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**Gamification as a didactic motivator in low-resource public English as a Foreign
Language (EFL) classrooms in Ecuador.**

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RESUMEN

El presente artículo indaga sobre la viabilidad y los impactos del uso de la Gamificación como recurso motivacional en aulas de instituciones públicas de escasos recursos en Ecuador, específicamente en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. La integración de elementos lúdicos en el proceso educativo tiende a aumentar la motivación estudiantil, propiciando un entorno de aprendizaje más efectivo. Los docentes de instituciones públicas ecuatorianas enfrentan desafíos al involucrar a los estudiantes en sus clases, en parte debido a metodologías desactualizadas y acceso limitado a recursos educativos y tecnológicos. Este estudio se centra en cómo la gamificación puede mejorar la motivación estudiantil y generar un ambiente de aprendizaje más estimulante en contextos de bajos recursos. La inclusión de elementos de juego puede mejorar la adquisición del idioma, fomentar el compromiso estudiantil y promover el aprendizaje colaborativo, como se ha demostrado en investigaciones previas. El enfoque cualitativo-deductivo utilizado permitió recopilar datos a través de una exhaustiva revisión bibliográfica. Los resultados sugieren que la gamificación ofrece una perspectiva prometedora para abordar los desafíos de la educación tradicional al fomentar la participación activa del estudiante y enriquecer la experiencia educativa en su totalidad.

Palabras clave: Gamificación; inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE); aulas de escasos recursos; motivación estudiantil; instituciones públicas ecuatorianas.

Gamification as a didactic motivator in low-resource public English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Ecuador.

ABSTRACT

The present article explores the feasibility and impacts of Gamification as a motivational tool in classrooms within low-resource public institutions in Ecuador, particularly in teaching English as a Foreign Language. By integrating game design elements into the educational process, teachers tend to enhance student motivation, thus creating a more effective environment for language learning. Traditionally, educators in Ecuadorian public institutions face challenges in engaging students in their classes, often due to outdated teaching methodologies and limited access to educational and technological resources. This study focuses on how gamification can increase student motivation and foster a more stimulating and enjoyable learning environment in low-resource settings concerning English as a Foreign Language instruction. Through the incorporation of gaming elements, teachers can improve language acquisition, student engagement, and encourage collaborative learning, as evidenced by previous studies. The utilization of a qualitative-deductive approach allowed for data collection through an extensive literature review across various educational contexts. Results suggest that Gamification offers a promising perspective for overcoming challenges in traditional education, promoting active student participation. Additionally, the findings highlight the potential of Gamification to revolutionize teaching practice and enrich the entire educational experience.

Keywords: Gamification; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Low-resource classrooms; Student motivation; Ecuadorian public schools.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present study is to examine the feasibility of Gamification as a tool to enhance the motivation of students in low-resource public English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Ecuador, through the integration of game design components in the

educational process. In this way, teachers may establish a foreign language learning environment that is more enjoyable, interactive, effective, and stimulating.

In the Ecuadorian context, teachers from public schools are facing meaningful challenges regarding the active involvement of students in the process of acquiring English as a foreign language. This situation is possible because of the persistence in the use of traditional teaching methodology that does not promote the active participation of students in terms of effectiveness, or offer interactive learning experiences. Furthermore, it could be attributed to the difficulty in accessing up-to-date educational materials.

Based on the previous information, we have determined that it is appropriate to address the topic of gamification as a didactic and engaging tool aiming to increase the quality of teaching and student engagement. This approach seeks to overcome any limitations such as access to technology and internet connectivity, and likewise, it is outlined as an opportunity to present pedagogical innovations that generate a purposeful impact and also contribute to both the academic and personal development of students (Sailer et al., 2017).

This work is based upon a variety of theories and concepts that are linked to Gamification, Language Learning, and motivation, which provide a solid basis for comprehending the practicality of gamification, using game elements, as a motivating didactic tool in low-resource public English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Ecuador.

The acquisition of a language is influenced by diverse elements as research about ESL/EFL has revealed so far including motivation, engagement, and interaction. It has been demonstrated that Gamification may foster language acquisition by providing opportunities for purposeful

practice. It may also promote the dialogue and establish an engaging and cooperative learning atmosphere.

Gamification, defined as “the use of game elements in non-game contexts” plays a crucial role in students’ participation by creating a better stimulating environment (Castro, 2023). This can help to contribute to current educational problems by establishing a positive atmosphere for productive and enjoyable learning.

The purpose of gamification is to increase student motivation and enjoyment through game experiences and reward systems that encourage their participation actively. Since motivation is essential for commitment and academic success, gamification provides a promising approach to boost the satisfaction and delight of learning, especially in English as a Foreign language teaching (Kim et al., 2018).

Despite the potential of gamification, its effectiveness in EFL classrooms in Ecuador has not been widely studied or utilized yet. Thus, the present study aims to examine how powerful gamification is as a motivating tool in EFL teaching, through the integration of game design elements into the learning process. This might create a more enjoyable, interactive, effective, and stimulating environment for Second language acquisition. Precisely, this work focuses on the following research question: What is the impact of resource scarcity, such as lack of internet access and limited availability of electronic gadgets, on the implementation of gamification to increase student motivation and level of commitment in low-resource Ecuadorian educational settings, specifically in the context of English as a Foreign language teaching?

Previous studies have explored gamification as a motivational tool in the teaching-learning context of English as a Foreign Language EFL. However, no specific research has been found

about its application in public schools with low resources. A common situation in Ecuadorian educational institutions. In this regard, a study conducted by Castro Benavides et al. (2023) provided valuable information about the use of gamification in the higher education of Ecuador, including its capacity to improve student engagement and motivation, its effectiveness in improving intrinsic motivation and performance of each user and its potential to improve student learning, motivation, and participation.

In addition, it is relevant to mention research that aims at applying gamification as a motivating strategy in Chinese large classrooms, Kraus et al., (2020) which has shown favorable reactions from both students and teachers by incorporating innovative methodologies focused on the usage of games as the core element of the class. It is imperative to understand that the adaptation of resources and the preparation are primary aspects to ensure the effective implementation of gamification.

On the other hand, several tools of gamification pursue that common goal: to encourage and involve all students during the learning process either inside or outside the classroom taking into account the possible educational needs (Briceño,2019). In this sense, it is crucial to consider inclusive education that involves all areas of the curriculum. In this way, English language teaching and the application of innovative strategies such as gamification represent a professional challenge that requires a reflection on behalf of teachers on adapting their pedagogy and covering special educational needs, thereby contributing to an active and fun learning process.

This research centers around gamification as a tool to enhance student motivation in low-resource educational atmospheres in Ecuador, to be specific in teaching English as a Foreign Language teaching. This procedure is developed in a setting characterized by resource

limitations, socioeconomic challenges, and a reduction in teaching hours, which currently stands at three pedagogical hours per week according to the current curriculum.

Over time, the Ecuadorian public educational system has experienced various changes that have revolved around the promotion of cultural diversity, indigenous and foreign languages, along traditions, all to improve educational standards. These shifts have impacted student participation in learning activities, particularly in the realm of teaching English as a foreign language.

Notwithstanding the increasing demand for English Language skills in academic, professional, and tourism sectors to thrive in a globalized world, it observed there is a lack of innovation in the application of active methodologies by educators. Instead, many teachers prefer to continue using traditional strategies resulting in student demotivation and disinterest.

Hence, we will address the hypothesis suggesting that the implementation of gamification strategies in low-resource education environments in Ecuador runs into a positive effect on student motivation throughout the English as a foreign language learning journey.

METHODOLOGY

The current research adopts a qualitative-deductive approach, which involves gathering data through a descriptive analysis supported by a documentary review obtained from a plethora of educational materials such as postgraduate studies, scientific articles, blogs, journals, and indexes in trustable databases such as Google Scholar, Scielo, Redalyc, and Latindex. The sources were carefully chosen from a broad array of materials showcasing similar contexts to ours from both Asia and Latin America, as well as specific studies conducted in Ecuador.

Throughout the data collection phase, preference was given to sources that offered a wide and diverse perspective on the subject under study, along with those that presented rigorous and relevant findings. Both empirical studies and theoretical reviews have been considered to have a comprehensive and holistic view of the topic. Significant similarities were identified across the different contexts addressed by each research, particularly about increasing motivation using the implementation of gamification strategies in educational settings. These similarities provided a solid foundation for comparative analysis, discussion and subsequent conclusions in this study.

DISCUSSION AND OUTCOMES

Gamification, commonly defined as “the use of game elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled y Nacke, 2011) plays an important role in student engagement as the environment becomes more stimulating upon its implementation. Therefore, this growing interest from students can contribute to solving real educational issues by fostering a healthy, trustworthy, fun and more productive atmosphere to build the groundwork of successful education.

In this scenario, Castro Benavides et al. (2023) demonstrate in their research that through gamification, which uses game elements, student motivation and commitment can be increased at different educational levels and cultural contexts, leading to an enhancement in learning. Nonetheless, further investigation is needed to determine the effectiveness with varied student populations. While the study has found that gamification improves the satisfaction of psychological needs, alongside academic performance and intrinsic motivation, there are also challenges and constraints associated with its implementation.

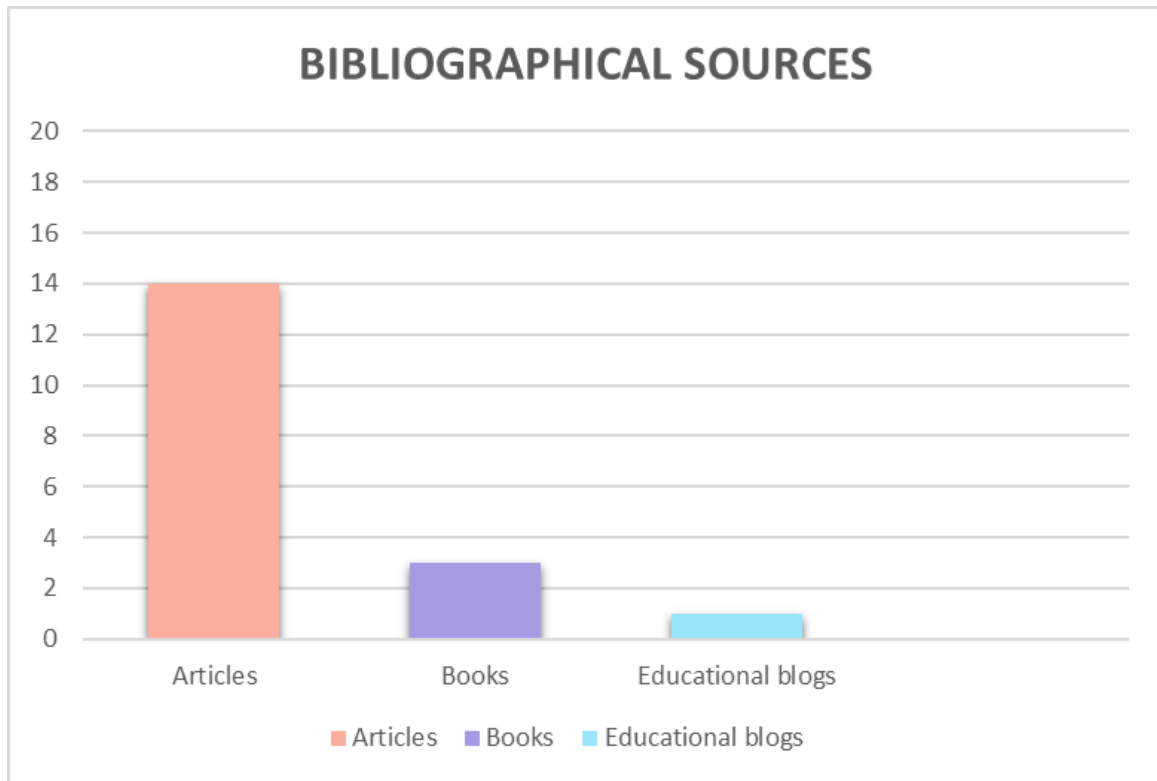
On the flip side, Kraus et al. (2020) align with the aforementioned study, as they found that students exhibited higher motivation to learn by integrating gamification into their research. Specific physical elements such as charades, designed to enhance reading and vocabulary skills, were perceived as games and therefore more enjoyable, provoking student interaction. This differed from traditional classroom settings where the focus is mainly on teaching grammatical structures. However, they realized that other games which involved dialogue did not encourage spontaneous communication, and consequently, affected the enjoyment of the activity.

Finally, the research carried out by Carmen Rodriguez et al. (2019) on the use of gamification to promote inclusivity in education revealed that this didactic tool fits perfectly to each need that arises and that it increases student motivation and self-esteem, allowing them to express their emotions. Likewise, it is possible to respect the different learning paces in the classroom by involving collaborative work resulting in increased academic performance and self-confidence as students engage more deeply in the game. This, in turn, improves their physical, playful and communicative skills, and the ability to solve problems in real contexts.

Up to this point, it has been demonstrated that the application of gamification as a didactic motivator, in the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, is highly beneficial. However, there are no studies available regarding the use of gamification in low-resource public classrooms within Ecuadorian public schools.

ILLUSTRATIONS, FIGURES, TABLES

In the figure below (Figure 1), comprehensive details will be presented on the diverse bibliographic sources from which information was gathered to develop this research.



The bibliographic sources used in the present paper were 14 scientific articles, 3 books, and 1 educational blog.

The following table (Table 1) provides a comparative analysis of the implications of traditional education and the contributions of gamification in EFL teaching. The table outlines the difference between both aspects, emphasizing the advantages of the application of gamification in low-resource public classrooms.

IMPLICATIONS OF TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN LOW-RESOURCE PUBLIC CLASSROOMS	BENEFITS OF GAMIFICATION APPLICATION IN LOW-RESOURCE PUBLIC CLASSROOMS
Limited collaboration.	Motivated and engaged students in the learning process.
Lack of immediate feedback.	Active and experiential learning.
Predominantly silent and passive students.	Development of social and collaborative skills.
Mandatory use of outdated texts.	Interactive classes.
Traditional organization in the classroom.	Greater understanding.
Lack of technological resources and the internet.	Further emotional connection with respect to the content.
Large class sizes.	Continuous and immediate feedback.
Limited exposure to the language.	Customized learning experiences.

The incorporation of gamification in the educational setting has the potential to positively revolutionize the teaching process, offering an enriching learning experience that might have a significant impact on the student's academic performance. This innovative pedagogical strategy effectively addresses the various limitations associated with the education traditional paradigm. By creating a playful and participative atmosphere, gamification promotes greater

involvement and engagement on behalf of students, thus stimulating their intrinsic motivation towards the learning process.

One of the foremost benefits of gamification in a classroom is the ability to transform the dynamics of teaching, turning the process of acquiring knowledge into an amazing and immersive experience. By integrating game elements such as challenges, competitions and rewards, an educational environment is created that encourages active exploration, peer collaboration and the development of cognitive and socioemotional skills.

Besides, gamification provides the opportunity to personalize learning according to the individual needs and preferences of each student, enabling flexible adjustment of content and activity difficulty. This simplifies the attention to diversity within the classroom, promoting an inclusive approach that acknowledges and values the uniqueness of each student.

Gamification can also improve the retention of information and the long-term transfer of knowledge by creating memorable and meaningful learning experiences. By associating academic concepts with situations and contexts relevant to students, the connection and practical application of contents are promoted, thereby boosting comprehension and assimilation.

In summary, gamification represents a powerful pedagogical tool that provides various advantages during the teaching-learning process. By offering a dynamic, interactive and personalized approach, this strategy can boost the motivation, commitment, and academic performance of students transforming favorably the overall educational experience.

CONCLUSIONS

The application of gamification emerges as a vital tool to enhance the interest and involvement of students in low-resource educational settings, specifically within the context of teaching English as a Foreign language. Its approach is rooted in the integration of game elements that involve students actively, offering an innovative and effective perspective to tackle the challenges related to the educational field. It is imperative to take actions that go beyond the current barriers and allow the effective implementation of strategies aimed at improving student learning.

Educators working in public schools, especially those with low resources, should not allow the lack of pedagogical materials to limit their work. On the contrary, they must foster the creation of dynamic, stimulating, collaborative, comfortable and inclusive learning environments where learners can feel uninhibited in expressing themselves and sharing their opinions and emotions without fear of judgment.

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