

Gamified Flipped Classroom for Teaching EFL Productive Skills: Exploring Teachers' Practices and Challenges in an Islamic University

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of a gamified flipped classroom model by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at an Islamic university to teach productive skills, specifically speaking and writing. The research aimed to explore the practical application of this model as well as the challenges and opportunities encountered by teachers and students. A qualitative case study design was employed, focusing on a university language enrichment program. Data collection involved preliminary and semi-structured interviews with two EFL teachers and four undergraduate students, in addition to non-participant classroom observations. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, was used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that teachers utilized familiar digital platforms, such as WhatsApp and a Learning Management System (LMS), to deliver pre-class flipped content,

allowing classroom time to be dedicated to collaborative, gamified activities. This approach fostered student engagement, motivation, and confidence, particularly in group tasks. Despite the presence of challenges such as technological limitations and varied learner readiness, the model effectively transformed teachers into facilitators and created a student-centered environment that supports productive language development. The study concludes that the success of a gamified flipped classroom is dependent on thoughtful planning, accessibility to digital resources, and differentiated instruction. Furthermore, it contributes to the understanding of blended pedagogical models in higher education EFL settings.

Keywords: Gamified Flipped Classroom, Productive Skills, EFL Instruction, Teacher Practices, Islamic University

INTRODUCTION

Productive language skills, speaking and writing, are central to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as they facilitate learners to communicate meaning, express ideas, and engage effectively in academic and professional settings (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014; Shuhratovna, 2024). However, in many EFL classrooms, these skills are often underdeveloped, as the instructional focus often prioritizes receptive skills, such as reading and listening (Richards, 2015). While learners may possess foundational knowledge, they frequently lack opportunities to practice language production in meaningful ways, resulting in low confidence, anxiety, and poor communicative competence (Ampa & Akib, 2018; Aisyah et al., 2024).

The challenge of fostering effective communication skills is particularly significant in higher education, where students are expected to demonstrate advanced communicative competence but often lack the confidence, fluency, or sustained practice necessary for proficient spoken and written English production. This issue is compounded by traditional teacher-centered approaches, limited classroom time, and insufficient resources for communicative activities. Graham and Perin (2018) argue that when productive skills are taught in isolation and disconnected from real-world

applications, learners struggle to transfer their knowledge into meaningful communication. In many cases, factors such as low motivation, passive learning habits, and a lack of interactive materials further hinder students' ability to develop productive language skills (Aisyah et al., 2024). These conditions highlight the urgent need for innovative pedagogical strategies that promote active engagement and provide authentic, skill-integrated learning environments.

One notable innovation in educational practice is the gamified flipped classroom, an instructional model that integrates two pedagogical trends: the flipped classroom and gamification. This model combines pre-class content engagement with in-class, game-based activities to enhance motivation, participation, and skill development. Research shows that this integrated model has the potential to improve learner motivation, increase class participation, and enhance outcomes in speaking and writing tasks (Motallebzadeh et al., 2018; Afrilyansanti et al., 2017). Gamified flipped classrooms support not only the acquisition of linguistic skills but also the development of 21st-century competencies such as collaboration, critical thinking, and learner autonomy (Gündüz & Akkoyunlu, 2020). Nevertheless, empirical studies exploring the practical implementation of this model particularly in higher education EFL contexts remain limited (Chen et al., 2020; Zainuddin et al., 2019). Most existing research tends to treat flipped learning and gamification as separate interventions or focuses primarily on learners' outcomes without examining instructional practices or pedagogical challenges.

Addressing this gap, the present study offers its novelty by exploring how EFL teachers at an Islamic university implement gamified flipped classrooms to teach English productive skills—speaking and writing. It explored not only how the model is applied in practice, but also the challenges and opportunities that emerge during its implementation, along with how students engage with and respond to this approach. Conducted in the context of an Islamic university language enrichment program designed to enhance students' English proficiency, the study provides contextually

grounded insights into how gamified flipped classrooms can be tailored to local instructional realities while simultaneously responding broader demands for student-centered and communicative EFL instruction.

By exploring how gamified flipped classrooms are implemented in an Islamic university EFL setting, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on blended learning and gamification in language education. Rather than aiming to improve instruction directly, it seeks to explore how EFL teachers use this integrated model to teach productive skills namely speaking and writing as well as how students respond to such practices. Thus, this research aims to answer: first, how do EFL teachers implement gamified flipped classroom to teach productive skills? Second, what are the challenges and opportunities encountered by both teachers and students in the implementation of this model? The findings offer practical insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to understand innovative, student-centered approaches to language teaching, particularly in higher education contexts shaped by the demands of 21st-century competencies.

Gamified Flipped Classroom: Concept, Implementation, and Theoretical Foundations

The gamified flipped classroom is an instructional model that combines two pedagogical innovations, flipped classroom and gamification, to promote active learning, motivation, and deeper engagement. In flipped classrooms, instructional content is typically delivered outside of class through videos or digital readings while classroom time is used for interactive, application-based tasks (Lo & Hew, 2017). Gamification, on the other hand, refers to the integration of game-like elements such as points, badges, levels, and competition into non-game contexts to enhance motivation and participation (Deterding et al., 2015; Hamari et al., 2016; Kholis et al., 2022).

When integrated, these approaches create a learner-centered environment that encourages autonomy, collaboration, and meaningful practice, especially in language learning (Zainuddin &

Halili, 2016; Hwang et al., 2020). Implementation typically involves pre-class video lectures or online materials followed by gamified tasks during class, such as quizzes, role-plays, team competitions, or point-based speaking challenges (Chen et al., 2020; Gündüz & Akkoyunlu, 2020). Research suggests that this model increases student engagement, reduces passive learning, and helps learners persist in complex tasks (Motallebzadeh et al., 2018; Gündüz & Akkoyunlu, 2020).

However, implementing a gamified flipped classroom involves several pedagogical and practical challenges. The flipped model demands well-structured instructional design, reliable technology access, and learner discipline in engaging with pre-class materials (Zainuddin et al., 2019). Additionally, teachers must also ensure that in-class activities effectively build upon the input provided, promoting interaction and skill application rather than repetition. In the gamification aspect, integrating points, badges, or competitions must be done with care to avoid shifting focus away from learning objectives (Toda et al., 2019). Overuse of rewards can lead to superficial engagement, while insufficient scaffolding may leave students confused or disengaged (Kholis et al., 2022). Furthermore, student responses to gamification can vary widely, influenced by personality, motivation, and prior experience (Rahmawati et al., 2021). These factors highlight the need for thoughtful planning, technological readiness, and teacher adaptability to ensure the model supports meaningful, skill-oriented learning.

The gamified flipped classroom is supported by three main learning theories: constructivism, sociocultural theory, and behaviorism. Constructivism emphasizes active knowledge construction through learner engagement and meaningful tasks (Aljohani, 2017). The flipped model aligns with this principle by moving content delivery outside the classroom and using in-class time for interactive activities like speaking and writing. Gamification further enhances it with challenge-based tasks that foster reflection and experimentation (Gündüz & Akkoyunlu, 2020). Sociocultural theory, grounded in Vygotsky's concept of the

Zone of Proximal Development, highlights the role of interaction, scaffolding, and mediation in language development (Aimin, 2013). The model supports this theory through peer collaboration, teacher guidance, and contextualized tasks (Zainuddin & Halili, 2016). Meanwhile, behaviorism underpins the motivational aspects of gamification, where rewards such as points and badges reinforce participation and build consistent learning habits (Hamari et al., 2014; Estremera, 2023). Although behaviorist methods focus on extrinsic motivation, they can effectively complement cognitive and social learning by encouraging repeated practice and reducing learner anxiety. Collectively, these theories explain how the gamified flipped classroom facilitates the development of productive skills in EFL instruction.

Teaching English Productive Skills in EFL Contexts

Productive skills, which include speaking and writing abilities, are essential for learners to effectively communicate ideas, engage in discussions, and function appropriately in academic, professional, and social contexts (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014; Richards, 2015). Unlike receptive skills such as listening and reading, which focus on understanding language input, productive skills require learners to generate meaningful output by drawing upon both cognitive and linguistic resources (Nunan, 2003). In EFL settings, where authentic exposure to English is often limited, these skills are particularly important for building communicative competence, confidence, and learner autonomy.

Speaking requires real-time processing, fluency, grammatical accuracy, appropriate vocabulary use, and pragmatic competence for effective interaction (Nation & Newton, 2009; Aisyah et al., 2024). It enables learners to participate in academic discussions, presentations, and peer collaboration, skills that are vital for Islamic university performance and professional interactions. Writing, in contrast, is a more reflective process that entails the coherent organization of ideas, the maintenance of grammatical and lexical accuracy, and the tailored tone and style for specific audiences and purposes (Hyland, 2016). It also plays a crucial social role by enabling individuals to build shared meaning, document ideas, and

influence others (Bazerman, 2015, cited in Aisyah et al., 2024). Speaking and writing are central to functional language use, fostering both academic success and intercultural communication (Oflaz, 2019).

In Islamic university contexts, the expectation for students to demonstrate advanced communicative competence often contrasts sharply with the limited classroom interaction and practice time allocated. Productive skills are occasionally taught in isolation from authentic contexts, leading to difficulties in fluency, coherence, and confidence (Graham & Perin, 2018). Speaking development is further hindered by anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low self-efficacy, and insufficient vocabulary or pronunciation skills (Horwitz et al., 1986; Malik et al., 2021). Writing instruction can be equally challenging due to students' struggles with text organization, adherence to academic conventions, and adaptation to English rhetorical norms (Graham & Perin, 2018). These difficulties are compounded by a lack of targeted feedback, overcrowded classrooms that restrict opportunities for individual practice, and rigid curricula that tend to prioritize grammar and reading over communicative language usage (Hyland, 2016; Graham & Perin, 2018; Sharma, 2015; Tovar Viera et al., 2024; Richards, 2015; Ampa & Akib, 2018).

Recent studies suggest that gamified flipped classrooms can address many of these challenges by providing structured pre-class preparation and dedicating in-class time to interactive, student-centered practice (Hwang et al., 2020; Afrilyansanti et al., 2017). The flipped approach allows students to familiarize themselves with content such as vocabulary, grammar, or discourse structures at their own pace, before applying it in speaking or writing tasks, thereby reducing anxiety, and improving confidence (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Lo & Hew, 2017; Zainuddin & Halili, 2016; Hung, 2015). Gamification adds motivational elements such as points, levels, storytelling quests, or timed challenges, thereby encouraging active participation and simulating real-world communicative demands (Deterding et al., 2011; Hamari et al., 2014; Toda et al., 2019). When implemented thoughtfully, this integrated model can establish a

supportive environment that fosters fluency, accuracy, and sustained engagement in both speaking and writing.

Technology Roles in Supporting Gamified Flipped Classrooms

Technology plays a central role in facilitating both flipped classroom and gamification, serving as the platform for content delivery, interaction, assessment, and engagement (Lo & Hew, 2017). In flipped classrooms, digital tools such as video platforms, learning management systems (LMS), and discussion forums allow teachers to deliver materials asynchronously, giving learners the flexibility to review content at their own pace (Zainuddin & Halili, 2016). Tools like Google Classroom, LMS and YouTube are commonly used to present flipped input in EFL contexts (Hwang et al., 2020).

Gamified elements are also heavily reliant on digital tools that can automate point tracking, leaderboards, and badges, creating a structured reward system that reinforces participation (Deterding et al., 2015; Toda et al., 2019). Platforms such as Classcraft, Kahoot, Quizizz, and Wordwall have gained increasing popularity in EFL settings for their ability to combine language tasks with interactive, game-like features (Chen et al., 2020). Additionally, the use of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has been shown to enhance the accessibility and continuity of gamified flipped instruction, particularly outside the classroom (Hwang et al., 2020).

Technological integration also facilitates the collection of learning analytics, enabling teachers to monitor students' progress, adapt materials, and personalize feedback (Hamari et al., 2016). However, successful implementation depends on infrastructure, digital literacy, and institutional support, which remain significant barriers in many developing country contexts (Zainuddin et al., 2019). Therefore, the effective utilization of technology in gamified flipped classrooms requires not only pedagogical knowledge but also technical readiness and contextual awareness (Hwang et al., 2020).

The Importance of Contextual Adaptation in EFL Instruction

The effectiveness of pedagogical models such as the gamified flipped classroom is highly influenced by local educational, cultural,

and institutional contexts (Lo & Hew, 2017). While global studies often highlight the general benefits of gamification and flipped classroom, their implementation necessitates adaptation to learners' needs, proficiency levels, and classroom realities (Zainuddin & Attaran, 2016). For instance, in Indonesian higher education, limited class hours, diverse student backgrounds, and uneven access to technology pose unique challenges to adopting such innovations (Aisyah et al., 2024).

Teachers must also navigate curriculum constraints, assessment demands, and students' prior learning habits when introducing new instructional models (Graham & Perin, 2018). Moreover, learners' cultural perceptions of teacher authority and classroom participation may affect their willingness to engage with game-based or student-led activities (Zainuddin & Attaran, 2016). This underscores the need for contextual adaptation, in which pedagogical strategies are not merely adopted but are meaningfully reshaped to align with the learning environment (Motallebzadeh et al., 2018).

Research further emphasizes the pivotal role of teacher agency in mediating between pedagogical innovation and classroom practice (Chen et al., 2020). Teachers who demonstrate the ability to creatively modify gamified flipped strategies while maintaining focus on language learning objectives tend to report higher engagement and instructional effectiveness (Zainuddin et al., 2019). As such, understanding how teachers apply this model in context-specific ways is crucial for informing scalable and sustainable EFL pedagogy.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This qualitative case study explored how EFL teachers implement gamified flipped classroom strategies to teach productive language skills. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows for a rich, contextualized understanding of human experiences, actions, and meanings (Creswell, 2013). The case study method, as proposed by Yin (2014), is well-suited for in-depth

investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life setting, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. This design enabled the researcher to closely examine instructional practices, classroom dynamics, and participant perspectives related to the integration of flipped learning and gamification.

Research Site and Participation

The study was conducted in the Program Pengayaan Bahasa Inggris (PPBI) at the Language Development Center (LDC) of Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto. The program is structured based on the Common European Framework of Reference for language (CEFR) levelling and provides supplementary instruction to assist undergraduate students in improving their English proficiency, with a particular emphasis on productive skills such as speaking and writing. The selection of the setting was driven by its adoption of technology-based instructional approaches, including both flipped classroom and gamification, which aligns with the research focus.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they possessed direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. The participant pool consisted of two EFL teachers who had previously integrated gamified flipped strategies into their teaching, and four undergraduate students from the elementary level of the PPBI program. The elementary level was targeted based on literature suggesting that lower-proficiency learners often derive significant motivational and cognitive benefits from highly interactive, gamified learning environments (e.g., Parra-Gonzalez et al., 2021; Kraus, Zhu, & Deng, 2020). Teacher eligibility was confirmed via a preliminary screening interview.

Technique of Data Collection

To triangulate data and build a comprehensive understanding, three primary techniques were employed over a period of one academic module.

The first technique was semi-structured interviews. Individual interviews were conducted with both

teachers and all four students. Teacher interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, while student interviews were 25 to 35 minutes in duration. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview protocol used open-ended questions to explore experiences and perceptions. For instance, questions directed at teachers included:

"Can you walk me through your process of designing a gamified flipped lesson for a speaking class?" and "What challenges, if any, have you faced in implementing this approach, and how have you addressed them?"

For students, questions included:

"How did the pre-class videos and the in-class games work together for you?" and "Can you describe a time when the game-like elements in class motivated you to participate?"

Another technique employed for data collection was non-participant observation. Four consecutive class sessions, each lasting 90 minutes and focusing on speaking or writing skills, were observed. The researcher adopted a non-participant role, using a structured observation checklist and taking detailed field notes. The checklist encompassed the following aspects:

- Flipped Classroom Implementation: How students referred to or used pre-class materials in their tasks.
- Gamification Elements: Presence and use of points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, and narratives.
- Student Engagement: Levels of participation, collaboration, and verbal interaction during gamified activities.
- Instructor's Role: Facilitation strategies and feedback provision.
- Sessions were also video-recorded (with participant consent) to allow for repeated review and to capture nuances in interaction that might be missed in real-time note-taking.

The final technique employed was document analysis. Supporting documents, such as the instructors' lesson

plans and the digital materials distributed to students (e.g., pre-class videos, quiz modules), were collected to provide context and corroborate evidence derived from observations and interviews.

Research Procedure

The research followed a sequential procedure to ensure methodological coherence:

Ethical Clearance and Consent: Prior to commencing data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board. All participants were provided with an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Written informed consent was secured, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality in all reports.

Participant Selection: Eligible teachers were identified and recruited. Subsequently, students from their classes who met the elementary-level criterion were invited to participate.

Classroom Observations: The four targeted classroom sessions were observed, with video and audio recording. The researcher completed the observation checklist and expanded field notes immediately after each session.

Post-Observation Interviews: Following the final observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers and students to gather their reflections on the observed processes and their overall experiences

Data Analysis

The collected data—comprising interview transcripts, field notes, observation checklists, and documents—were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework.

- **Familiarization:** The researcher immersed themselves in the data by reading transcripts and notes multiple times.
- **Generating Initial Codes:** Significant features of the data were systematically coded using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 12). For instance, segments of text

describing "students competing on a leaderboard" were coded as `competition_element`, and comments on "instructor time investment" were coded as `preparation_challenge`.

- **Searching for Themes:** The initial codes were collated and grouped into potential overarching themes (e.g., "Gamification as a Motivational Driver," "Logistical Hurdles of the Flipped Model," and "Enhanced Student Interaction").
- **Reviewing Themes:** Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they formed a coherent pattern and accurately represented the coded data and the entire dataset.
- **Defining and Naming Themes:** The essence of each theme was clearly defined and given a concise, descriptive name.
- **Producing the Report:** The analysis was woven into a narrative, supported by vivid data extracts.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, several validation strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by sharing a summary of the findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. Peer debriefing was undertaken, where the researcher discussed the coding scheme and emerging themes with a colleague experienced in qualitative methods to challenge assumptions and reduce bias. Furthermore, code-recode reliability was established by recoding a portion of the data after a two-week interval, which resulted in consistent code application. Finally, the triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and documents facilitated cross-verification of the emerging themes and build a credible account.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Both teachers began the instructional cycle with flipped input materials, primarily in the form of videos, forum discussions, PowerPoint slides, and digital worksheets. These materials were shared prior to classroom meetings through WhatsApp and LMS

platforms. The purpose of the pre-class content was to introduce vocabulary, grammar structures, or models for speaking and writing, enabling students to gain basic understanding before participating in communicative tasks.

Students generally felt more confident and better prepared for in-class activities after reviewing the materials. They also appreciated being able to study at their own pace. However, some faced obstacles such as limited device availability and unstable internet connections, which occasionally disrupted their access to the materials.

Table 1. Summary of Flipped Input Practices by Teacher A and B

Activity Type	Teacher A	Teacher B
Pre-class Materials	Forum discussion, grammar, vocabulary building	PowerPoint slides, instructional videos, worksheets/quizzes
Delivery Platform	WhatsApp group	LMS
Learning Focus	Vocabulary building and grammar structures	Speaking and writing models, expressions and vocabulary building
Student Preparation	Forum discussion, tasks with guiding questions	Worksheets and short quizzes

Gamification was strategically embedded into different phases of instruction by both teachers, although the extent and timing varied. Teacher A incorporated gamified elements throughout the entire learning cycle from the pre-class phase to the post-activity stage, with the intention of maintaining motivation and engagement. In contrast, Teacher B integrated gamification primarily during face-to-face sessions, with occasional application in post-class activities.

In terms of game types, both teachers used a combination of digital and non-digital games tailored to support speaking and writing tasks. For speaking, activities included team-based quizzes, role-playing with point-based rewards, and timed speaking challenges, often conducted in pairs or small groups.

These tasks encouraged spontaneous language use, peer correction, and collaborative meaning-making. For writing tasks, teachers used mission-style prompts, writing relays, and scaffolded tasks with leaderboard scoring, designed to promote structure, creativity, and accountability.

Most gamified tasks were group-based, designed to foster cooperation and healthy competition among students. Students reported that working in teams helped reduce anxiety and encouraged more active participation, especially in speaking-related tasks.

The following table presents a comparative overview of the practical implementation of gamification as executed by two educators, Teacher A and Teacher B. It details the structural, methodological, and logistical aspects of their gamified classrooms, offering a concrete basis for analyzing their pedagogical approaches. This comparison focuses on how gamification is integrated into the learning process across different language skills and classroom phases.

Table 2. Summary of Gamified Activities by Teacher A and Teacher B

Aspect	Teacher A	Teacher B
Phase of Gamification	Pre-class, main activity, and post-activity occasionally	Main activity (face-to-face); post-activity occasionally
Types of Games for Speaking	Role-plays, team quizzes, timed speaking games	Group discussions with point rewards, speaking contests
Types of Games for Writing	Mission-based writing, writing relays with points	Scaffolded writing with leaderboard, paragraph building games
Interaction Format	Group and peer-based tasks	Group-based tasks
Tools Used	Whiteboard, flashcards, Blooket, printed cards	LearningApp, scoreboards, printed prompts

Table 2 reveals the distinct strategic emphases in the application of gamification. Teacher A employs a more pervasive and integrated approach, utilizing gamification across multiple phases of instruction (pre-class, main, and post-activity). This design implies that game-like elements are woven into the fabric of the learning journey. The use of role-plays and timed games for speaking, alongside mission-based writing, indicates a preference for dynamic and immersive activities.

In contrast, Teacher B's strategy appears more focused and activity-centric, primarily leveraging gamification during the main face-to-face instructional block. The emphasis on points and rewards for group discussions, along with scaffolded writing organized through a leaderboard, indicates a methodology that uses game elements to structure and motivate specific, discrete tasks. While both teachers heavily favor group-based interaction, Teacher A shows a slight variation by incorporating peer-based tasks, potentially encouraging more individualized accountability within the collaborative framework. Their tool selection further reflects their styles: Teacher A uses a mix of physical tools (such as flashcards, cards) and digital tools (Blooket), while Teacher B leans towards organizational tools (scoreboards, prompts) and a specific application (LearningApp).

To delve deeper into the pedagogical design, Table 3 analyzes the specific game elements employed by each teacher through the lens of Toda et al.'s (2019) taxonomy of gamification dimensions. This framework moves beyond the surface-level activities to examine the underlying psychological and motivational components. The taxonomy categorizes elements into five key dimensions: Performance, Ecological, Personal, Social, and Fictional, allowing for a structured comparison of how each teacher leverages game dynamics to engage their students.

Table 3 provides insight into the distinct engagement strategies employed by Teachers A and B. Both teachers effectively employ Performance and Social elements, using points, collaboration, and competition as foundational motivators. This

underscores their shared understanding of these elements' effectiveness in the classroom setting.

Table 3. Game Elements Used by Teacher A and Teacher B Based on Toda et al.'s (2019) Taxonomy

Engagement Dimension	Game Elements Used by Teacher A	Game Elements Used by Teacher B
Performance	Points, levels, progress bars, rewards	Points, scores, time-limited challenges
Ecological	Game-like rules, quests, feedback loops	Tasks with game mechanics, challenge sequencing
Personal	Self-paced missions, role flexibility	Student-chosen topics, adaptive writing prompts
Social	Group competition, team collaboration, peer voting	Group work, team-based quizzes, collaborative games
Fictional	Fantasy themes in writing tasks, narrative context	Scenario-based writing, storytelling prompts

The notable differences between the two teachers emerge within the Personal and Fictional dimensions. Teacher A demonstrates a stronger emphasis on personal agency and immersion. Elements like "self-paced missions," "role flexibility," and "fantasy themes" suggest a learning environment designed to foster autonomy and narrative engagement, potentially increasing intrinsic motivation.

Teacher B, employs personalization through ("student-chosen topics") and integrates fiction via ("scenario-based writing"), framing these elements within a more structured and sequential framework, as indicated by "challenge sequencing" and "adaptive writing prompts." This points to a design that carefully controls the learning pathway while still offering opportunities for choice and contextual application. In essence, Teacher A's approach leans

towards creating an open-ended "game world" for learning, whereas Teacher B's approach focuses on applying a consistent "game layer" to structured curricular tasks.

The implementation of gamified flipped classrooms has revealed dynamic and evolving roles for teachers, along with increased student engagement. Both teachers acted as facilitators, guiding students through pre-class preparation, interactive in-class tasks, and reflective post-activities. Teacher A maintained a more continuous role across all phases preparing gamified materials, monitoring pre-class completion, leading in-class games, and assigning reflective follow-up activities. Teacher B, meanwhile, focused on teacher intervention during face-to-face sessions, using gamified tasks as reinforcement and providing post-task feedback, especially in speaking activities.

From the students' perspective, the gamified flipped model fostered higher levels of engagement, particularly in group tasks. Learners reported feeling more motivated and less anxious during speaking activities, especially when supported by game mechanics such as points, time limits, or competition. Writing tasks also became more dynamic as students engaged in missions or collaborative drafting. However, challenges remained, including varying levels of participation, occasional confusion regarding game instructions, and reliance on internet access for flipped materials.

Despite these issues, students demonstrated increased risk-taking, participation, and task completion, indicating the model's potential to support productive language use. Both teachers acknowledged that maintaining this engagement required careful planning, ongoing feedback, and flexibility to adjust tasks based on learners' responses. These findings highlight the dual importance of teacher adaptability and learner-centered design in sustaining meaningful engagement within gamified flipped classrooms.

Discussion

The findings illuminate how the integration of flipped input delivery and gamified activities collaboratively scaffolded the development of speaking and writing skills while simultaneously transforming teachers' role and enhancing learners' engagement.

This discussion connects these findings to existing theories and literature, offering new insights into blended pedagogy in higher education EFL contexts.

Flipped Classroom Builds Autonomy and Prior Knowledge

The findings indicated that both teachers adopted a flipped classroom approach to provide learning input before face-to-face sessions, enabling students to build prior knowledge and develop greater autonomy. By accessing materials before class, learners could take control over the pace and timing of their studies, a process that fosters self-directed learning habits (Zainuddin & Halili, 2016; Abdullah et al., 2019). At the same time, engaging with key vocabulary, grammatical structures, and functional expressions beforehand provided students with a foundation of background knowledge to draw on, thereby reducing cognitive load during class activities and enabling more confident participation (Sweller et al., 2019; Afrilyasanti et al., 2017).

The use of familiar platforms, such as WhatsApp Groups (WAG) and the Islamic university's LMS aligned with students' digital habits. This integration improved accessibility, sustained engagement, and supported pre-class preparation. This aligns with the assertion that incorporating technology familiar to students enhances accessibility, reduces barriers to participation, and promotes motivation in flipped instruction (Lo & Hew, 2017; Zainuddin et al., 2019). By delivering structured input through these platforms, learners could engage with materials at their own pace, arrive in class with a more robust prior knowledge, and participate more actively in communicative tasks.

The structured delivery of input outside of the classroom also supports constructivist learning principles, enabling students to connect new material to their existing knowledge, forming cognitive frameworks that facilitate deeper learning (Aljohani, 2017). From a sociocultural perspective, this shared pre-class knowledge base created conditions for mediated learning within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, allowing collaborative dialogue, peer scaffolding, and communicative tasks to be more productive (Aimin, 2013; Zainuddin, 2017).

Pedagogical Gamification for Active Engagement and Language Use

Gamification was deliberately integrated in both classrooms to reinforce flipped content and promote active language usage. It transformed passive tasks into interactive, motivational experiences through points, progression, narrative, and immediate feedback (Toda et al., 2019; Deterding et al., 2015). This aligns with Hamari et al. (2014), who found that gamification boosts engagement and persistence, particularly in collaborative and communicative language tasks.

Teacher A blended digital tools such as Blooket with offline activities including fantasy-themed writing games and conversational role-plays, embedding gamification in both pre-class and in-class stages. This reflects Bicen and Kocakoyun's (2018) emphasis on combining online and offline strategies to foster student motivation. In contrast, Teacher B primarily applied gamification during face-to-face sessions, using vocabulary races and cooperative challenges. This strategy is consistent with Kaur and Aziz's (2020) findings, which demonstrate that physical interaction enhances fluency and reduces speaking anxiety. Both teachers employed engagement dimensions such as performance, social, ecological, personal, and fictional aspects, thereby ensuring cognitive, emotional, and social investment (Toda et al., 2019).

Both speaking and writing activities have benefited from gamification's integration of competition, collaboration, and feedback mechanisms. Vocabulary challenges, point-based guessing games, narrative-driven writing tasks, and relay-based text production have encouraged creativity, repetition, and risk-taking in communication. Such designs reflect Graham and Perin's (2018) and Nation and Newton's (2009) view which highlight the significance of repeated, low-pressure practice with clear goals and feedback for the optimal development of productive skills, while also fostering engagement and sustained participation (Gürbüz & Cabaroğlu, 2021).

Gamified Flipped Classroom in Scaffolding Productive Skills

While the gamified flipped classroom demonstrably boosts motivation and participation, its true value in enhancing productive skills lies in its capacity to scaffold the transition from receptive knowledge to authentic, independent language production. The model moves beyond merely increasing short-term engagement by systematically building competence through structured, low-stakes practice.

The flipped component provides the essential cognitive foundation. By engaging with input via an LMS or WAG beforehand, students autonomously construct a knowledge base of vocabulary and structures, reducing the cognitive load and anxiety associated with real-time production (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Afrilyasanti et al., 2017). This pre-class scaffolding ensures that in-class time is not spent on passive reception but is dedicated to active language use.

In-class gamified activities offer a genuine skill development opportunity. Games like "Knight and Dragon" for writing or guessing games, and relay races for speaking function as more than just motivational tools; they are purposeful practice engines. By creating a "safe failure space" (Lee & Hammer, 2011), these games encourage repeated experimentation with the pre-taught language, crucial for proceduralization—the process of converting declarative knowledge (knowing the rule) into procedural skill (using it fluently). Furthermore, the collaborative nature of these games fosters peer-assisted learning within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, providing immediate, contextual feedback that refines both accuracy and fluency.

Therefore, the integration of gamification enhances productive skills by designing games as scaffolded, communicative tasks. For instance, in a relay race, the rapid and accurate application of a target grammatical structure is required, while in a writing game, clarity and creativity are incentivized. The gamification directly supports skill acquisition in these scenarios. The resulting increase in motivation and reduction in anxiety (Horwitz, 1986) are not the end goals but serves as enabling

conditions that facilitate deeper cognitive engagement and more frequent, confident practice.

In conclusion, this approach is a sound strategy not because it is entertaining, but because it aligns pedagogical design with the principles of skill acquisition: it provides a structured path from input to supported practice, and ultimately, to autonomous output. The gamification serves as the mechanism that transforms the repetitive practice necessary for mastering speaking and writing not only into an enjoyable experience but also a compelling one.

Redefining Teacher Roles and Increasing Learner Engagement

The implementation of the gamified flipped classroom required teachers to shift from traditional lecturers to more dynamic and multifaceted roles. They became content curators, instructional designers, facilitators, and motivators. Teacher A created materials via WAG and designed sequenced gamified tasks, while Teacher B guided learners through the LMS and transitioned into a learning coach during in-class activities. Their dynamic monitoring and responsive scaffolding reflect Aimin's (2013) notion of responsive scaffolding and McLean's (2012) view of teachers as adaptive guides in student-centered settings.

This pedagogical model also required teachers to use differentiated strategies to cater to diverse proficiency levels, demonstrating that gamification exhibited universal adaptability in accommodating various learning styles and emotional needs. This role adaptation aligns with creating "sandboxes" environments where students can safely experiment under guidance (Afriyasanty et al., 2017). This shift from traditional instruction mandates that teachers be creative, flexible, and technologically proficient, as noted by Zainuddin and Halili (2016).

Challenges and Opportunities in Practice

In gamified flipped environments, teachers navigate their dual roles by acting as dynamic facilitators during class—guiding team quests, providing real-time feedback, and fostering a collaborative spirit—while simultaneously upholding their responsibilities as evaluators, measuring individual mastery and assigning grades. This shift in pedagogy creates a fundamental tension: the

facilitator's identity, which thrives on encouraging risk-taking and rewarding participation within the game, often conflicts with the evaluator's mandate to impartially judge performance and outcomes. A key contradiction emerges when the teacher's agency to motivate through gamified rewards (e.g., points, badges) clashes with the need to objectively assess learning. This may create confusion for students regarding the primary goal, whether engagement or achievement, and challenge the teacher's traditional identity as the sole arbiter of knowledge and success. This challenge aligns with Parra-González et al. (2020), who highlight the increased planning burden in gamified flipped classrooms.

Technological challenges, including unstable internet connections, malfunctioning equipment, and limited institutional support, often disrupted lessons, and hindered smooth delivery, as noted by Aydın (2018) and Lo and Hew (2017). Student readiness was uneven, with some students neglecting pre-class content, which reduced the effectiveness of in-class gamified tasks. This finding aligns with Zainuddin's (2017) emphasis on the importance of learner accountability in flipped learning. Additionally, unfamiliar group dynamics and language anxiety affected student participation and collaboration during activities, consistent with Clément et al. (1994) and Horwitz (2001), who stress the role of group cohesion and anxiety reduction for successful language learning.

Despite these challenges, the model created significant opportunities. While the gamified flipped classroom enhances engagement by integrating pre-class preparation with interactive activities, its reliance on extrinsic motivators such as points, leaderboards, and rewards presents a significant pedagogical risk. These game mechanics, though effective for short-term participation, can potentially undermine the development of intrinsic motivation and long-term learner autonomy in language usage.

Gamification operates through several mechanisms. First, an overemphasis on points and rankings can divert a student's focus from the inherent satisfaction of communication and mastery

(intrinsic motivation) towards the external reward of "winning" (extrinsic motivation). As a result, once the gamification structure is removed, the driving force for engagement may disappear. Secondly, these competitive elements can commodify language practice, reducing students' inclination to take creative risks or engage in authentic, non-rewarded communication—the very activities essential for fluency. While Bergmann and Sams (2012) rightly acknowledge that flipped learning increases interaction, and Clément et al. (1994) emphasize peer collaboration, gamification can distort these interactions into transactions focused on point accumulation rather than genuine, autonomous language use.

Therefore, for gamification to support sustainable language learning, it must be carefully designed not as the core incentive, but as a scaffold that gradually fades, ensuring that the joy of discovery, collaboration, and self-expression ultimately becomes the primary motivation for the learner.

While Deterding et al. (2015) argue that well-designed gamification can sustain interest through clear goals and social interaction, a significant risk emerges when the design heavily relies on extrinsic motivators such as points, badges, and leaderboards. This reliance can inadvertently undermine the very intrinsic motivation and long-term autonomy the original statement seeks to foster.

The development of intrinsic motivation—the drive to learn a language for the inherent satisfaction of communication and mastery—can be "crowded out" by these external rewards. According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), when an activity is already potentially interesting, adding a tangible reward can redirect the learner's focus from the inherent enjoyment of the task (e.g., successfully constructing a sentence) to the instrumental goal of obtaining a badge. This risks transforming a meaningful learning journey into a mere points-collection activity.

Consequently, the long-term learner autonomy in language use is threatened. If a student's primary reason for practicing is to stay atop a leaderboard, their engagement may cease once the game mechanics are removed. They may not develop the internal drive to

seek out authentic language opportunities—such as watching foreign films, reading articles, or conversing with native speakers—outside the structured, reward-based system. This stands in contrast to the scaffolded, low-pressure games mentioned, which aim to build confidence (as per Horwitz, 1986 and Aydın, 2018) by reducing anxiety, not by offering transactional rewards.

In essence, while extrinsic motivators can provide an initial hook, an over-reliance on them risks creating a dependency that stifles the development of the self-sufficient, curious, and internally-driven language learner. Ultimately, this can compromise the goal of fostering genuine and lasting language proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the implementation of gamified flipped classrooms in EFL higher education, with a particular focus on how contextual factors shape their effectiveness and potential for wider adoption. The findings confirmed that this model can create dynamic, student-centered environments that boost engagement and facilitate meaningful language practice. However, its success is profoundly mediated by the specific context in which it is applied.

Technological infrastructure emerged as a foundational determinant. While teachers leveraged platforms that align with students' digital habits to deliver pre-class input, the study highlighted that inequitable digital access and variable technology reliability can pose significant barriers. For the model to be effective and scalable, institutional investment in robust and equitable technological infrastructure is a prerequisite, transcending a mere design consideration to a fundamental requirement.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the model was significantly influenced by institutional policies. The considerable preparation requirements imposed on teachers to develop gamified pre-class materials and in-class activities require institutional support. Scalability depends on policies that recognize this labor through workload adjustments, funding, or professional development. Similarly, rigid curricula and assessment protocols can hinder the

flexibility needed for the adaptive, collaborative practice that underpins the model's success.

Finally, cultural attitudes toward teacher authority directly impacted classroom dynamics. The study noted that teachers successfully transitioned into facilitative roles; however, this shift can challenge deeply ingrained expectations in certain cultural contexts where the teacher is viewed as the primary source of knowledge. Students' initial reluctance or varying learner readiness to engage in peer-driven, gamified activities can stem from these attitudes. Therefore, the model's scalability necessitates a parallel process of "preparing" students for this new learning culture and carefully scaffolding the transition to enhance learner autonomy.

In conclusion, the study suggests that the promise of the gamified flipped classroom in EFL higher education is contingent not only on pedagogical design, but also on a supportive ecosystem. Its effectiveness and scalability are directly shaped by the interplay of reliable technology, enabling institutional policies, and a cultural context—or strategic effort—that supports a redefined role for both teachers and students.

By documenting real-world practices, this study contributes to understanding how blended pedagogical models can be applied in EFL higher education. However, this exploration also raises significant equity implications. The implementation of gamified flipped classrooms is not neutral; it inherently advantages students with robust digital literacy, reliable technology access, and a predisposition for competitive or self-directed learning. Conversely, it may disadvantage individuals with limited technology access, lower digital fluency, or learning preferences that thrive on direct instruction and collaborative, non-gamified environments. Therefore, future work must expand beyond measuring language proficiency and autonomy to critically assess how these models can be adapted to support, rather than inadvertently exclude, a diverse student body.

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