



Gamification in Language Assessment: Challenges and Pedagogical Strategies Across Three Assessment Types in EFL Contexts

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Abstract

Gamification has become a popular learning strategy that incorporates game elements such as points, levels, and badges into learning activities to enhance learners' participation and motivation. It has recently been extended beyond instruction to the field of assessment, where it transforms traditional testing into more interactive and engaging experiences. However, integrating gamification into assessment presents unique challenges that differ from its use in teaching. This narrative review aims to examine the challenges in integrating gamification elements into Assessment for Learning (AfL), Assessment of Learning (AoL), and Assessment as Learning (AaL), and to explore pedagogical strategies for addressing these challenges in EFL contexts. The study analyzed ten peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2014 to 2024 from ScienceDirect and Taylor & Francis, selected based on their relevance to gamification in language assessment. Each study was reviewed to identify recurring challenges and pedagogical strategies for language assessment practices. The results reveal that while gamification can foster learner engagement, challenges remain in aligning game elements with learning objectives, adapting materials to learners' proficiency levels, and ensuring content validity. Reported pedagogical strategies for improvement include ensuring the contextual relevance of game elements and assessment purposes, aligning gamification with instructional goals, combining traditional and gamified components, providing transparent feedback systems, and integrating teacher guidance in reflective tasks. The study suggests that effective implementation of gamified assessment requires teachers' strong language assessment literacy and continuous reflection. These insights offer practical implications for EFL educators in designing assessments that are not only engaging but also pedagogically sound and valid.

Keywords: Gamification in EFL; Gamified assessment as learning; Gamified assessment for learning; Gamified assessment of learning; Gamified language assessment

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INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, technology is widely used in every sector worldwide. It has become an important part of daily life for everyone and cannot be separated from human activity. Many people rely on and use it all the time, which impacts various fields, particularly in the field of education (Obinna et al., 2024). Technology has already entered the education sector and brings positive effects to the teaching and learning process. A study by Roy (2019) found that technology has the potential to improve learners' involvement and foster greater enthusiasm throughout the educational experience. This highlights that technology plays an essential role in the educational field. Recently, gamification has been hyped as an example of the effect of integrating technology in education. Gamification is combining game principles, such as levels,

badges, and scores, with learning materials or media that can support the learning activities for learners (Saleem et al., 2022). It is also in line with Staler and Koerner (2021) who stated that combining a non-gamified background with the game components is the definition of gamification. As teachers increasingly recognize its potential, gamification has evolved beyond its instructional applications to include assessment practices. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, gamified assessment has gained attention for its capacity to make evaluation more interactive, reduce students' anxiety, and increase learner involvement (Alomari et al., 2019; Yavuz et al., 2020). Thus, gamification has become a transformative force in both learning and assessment, reshaping traditional classroom practices and redefining how learners engage with language evaluation.

Although gamification has been widely adopted in instruction, its application in assessment remains conceptually unclear and practically challenging. Instruction primarily facilitates knowledge acquisition, whereas assessment serves to measure achievement, guide improvement, and foster reflection. Confusing these purposes risks compromising assessment validity and reliability (Kwon & Özpölat, 2021). In language education, assessment operates through three key paradigms: *Assessment for Learning (AfL)*, which emphasizes formative feedback to enhance learning; *Assessment of Learning (AoL)*, which focuses on measuring outcomes; and *Assessment as Learning (AaL)*, which promotes learner autonomy and reflection (Schellekens et al., 2021). Integrating gamification into each paradigm introduces distinct design challenges, particularly in balancing enjoyment with fairness, engagement with validity, and innovation with reliability. The diversity of findings across EFL studies highlights the need for a focused synthesis that examines how gamification functions within AfL, AoL, and AaL, rather than treating assessment as a single category. While gamification and game-based learning (GBL) share certain concepts, they differ in purpose and scope. Gamification refers to using game-like features such as points, badges, leaderboards, or progress bars in non-game contexts to motivate and engage learners without transforming the learning process into an actual game (Staller & Koerner, 2021).

Conversely, game-based learning involves full-fledged games intentionally designed for educational objectives, where gameplay itself constitutes the learning activity (Nousiainen et al., 2018). Similarly, it is vital to distinguish between gamified instruction and gamified assessment. Gamified instruction enhances teaching and learning processes, whereas gamified assessment specifically applies game elements to evaluate and measure student performance. This study emphasizes how gamification is integrated into language assessment rather than used solely as an instructional approach. Teachers in EFL contexts often struggle to design assessments that are both meaningful and motivating (Hadzhikolev et al., 2020). Traditional assessments frequently induce anxiety and disengagement, negatively affecting student performance and even mental health (Ray et al., 2022). As Vallorani et al. (2022) note, the repetitiveness of conventional assessments discourages active participation. While gamification offers a potential solution by transforming assessment into a more engaging experience (Lai et al., 2020), challenges persist in aligning tasks with learning outcomes, managing technological constraints, and ensuring fairness. Therefore, identifying the specific challenges that arise when integrating gamification into each assessment type is essential to ensure its effectiveness in EFL contexts.

Despite numerous studies have shown that gamification enhances engagement and improves the learning experience in EFL classrooms, most of these investigations have focused on instructional rather than assessment contexts. Research has consistently reported that gamification promotes active participation (Alomari et al., 2019; Rahmani, 2020), increases learners' interest (Santillán et al., 2023), supports learner-centeredness (Palaniappan & Noor, 2022), and reduces anxiety (Yavuz et al., 2020). These findings

confirm the pedagogical advantages of gamification in teaching. However, despite its effectiveness in instruction, limited research has explored how gamification can be systematically applied to assessment, a domain with different principles, functions, and validity concerns. Existing studies primarily treat gamification as a teaching strategy rather than an assessment framework (Helvich et al., 2023; Santillán et al., 2023). Furthermore, little is known about how gamification interacts with the three major assessment paradigms that are AfL, AoL, and AaL in EFL contexts. Previous research rarely examines these frameworks collectively, which obscures how game mechanics function differently in formative, summative, and reflective assessments. Other studies highlight recurring implementation issues, including technological limitations, unbalanced reward systems, and weak alignment between game elements and assessment objectives (Carvalho et al., 2024; Hong et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these challenges have been analyzed in relation to assessment type or pedagogical response.

Additionally, most studies on gamification in English teaching focus mainly on instructional settings. For instance, gamification in EFL classrooms (using points, badges, and leaderboards) has gained significant attention for enhancing engagement and motivation (Tsai, 2024; Zolfaghari et al., 2025). However, less is known about gamification in language assessment. Few studies explicitly examine game elements in assessment tasks (AfL/AoL/AaL) rather than in instruction. One recent perspective urges integrating gamification into language proficiency exams to replicate authentic use (Zolfaghari et al., 2025). Similarly, gamified quiz platforms are being adopted for formative tests, but systematic evidence on their impact in EFL assessment remains limited (Zhang & Crawford, 2024). Addressing this gap, the present study systematically reviews empirical research to map both the challenges and pedagogical strategies of integrating gamification within AfL, AoL, and AaL frameworks, an area still underexplored in EFL language assessment.

Given these gaps, this study aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the challenges and pedagogical strategies involved in integrating gamification into the three assessment paradigms AfL, AoL, and AaL within EFL contexts. The review adopts a narrative approach, analyzing peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2024 that examine the relationship between gamification and language assessment. The study applies the operational definitions of AfL, AoL, and AaL based on Schellekens et al. (2021) and Derakhshan and Ghiasvand (2022) to maintain a sharp inclusion lens and ensure conceptual clarity. Specifically, AfL is treated as feedback-oriented formative assessment, AoL as summative evaluation for achievement measurement, and AaL as reflective assessment fostering learner autonomy. The scope of the review focuses on identifying both recurring challenges and effective pedagogical strategies that emerge from integrating gamification into these three paradigms. The findings aim to inform educators and researchers about evidence-based ways to balance engagement and validity in gamified assessment, contributing to more effective, learner-centered evaluation practices in EFL classrooms. Accordingly, the study is guided by two main research questions: (1) What are the challenges of integrating gamification in each type of assessment (AfL, AoL, and AaL) in EFL contexts? and (2) What are the pedagogical strategies to address these challenges?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a narrative review design to synthesize empirical findings on the intersection of gamification and language assessment in EFL contexts. It involves analyzing and synthesizing previous research on a specific topic (Agarwal et al., 2023). The narrative review method allowed in-depth thematic synthesis across heterogeneous empirical designs (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and design-based studies)

rather than statistical aggregation which also become the inclusion criteria. Moreover, excluded area were studies on gamification in instruction without assessment focus, or publications not in English. This design was selected because the available studies on gamification in language assessment vary widely in design, participant groups, and data types, which makes a thematic synthesis more appropriate than a meta-analysis. The review focused specifically on how gamification has been integrated into three key assessment paradigms: AfL, AoL, and AaL. In this study, gamification refers to the inclusion of game-like elements such as badges, points, leaderboards, quests, levels, and instant feedback in non-game contexts, while language assessment encompasses practices used to evaluate learners' language ability through formative, summative, and reflective approaches.

The articles were searched using keywords such as "gamification in EFL," "gamified language assessment," "gamified assessment for learning," "gamified assessment of learning," and "gamified assessment as learning." Furthermore, the articles for this review consisted of empirical journal articles that explicitly addressed gamification in relation to language teaching or learning and contained substantive discussion of assessment (in the forms of AfL, AoL, or AaL). The articles had to be research-based and were published between 2014 and 2024. The terms need to be matched with the definitions of gamification and language assessment. Additionally, both gamification and language assessment should be discussed in the articles. Then, using the research questions, the articles were synthesized. At the beginning, based on the keywords, 30 articles were found. Therefore, after more detailed analysis of the articles, whether they are relevant, research-based, and suitable for the term, the researcher determined that 10 articles were appropriate for the next analysis. These ten studies represent a variety of EFL contexts (university preparatory programs, secondary education, and language institutes), research designs (case studies, qualitative investigations, experimental and quasi-experimental designs, mixed methods, and design-based research), and participant groups (students and teachers). Table 1. lists the ten studies with publication year, setting, method, and participant summary as reported in the original sources.

The articles analyzed in this narrative review were identified from two major academic databases, ScienceDirect and Taylor & Francis, through a systematic search process consistent with the review design. The search employed the following keywords: "gamification in EFL," "gamified language assessment," "gamified assessment for learning," "gamified assessment of learning," and "gamified assessment as learning." The inclusion criteria required that articles be empirical studies related to gamification in language teaching or learning, explicitly discuss assessment in the form of AfL, AoL, or AaL, be published between 2014 and 2024, and match the operational definitions of *gamification* and *language assessment*. Studies that did not include empirical evidence or that discussed gamification solely as a teaching method were excluded. The initial search retrieved 30 articles. After closer examination of their relevance, methodological rigor, and conceptual alignment, 10 articles were selected for the final synthesis. These studies were chosen because they represented diverse EFL contexts (university preparatory programs, secondary education, and language institutes), research designs (case studies, experimental, quasi-experimental, mixed-methods, and design-based studies), and participant groups (students and teachers), allowing for a comprehensive view of how gamification is implemented and perceived in assessment practices. Table 1 presents the ten studies along with publication year, setting, method, and participant summary as reported in the original sources.

This study applied a narrative review methodology, therefore no primary data collection instruments such as tests, surveys, or questionnaires were used. Instead, a document analysis functioned as the main analytical instrument to systematically record, organize, and compare data from each selected study. The document analysis included

fields for publication details, study context, research design, participants, types of gamified elements applied, assessment framework (AfL, AoL, or AaL), and key findings related to the challenges and pedagogical strategies of gamified assessment. This structure ensured consistency in data extraction and facilitated comparison across studies with different methodological approaches. The review procedure consisted of three systematic stages. First, relevant studies were identified and retrieved using the predefined keywords. Second, the articles were screened and selected according to the inclusion criteria established earlier, which focused on empirical studies addressing gamification in relation to assessment. Third, the selected studies were carefully reviewed, and relevant information was extracted and organized within the document analysis. Each article was read multiple times to ensure an accurate and comprehensive understanding of its methodology, context, and results. To strengthen the trustworthiness and transparency of the synthesis, inclusion decisions were guided by the degree to which each study's operational definitions aligned with those of gamification and language assessment adopted in this review.

The review applied a thematic narrative synthesis to interpret and integrate findings across the ten selected studies. The extracted data were analyzed iteratively to identify the three assessment paradigms (AfL, AoL, and AaL). Thematic coding focused on four main dimensions: (a) the types of gamified elements employed (e.g., leaderboards, badges, instant feedback), (b) the assessment purpose and its operationalization within each study, (c) reported benefits and challenges, and (d) pedagogical strategies or recommendations. After coding, the themes were grouped into two major analytic strands: (1) challenges in aligning gamification with assessment purposes and (2) pedagogical strategies for addressing those challenges. This analytic framework allowed the synthesis to capture both conceptual and practical perspectives on gamified assessment in EFL education. For transparency, all interpretations and synthesized assertions are explicitly tied to the ten reviewed studies listed in Table 1. The following list is the articles analyzed:

Table 1. List of articles

No	Authors	Year	Title	Setting	Method	Participants
1	Nousiainen, T., Kangas, M., Rikala, J., & Vesisenaho, M.	2018	Teacher competencies in game-based pedagogy	15 schools and their partner schools in Southern Finland	Case study	The study involved around 30 active teachers, with 75% of participants being primary school class teachers
2	Aldemir, T., Celik, B., & Kaplan, G.	2018	A qualitative investigation of student perceptions of game elements in a gamified course	Turkey	Qualitative	For the first group, there were 81 participants from Foreign Language Education Department, and for the second group, there were 37 participants.
3	Redjeki, I. S., & Muhajir, R.	2021	Gamification in EFL classroom to support	A university in Bogor, Indonesia	Action research	The participants were 15 second-semester students in an

No	Authors	Year	Title	Setting	Method	Participants
			teaching and learning in 21st century			EFL classroom
4	Sadeghi, K., Sağlık, E., Mede, E., Samur, Y., & Comert, Z.	2022	The effects of implementing gamified instruction on vocabulary gain and motivation among language learners	English Preparatory private university in Istanbul, Turkey	A convergent mixed-methods	The study involved 32 intermediate-level students, consisting of 16 participants in the control group and 16 participants in the experimental group.
5	Philpott, A., & Son, J. B.	2022	Leaderboards in an EFL course: Student performance and motivation.	At a private, coeducational university in Kansai, Japan	A quasi-experimental	There were 44 second-year university students who were Japanese and were in intensive English classes, with ages ranging from 19 to 20 years old
6	Foroutan Far, F., & Taghizadeh, M.	2022	Comparing the effects of digital and non-digital gamification on EFL learners' collocation knowledge, perceptions, and sense of flow	At Jahad-Daneshgahi Language Institute, Isfahan, Iran	Experimental	The participants, consisting of 75 Iranian EFL learners at the B1 proficiency level, were assigned to three distinct groups: a digitally gamified class, a non-digitally gamified class, and a class with no gamification
7	Vnucko, G., Kralova, Z., & Tirpakova, A.	2024	Exploring the relationship between digital gaming, language attitudes, and academic success in EFL university students	Slovak	Mixed-method	The participants consisted of 99 Slovak EFL university students who were non-native speakers of English
8	Huang, S., & Zhang, H.	2024	Gamification acceptance model towards online learning among college students: an empirical study based on mediation and moderation	Colleges in Macau and Guangdong Province	Questionnaire survey	A total of 500 questionnaires were administered across selected colleges in Macao and Guangdong, yielding 315 completed

No	Authors	Year	Title	Setting	Method	Participants
						responses
9	Waluyo, B., & Balazon, F. G.	2024	Exploring the impact of gamified learning on positive psychology in CALL environments: A mixed-methods study with Thai university students	Thailand	A sequential explanatory mixed-method	There were 69 first-year students from the general English course
10	Carvalho, A. R., Ferreira, L., Gonçalves, L., Santos, C., Almeida, J., Ribeiro, N., & Pedro, L.	2024	Developing a gamified digital platform to promote extracurricular activities in basic and secondary schools – preliminary findings	At Portuguese basic and secondary school teacher	Design-based	244 teachers answered the survey, and a total of 215 valid responses were finally selected

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of the narrative review article's analysis will be synthesized through two guiding research questions that are the challenges of integrating gamification in each type of assessment and the strategies to solve the challenges. The review revealed that most selected studies used gamification to enrich assessment experiences rather than as complete game-based instruction. Studies such as Philpott and Son (2022) and Foroutan Far and Taghizadeh (2024) illustrated that gamified assessments embed elements like leaderboards, points, and digital badges to monitor learner progress without transforming the entire curriculum into a game. This differs from game-based learning, where games themselves constitute the primary mode of instruction (Nousiainen et al., 2018). The reviewed articles consistently emphasized that gamification modifies the process of assessment to make it interactive and engaging while preserving academic content and assessment goals. Thus, gamification functions as a pedagogical enhancement within assessment rather than as a full instructional medium.

This distinction matters because conflating instruction and assessment risks diluting the validity and purpose of assessment tasks. When gamification is misapplied as pure entertainment, learners may focus on winning or collecting points instead of demonstrating language competence (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020). Consequently, a clear conceptual separation ensures that game elements support rather than overshadow assessment purposes. As Schellekens et al. (2021) note, valid assessment requires alignment between task design and intended learning outcomes. Therefore, successful gamified assessment depends on educators' ability to preserve the integrity of assessment criteria while exploiting gamification's motivational benefits.

The Challenges of Integrating Gamification in Each Type of Assessment

Integrating gamification through the learning process offers several benefits, such as fostering engagement and increasing the motivation of the students (Li et al., 2023). It becomes an aspect that is often used by educators. The appearance of it makes the learning

process engaging and interactive, especially in designing or using it for several types of assessment for students to enhance their knowledge. However, in the process of applying it, challenges are some aspects that cannot be avoided and usually appear. Although gamification promotes positive engagement, it can be difficult to match it with the learning objective (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020). This study, which used narrative review, found several challenges in applying several types of assessment using elements of gamification.

Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Across the reviewed literature, the challenges that often appear are related to the students that often focus more on the elements of gamification itself rather than the real meaning of assessment for learning. A study by Huang and Zhang (2024) found that several students tend to feel the continuous enjoyment of the assessment process and reduce their focus in the learning process. Another research study also reported the same finding that the game elements increase the gaming time while decreasing the learning responsibility (Vnucko et al., 2024). This aligns with the finding by Nousiainen et al. (2018) that stated the enjoyment of gamification can hinder students' ability. The interactive game elements make the students act that way. In addition, the implementation of gamification elements, which is a leaderboard in the assessment, can decrease their motivation to be involved in the ongoing study. In addition, the reward system also causes a problem in that it makes students not want to be involved in the learning activity once there is no reward given (Philpott & Son, 2022). Moreover, Waluyo and Balazon (2024) reported that the game element's implication can still raise anxiety in doing the assessment as a result of the competitive atmosphere that appears. Those challenges that appear in the learning process can reduce the essence of providing ongoing process assessment. Overall, studies in AfL contexts highlight that maintaining alignment between engagement and assessment validity is the most persistent challenge.

Assessment of Learning (AoL)

Several challenges also appear in incorporating gamification elements for assessment of learning, especially to measure the learning outcomes. According to the findings in Foroutan Far and Taghizadeh (2024), using elements of gamification for assessing their knowledge in the final test changes their motivation in doing it. They become focused on the gamified elements that are provided, not because they would like to pass the examination. Other challenges that are related to the elements in the assessment also appear in giving scores using gamification. Several students reported that the traditional assessment is better than using the elements of gamification because the scoring system is not always right (Aldemir et al., 2018). Furthermore, Nousiainen et al. (2018) argued that adjusting the basic proficiency and the content itself while using gamification also became a struggle that the educators particularly faced. This aligns with findings from other studies, which have noted that one of the key challenges in integrating gamification into the learning process is the readiness and suitability of the instructional materials (Carvalho et al., 2024). Even though several studies said that applying gamification can boost the engagement of the student, the challenges still appeared. In summary, AoL studies underscore that scoring transparency and content adaptability remain key for reliable gamified summative assessment.

Assessment as Learning (AaL)

The challenges were also found when conducting the assessment as learning using gamification elements. A study by Aldemir et al. (2018) found that in spite of already providing the gamification elements, several students said that the level that asked them to write reflections is not engaging at all because it too often appears and causes boredom for the students to fill it. Other points, such as the related gamification mechanics

application in assessment for several students, do not seem interesting, which makes them not like being involved in the reflection part Sadeghi et al. (2022). Applying the reflective assessment in the learning process still seems to be the difficult part to employ despite providing engaging game elements. Additionally, technological limitations and unequal access to digital tools complicated consistent gamified assessment practices (Hong et al., 2025). Across AaL studies, sustaining reflective engagement remains difficult, despite the use of motivational game features. Having identified these challenges, the reviewed studies also proposed several strategies for integrating gamification more effectively across the three assessment types.

Pedagogical Strategies for Addressing Gamification Challenges in Different Types of Assessment

After knowing the challenges that often appear when using the elements of gamification in the several types of assessment, this narrative review also analyzed and found several strategies that can be applied to solve several challenges in integrating the gamification. The reviewed studies proposed several strategies to reconcile gamification with assessment purposes.

Assessment for Learning (AfL)

The important part of this type of assessment is the continuous feedback in the learning process. Therefore, Foroutan Far and Taghizadeh (2024) stated that to make it suitable for implementing gamification elements in this type, it needs to provide the ongoing response that is also immediately showing their progress. Furthermore, educators can also adjust to make the gamified elements more suitable for the learning process, such as rather than making the leaderboard become the aspect to give motivation for students, it will be better to use it for a quick performance boost Philpott and Son (2022). In addition, Waluyo and Balazon (2024) reported that combining positive reinforcement with learning activities that use an element of gamification is recommended not only to help reduce the anxiety students experience but also to enhance their language skills. Those several suggestions can be used and adjusted depending on the real situation.

Assessment of Learning (AoL)

A research study by Aldemir et al. (2018) suggested that educators need to provide the explanation of each gamification aspect that is used to assess the students' knowledge in order to make the grading point clear. Additionally, various types of gamified elements also need to be considered in designing the assessment so that the students can choose their own preferences and make it less boring. Moreover, being well-prepared on making systematic designs when integrating the content of the assessment with gamification can support the learners' work on the assessment Sadeghi et al. (2022). The educators can also combine the traditional form with assessment using gamification to make it balanced (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). Even though several challenges appear in the assessment of learning, applying those recommendations should be considered for the educators.

Assessment as Learning (AaL)

Reflection might be considered a non-interesting activity in spite of already providing it with engaging gamification elements for several students. However, there are several implications that are still integrated with gamification that can be used, such as providing the self-assessment activities using badges that have motivational sentences, which not only helped the students assess themselves but also can be positive reinforcement (Aldemir et al., 2018). Moreover, Nousiainen et al. (2018) suggested that the teacher's role can be integrated into the reflection phase, even when it is embedded within a gamified learning environment. In spite of several problems that appear in integrating gamification with reflection activities, there are still several tips that can be used to solve those kinds of situations.

These strategies confirm that gamified assessment success depends on alignment and moderation. As Schellekens et al. (2021) and Yang and Xin (2022) underline, the effectiveness of AfL, AoL, and AaL depends on purposeful design, continuous feedback, and learner motivation. Hence, integrating gamification into these paradigms must be guided by a pedagogical framework to ensure that game elements enhance learning evidence, not distract from it. By scaffolding gamified activities with clear rubrics and reflection prompts, teachers can maintain assessment credibility while sustaining motivation.

Discussion

Gamification has become an established pedagogical innovation in education, particularly within language learning and assessment contexts. Our review reveals that gamification can positively impact EFL assessment, particularly formative assessment. By making tests more interesting through competition and rewards (Tsai, 2024; Zhang & Crawford, 2024). The findings of this research offer new perspectives and extend the results of earlier studies about gamification in language assessment that focused on the challenges and suggestions for each type of assessment (Tsai, 2024). However, despite these contributions, there are still several differences between the findings of these studies and those of other research focusing on gamified assessment, highlighting the need for further investigation.

There are several challenges mentioned in the assessment for learning that can hinder when we apply gamification assessment. One of the studies stated that the elements of gamification that offer pleasure are able to interfere with the capability of students (Nousiainen et al., 2018). In contrast, the gamification elements can actually provide positive effects to the students' engagement, especially on vocabulary skills (Zhang et al., 2023). Furthermore, research by Waluyo and Balazon (2024) found that the feeling of anxiety can still appear when we use gamified assessment. In contrast, gamification can reduce language anxiety in students, leading to higher motivation and a more positive attitude toward the language learning process (Shynbekova et al., 2023). These contrasting findings highlight that while gamification in assessment for learning holds the potential to enhance engagement and reduce anxiety, its effectiveness largely depends on how its elements are implemented and aligned with learners' needs and contexts.

In the assessment of learning, the primary challenges are largely associated with how gamification elements are implemented within the assessment process. According to a study conducted by Aldemir et al. (2018), it was reported that problems in scoring the assessment can appear when we apply gamification elements; because of that, several students prefer more traditional assessment. However, another issue that arises when implementing gamification on assessment is that several teachers reported it is difficult to accommodate the content with the gamified elements (Nousiainen et al., 2018). On the contrary, EFL teachers perceive a positive effect of gamification and are satisfied with the applicability of gamification elements (Helvich et al., 2023). The various results suggest that while gamification in assessment of learning can enhance teacher and student engagement, its effectiveness largely links to suited design, alignment with learning objectives, and the ability to balance innovation with practical assessment demands.

Several obstacles are also found when we conduct assessments as learning using gamification in the classroom. Sadeghi et al. (2022) argued that the problem is mainly related to the students' engagement on the application of gamification and also on its mechanics when having to do reflection about the materials. On the contrary, certain gamification features can positively influence students' engagement and level of interest in the learning process (Rahayu et al., 2022). These contrasting insights indicate that while gamification in assessment as learning has the potential to foster greater interest and

participation, its success depends on how well the gamified elements support meaningful reflection and sustained student engagement.

Based on the findings of this study, activities incorporating gamification elements need to be suitable and align with the objectives of each type of assessment (assessment for learning, assessment of learning, and assessment as learning) to maximize their effectiveness. The limitations from the findings are drawn from recent, mostly small-scale studies, many of which focus on younger learners or on single institutions. Empirical evidence on AfL, AoL, and AaL contexts is particularly scarce, limiting conclusions about those areas. Additionally, as a narrative review, we did not perform a meta-analysis, and some relevant articles may have been missed if not indexed in our search scope. Future research should expand into empirical studies on summative gamified assessments, which would clarify whether positive effects translate to high-level testing that is necessary to explore the long-term effects of gamified language assessments across diverse EFL settings. Longitudinal investigations are needed to see if motivation gains persist over time. Research on AaL approaches such as gamified portfolios or self-check platforms could illustrate gamification's role in promoting learner reflection. Finally, comparative studies examining different EFL settings (age groups or cultural contexts) would help identify which strategies work best for which learners.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that gamification has significant potential to enhance student engagement and motivation when appropriately applied to language assessment. The findings demonstrate that integrating game elements into AfL, AoL, and AaL can increase learner participation and create more interactive assessment experiences. However, the success of gamified assessment depends on aligning its design with the intended assessment purpose. When applied without pedagogical coherence, gamification risks distracting learners from assessment goals and reducing validity. This study highlights that teachers' language assessment literacy and reflective design skills are central to the successful implementation of gamified assessment. By aligning game mechanics such as badges, leaderboards, or feedback systems with assessment criteria, educators can maintain reliability while promoting motivation and self-regulation. The findings contribute to both theoretical and practical understanding of how gamification can serve as a meaningful extension of assessment practices in EFL contexts.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings obtained through the narrative review, it is recommended that educators carefully adapt gamification strategies to the distinct objectives of AfL, AoL, and AaL. Professional development programs should emphasize strengthening teachers' understanding of assessment principles before integrating the gamification elements. In addition to pedagogical implications, this review was limited to ten empirical studies between 2014 and 2024, which may not fully represent the diverse contexts of EFL assessment practices. Future research should expand the scope to include a wider range of educational settings, longitudinal studies, and mixed-method approaches to investigate the long-term effects of gamified assessment on learner outcomes. In addition, future studies could examine how gamification interacts with emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to create adaptive and personalized assessment systems.

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