly examine their combined application at the elementary level, underscoring the need for further integrative research focused on early stages of language development.

Table 1.

Thematic Results of the Literature Review

Thematic category

Main findings identified in the literature

Representative focus of studies

Gamification and motivation	associated with increased learner motivation, engagement, and participation in elementary EFL contexts. Studies report positive emotional responses such as enjoyment, curiosity, and sustained attention when game elements are incorporated into language learning activities.	Motivation, engagement, and affective factors in EFL
The analysis revealed that gamification is consistently		
Authentic materials and language acquisition	that authentic materials support meaningful language input by exposing learners to real-world linguistic structures and contexts. Findings highlight improvements in comprehension, vocabulary development, and pragmatic awareness when materials are appropriately scaffolded.	Input, comprehension, vocabulary, authenticity
The reviewed literature indicates		
Combined use of gamification and authentic materials	integrating gamification with authentic materials facilitates learners' interaction with complex language input. Gamified frameworks reduce anxiety and increase persistence, making authentic content more accessible to young learners.	Integrated instructional design
Results show that		
Conditions and limitations	pedagogical design, age appropriateness, and alignment with instructional objectives. Poorly designed gamification or	
The analysis identified that the effectiveness of both approaches depends on	unadopted authentic materials may reduce effectiveness.	

Note. Developed by the authors based on the literature review.

Overall, the synthesis presented in Table 1 reinforces the argument that gamification and authentic materials should not be viewed as isolated pedagogical trends, but as mutually reinforcing components within a coherent instructional design. The literature converges in suggesting that motivational structures provided by gamified frameworks can mediate young learners' interaction with authentic linguistic input, thus supporting both affective engagement and cognitive processing. At the same time, the identified conditions and limitations emphasize that their impact depends on intentional planning, scaffolding, and alignment with learning objectives. Consequently, future research should further explore integrative models that examine how these strategies can be systematically combined to enhance communicative competence and sustained language development in primary EFL contexts.

Table 2.

Effects by Variable and Conditions for Effectiveness

Instructional variable

Reported effects

Conditions identified in the literature

Gamification

Increased motivation, engagement, participation, and willingness to use the target language

Meaningful challenges, balanced rewards, feedback, and age-appropriate design

Authentic materials

Enhanced comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, learner interest, and confidence

Careful selection, linguistic scaffolding, and contextual relevance

Combined integration

Greater persistence, reduced anxiety, deeper engagement with authentic language content

Alignment between game mechanics and instructional goals, appropriate integration

Note. Developed by the authors based on the literature review.

In sum, the literature reviewed demonstrates that gamification and authentic materials each contribute significantly to enhancing motivation and supporting language acquisition in elementary EFL contexts, particularly when grounded in sound pedagogical design. While gamification strengthens affective engagement through structured challenges and feedback, authentic materials enrich the quality of linguistic input by connecting classroom learning to meaningful communicative contexts. However, the limited number of integrative analyses examining their combined implementation suggests the need for more systematic research that explores how motivational frameworks and authentic input can be strategically aligned. Such an integrative perspective is essential for advancing both theoretical understanding and evidence-based instructional practices in primary English language education.

3. METODOLOGÍA

This study adopts a bibliographic research design grounded in a structured literature review aimed at synthesizing existing academic evidence on the role of gamification and authentic materials in elementary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, with particular emphasis on motivation and language acquisition. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the study focuses on identifying, analyzing, and integrating findings reported in previous scholarly works.

Data Sources

The literature search was conducted using international academic databases widely recognized in the field of education and applied linguistics. The primary databases consulted included Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, selected for their broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals, systematic reviews, and high-impact publications related to language education, gamification, and instructional methodologies.

Time Frame

To ensure both relevance and conceptual continuity, the review focused on studies published within a fixed time range from 2015 to 2025. This period was selected to capture recent developments in gamification and digital pedagogies, while also including foundational studies that continue to inform contemporary research in EFL education.

Search Strategy

A systematic search strategy was employed using predefined keywords and Boolean combinations aligned with the research objectives. The primary search strings included combinations such as:
gamification AND elementary EFL
gamification AND motivation AND language learning

authentic materials AND language acquisition

young learners AND EFL motivation

gamification AND authentic materials AND EFL

These search strings were applied consistently across databases, with filters adjusted to limit results to peer-reviewed articles, books, systematic reviews, and academic theses relevant to foreign language education.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the quality and relevance of the selected studies.

Inclusion criteria comprised:

- Publications focused on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL).
- Studies addressing gamification, authentic materials, motivation, engagement, or language acquisition.
- Research conducted in elementary or primary education contexts, or studies offering transferable theoretical insights applicable to young learners.
- Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, systematic reviews, and postgraduate research.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Studies unrelated to language learning or foreign language education.
- Publications lacking academic rigor, such as opinion pieces or non-scholarly sources.
- Research exclusively focused on adult professional training with no theoretical relevance to educational contexts.
- Duplicated studies across databases.

Selection Process

The selection of sources followed a multi-stage screening procedure. Initially, records were identified through database searches. Titles and abstracts were then reviewed to assess relevance to the research focus. Subsequently, full-text readings were conducted to evaluate methodological quality and thematic alignment. Only studies meeting all inclusion criteria were retained for the final corpus of analysis.

Data Analysis

The selected literature was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Studies were coded inductively to identify recurring themes, conceptual patterns, and key findings related to gamification, authentic

materials, motivation, and language acquisition. These themes were then organized into broader analytical categories that informed the structure of the Literature Review and the presentation of thematic findings.

Through this systematic and replicable procedure, the study aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge, highlight convergences and discrepancies within the literature, and identify gaps that warrant further research in elementary-level EFL education.

Scope and Delimitation

The scope of this study is limited to literature addressing English language learning at the elementary or primary education level. While research conducted in secondary or higher education contexts may be referenced for theoretical support, the primary focus remains on young learners and early stages of EFL instruction. The study is further delimited to research that explicitly examines gamification, authentic materials, motivation, or language acquisition within formal educational contexts.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the selected literature revealed a set of recurring thematic results related to the use of gamification and authentic materials in elementary-level English as a Foreign Language education. As summarized in Table 1, the reviewed studies consistently report that gamification is associated with increased learner motivation, engagement, and active participation, particularly through the incorporation of challenges, feedback, and interactive tasks.

The results further indicate that authentic materials contribute to meaningful language acquisition by providing exposure to real-world language use. Across studies, improvements in comprehension, vocabulary development, and pragmatic awareness were identified, especially when authentic resources were adapted to learners' proficiency levels and supported through instructional scaffolding.

As shown in both Table 1 and Table 2, the literature also highlights the effects of combining gamification and authentic materials. The analysis revealed that gamified instructional frameworks facilitate learners' interaction with authentic language input by reducing anxiety and increasing persistence. This integration was found to support sustained engagement and accessibility to complex linguistic content in elementary EFL contexts.

The results indicate that the effectiveness of gamification and authentic materials is influenced by specific conditions. The reviewed literature consistently emphasizes the importance of pedagogical

alignment, age-appropriate design, and thoughtful integration. Studies caution that poorly designed gamification strategies or inadequately adapted authentic materials may limit the reported benefits.

The analysis of the selected literature reveals several recurring thematic findings related to the use of gamification and authentic materials in elementary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. These findings emerge from the synthesis of empirical studies, systematic reviews, and theoretical contributions, reflecting consistent patterns across diverse educational contexts.

One of the most prominent findings across the literature concerns the role of gamification as a catalyst for learner motivation and engagement. Research consistently indicates that gamified learning environments foster positive emotional responses among elementary EFL learners, including enjoyment, curiosity, and sustained attention. Game elements such as challenges, immediate feedback, and progression systems contribute to increased participation and willingness to engage in language tasks, particularly when compared to traditional instructional approaches. Beyond surface-level rewards, the literature highlights that gamification supports intrinsic motivational factors by promoting a sense of achievement, autonomy, and competence when learning tasks are perceived as meaningful and attainable.

Another central finding relates to the contribution of authentic materials to meaningful language input and acquisition. The reviewed studies emphasize that exposure to real-world language use enhances learners' comprehension, vocabulary development, and pragmatic awareness, even at early stages of language learning. Authentic materials provide linguistic richness that supports gradual adaptation to natural language patterns when appropriate pedagogical scaffolding is applied. In addition to linguistic benefits, authenticity has been repeatedly associated with increased learner interest and confidence, as students demonstrate greater engagement when instructional content reflects familiar contexts or real communicative purposes.

The literature further reveals synergistic effects when gamification and authentic materials are integrated within EFL instruction. Gamification appears to provide a motivational framework that facilitates learners' interaction with authentic language content by reducing anxiety and increasing persistence. When authentic texts, audiovisual materials, or real-life scenarios are embedded within gamified tasks, learners experience these resources as more accessible and engaging. This integration supports both affective and cognitive involvement, contributing to sustained motivation and enhanced language-related outcomes, particularly in elementary education contexts.

At the same time, the reviewed literature identifies important conditions and limitations that influence the effectiveness of these approaches. Several studies caution that poorly designed gamification strategies may lead to superficial engagement or excessive reliance on extrinsic rewards, which can undermine intrinsic motivation over time. Similarly, authentic materials may pose challenges related to linguistic complexity or cognitive load if they are not carefully selected and adapted to learners' proficiency levels. Across studies, successful outcomes are consistently linked to thoughtful pedagogical design, alignment with instructional objectives, and age-appropriate implementation.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this bibliographic review provide a coherent synthesis of how gamification and authentic materials contribute to motivation and language acquisition in elementary-level EFL education. Taken together, the findings indicate that both approaches address central challenges in early foreign language learning by enhancing affective engagement, facilitating meaningful exposure to language, and supporting sustained learner participation. Rather than functioning as isolated strategies, the literature suggests that gamification and authentic materials operate as complementary components within instructional designs that respond to the cognitive and emotional characteristics of young learners.

From the perspective of gamification, the findings can be interpreted in light of theoretical frameworks that emphasize the role of motivation and affective factors in second language acquisition. Gamified learning environments appear to align with motivational principles related to autonomy, competence, and social interaction, which are particularly relevant in elementary education. By framing language learning as an interactive and goal-oriented process, gamification helps reduce anxiety and encourages active participation, thereby creating conditions that support continued engagement over time. These interpretations are consistent with broader motivational theories that highlight the importance of learner involvement and emotional investment in sustaining learning processes.

In relation to authentic materials, the discussion reinforces theoretical assumptions regarding the value of meaningful input in language acquisition. Exposure to real-world language use enables learners to interact with linguistic forms in context, supporting comprehension, vocabulary development, and pragmatic awareness. The reviewed literature suggests that authenticity contributes not only to cognitive development but also to affective engagement, as learners perceive language learning as relevant and connected to real communicative purposes. This interpretation aligns with established views that meaningful input and contextualized language use are essential for effective early language learning.

The integration of gamification and authentic materials represents a key contribution highlighted by this study. Interpreting the findings across thematic categories suggests that gamification provides a motivational structure that mediates learners' interaction with authentic language content. When combined, these approaches appear to enhance accessibility to complex input by embedding authentic materials within playful, structured, and supportive learning environments. This synergy is particularly significant in elementary EFL contexts, where learners benefit from instructional designs that balance challenge with enjoyment and guidance.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the discussion highlights the relevance of these findings for the teaching of English at the primary level. The literature suggests that effective implementation depends less on the presence of game elements or authentic resources alone and more on intentional instructional design. Teachers and curriculum designers are encouraged to consider how gamification and authenticity can be aligned with learning objectives, developmental stages, and classroom contexts to maximize their potential benefits.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in a bibliographic approach. This study is constrained by the scope and quality of existing literature, which varies in methodological design and educational context. While the synthesis provides valuable insights, it does not account for contextual variables specific to individual classrooms or long-term learning outcomes. Nevertheless, by consolidating and interpreting existing evidence, this bibliographic study contributes conceptually and pedagogically to a clearer understanding of how gamification and authentic materials function in elementary EFL education, offering a foundation for future empirical and longitudinal research.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This bibliographic study examined how existing literature conceptualizes the role of gamification and authentic materials in supporting motivation and language acquisition in elementary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. In response to the research question guiding the study, the synthesis of empirical studies, systematic reviews, and theoretical contributions indicates that both approaches are consistently associated with positive outcomes in early language learning when they are applied within pedagogically sound frameworks.

Regarding the objective of analyzing the role of gamification in elementary EFL education, the reviewed literature demonstrates that gamified learning environments contribute to increased learner motivation, engagement, and active participation. These effects are particularly significant in primary education contexts, where affective factors strongly influence learning processes. Gamification

appears most effective when it emphasizes meaningful challenges, feedback, and social interaction rather than an excessive reliance on extrinsic rewards.

With respect to the objective of examining the contribution of authentic materials to language acquisition, the findings indicate that exposure to real-world language use supports comprehension, vocabulary development, and familiarity with natural linguistic patterns. Authentic materials also enhance learners' interest and confidence when they are carefully selected and scaffolded in accordance with learners' developmental levels and instructional objectives.

Addressing the objective of synthesizing evidence on the combined use of gamification and authentic materials, the literature suggests that their integration offers a promising approach in elementary EFL education. Gamification provides a motivational framework that facilitates learners' interaction with authentic language content, making complex input more accessible and engaging. Although these conclusions are derived from a bibliographic analysis and should be interpreted accordingly, this study contributes to a clearer understanding of how motivation and language acquisition can be supported through integrated instructional approaches at the primary level.

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