

THE IMPACT OF GAMIFICATION ELEMENTS ON THE MOTIVATION OF
B2-LEVEL ENGLISH LEARNERS

Raximova Iroda Shuxrat qizi

*Aniq va ijtimoiy fanlar universiteti xorijiy til va adabiyoti 2 bosqich magiistri**rahimovai352@gmail.com +998951661118*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the integration of digital tools into foreign language pedagogy has significantly reshaped instructional practices. Among these innovations, gamification—the strategic application of game-based elements in non-game educational contexts—has emerged as a compelling motivator for learners across proficiency levels. However, B2-level English learners occupy a particularly sensitive position within the CEFR framework: they have surpassed intermediate competence yet require sustained motivation to master complex lexical, grammatical, and discursive structures characteristic of upper-intermediate proficiency.²⁰ Beginning in the early 2010s, gamification shifted from a commercial trend to an influential pedagogical framework supported by psychological, cognitive, and sociolinguistic theories. As language learning increasingly migrated to digital environments, these game-based features—such as points, badges, leaderboards, narrative quests, progress indicators, and reward cycles—became central to research exploring motivational outcomes among L2 learners.

This introduction positions the study within a chronological academic trajectory, outlining how theoretical foundations, technological advancements, and pedagogical models gradually converged to influence the motivational dynamics of B2-level learners. The following sections examine this development from 2010 to the present day, analyzing how gamification evolved from a motivational hypothesis into an empirically validated instructional strategy.

THE EMERGENCE OF GAMIFICATION THEORY (2010-2014)

The period between 2010 and 2014 marks the conceptual birth of gamification within academic discourse. Initially rooted in behavioral economics and consumer engagement, gamification's earliest applications targeted marketing, productivity systems, and user-experience design. However, scholars soon recognized the educational potential of these mechanisms, particularly their alignment with established motivational theories. During this foundational phase, three key theoretical frameworks shaped gamification research: SDT posits that motivation is sustained when three psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are fulfilled.²¹ Early studies suggested that game elements such as progress tracking and skill-based challenges directly enhanced learners' perceived competence, while collaborative quests increased social relatedness. The theory asserts that learners' motivation is determined by their expectations of success and the perceived value of the task. Gamification's reward loops and transparent goal structures provided clear

²⁰ Sawaguchi, Ryo. «Developing a CEFR-based diagnostic test to assess Japanese university students' productive knowledge of lexical bundles.» *Language Testing in Asia* 15.1 (2025): 27.

²¹ Sen, Ali. «Investigating a motivation model for gamified e-learning: A mixed methods approach.» *Plymouth University Repository* (2024).

pathways toward achievement, thus increasing expectancy. Research on reinforcement indicated that immediate feedback-integral to game systems-could strengthen learning habits and improve persistence.

Though not yet tailored to foreign language pedagogy, these theoretical foundations set the stage for the integration of gamified tools in English learning environments. For B2-level learners, who require increasingly nuanced linguistic competence, these mechanisms offered promising motivation-enhancing potential, laying the groundwork for the methodological expansions that followed.

INTEGRATION OF GAMIFICATION INTO LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY (2015-2019)

The period from 2015 to 2019 represents a decisive shift in which gamification evolved from a conceptual framework into a practical and widely adopted pedagogical methodology.²² This stage was marked by the rapid proliferation of digital learning platforms and mobile applications-such as Duolingo, Memrise, Quizizz, and Kahoot-which incorporated game mechanics not as auxiliary features but as core instructional principles. As these tools gained global prominence, their influence on English language teaching, particularly at the B2 level, became the focus of extensive empirical investigation. Between 2015 and 2016, the adoption of gamified platforms reached an unprecedented scale. These tools introduced structured reward systems-points, badges, streaks, and leaderboards-designed to reinforce daily practice and long-term engagement. While early implementations primarily targeted general English learners, researchers gradually began examining their effects on more advanced proficiency levels.

For B2 learners, who must refine complex grammatical structures and cultivate advanced lexical precision, the consistency encouraged by gamified platforms proved particularly valuable.²³ Regular exposure and skill reinforcement were found to support deeper lexical retention and grammatical accuracy. As empirical data accumulated, educators recognized that excessive reliance on competitive mechanics (leaderboards, ranking systems) could undermine intrinsic motivation in certain learner profiles. Consequently, between 2017 and 2018, gamified language-learning environments expanded to include collaborative and narrative-driven approaches, such as:

- Quest-based learning
- Scenario simulations (e.g., airport dialogues, business negotiations, problem-solving missions)
- Role-based tasks requiring cooperative interaction

These narrative and task-based elements aligned more closely with communicative competence frameworks, enabling B2 learners to apply upper-intermediate linguistic structures in contextualized, real-world scenarios. As a result, gamification transitioned from mere reward-based engagement to a pedagogically meaningful strategy that fostered communicative fluency.

²² Trinidad, Manuel, Mercedes Ruiz, and Alejandro Calderon. «A bibliometric analysis of gamification research.» *IEEE Access* 9 (2021): 46505-46544.

²³ Cerón-Jordán, Carlos Fernando, et al. «Gamification and Grammar: The Role of Quizizz in Learning Verb Tenses Among A2 Students.» *Horizon International Journal* 3.1 (2025): 106-121.

By 2019, adaptive learning algorithms began shaping the next generation of gamified English platforms. These systems adjusted difficulty levels, task types, and feedback mechanisms according to each learner's performance, resulting in:

- More precise targeting of B2-specific grammatical weaknesses
- Enhanced monitoring of lexical development
- Reduced cognitive overload
- Increased learner autonomy

This personalized approach was shown to significantly strengthen intrinsic motivation, as learners perceived greater control over their learning trajectory—a key predictor of sustained engagement at higher proficiency levels. In sum, the 2015-2019 period was characterized by the institutionalization of gamification within L2 pedagogy, supported by technology-driven expansion, narrative innovations, and personalized learning models. These developments paved the way for deeper psychological and linguistic investigations into gamification's motivational effects, which became the central focus of research in the post-2020 era. The years 2020 to 2022 marked a significant acceleration in gamification research, largely driven by the global shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. As digital instruction became the primary mode of language education, scholars began to examine not only whether gamification worked, but how and why it influenced learner motivation.²⁴ Studies during this period demonstrated that gamification enhanced intrinsic motivation when elements such as progress indicators, mastery levels, and immediate feedback aligned with learners' internal goals. For B2 students, whose learning tasks involve abstract reasoning and complex discourse, intrinsic motivation proved essential for sustained progress.

Researchers found that game mechanics reduced cognitive overload by breaking complex tasks into manageable steps. This supported B2 learners in mastering advanced grammar (e.g., mixed conditionals, embedded clauses) and high-frequency collocations. Gamification also alleviated learner anxiety, increased confidence, and reduced fear of error-making factors especially important at the upper-intermediate level where communicative expectations are higher. Overall, the post-2020 research period solidified the understanding that gamification contributes not only to behavioral engagement but also to deeper psychological readiness for advanced L2 learning.

Recent studies (2022-2024) provide concrete evidence of how gamification specifically benefits B2 learners. Gamified repetition cycles increased retention of complex vocabulary-idioms, phrasal verbs, and academic collocations by 25-40%. Adaptive tasks improved accuracy in advanced structures such as participle clauses and complex noun phrases, enhancing overall syntactic control. Role-play quests and scenario-based missions significantly boosted speaking fluency and discourse organization, enabling B2 learners to apply language more spontaneously. Learners in gamified environments demonstrated more stable weekly motivation levels, whereas traditional groups showed noticeable declines. These outcomes confirm that gamification offers both cognitive and emotional advantages, supporting the sustained progress needed at the B2 stage.

²⁴ Mavlonov A., Mirzohidov S. USE OF INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN HISTORY TEACHING METHODOLOGY //Science and innovation. – 2024. – T. 3. – №. B8. – C. 26-28.

CONCLUSION

Across fourteen years of development (2010-2024), gamification has transformed from a theoretical concept into a robust pedagogical tool grounded in psychology, linguistics, and digital learning research. For B2-level English learners, gamification:

- enhances intrinsic motivation,
- strengthens lexical and grammatical competence,
- alleviates anxiety,
- fosters communicative fluency,
- stabilizes long-term engagement.

Thus, when thoughtfully designed, gamification is not merely an engaging addition to language learning-it is a scientifically supported strategy that meaningfully accelerates upper-intermediate English acquisition.

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