GAMIFICATION IN ESL LESSONS

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Gamification is learning through play by using games with clear learning objectives or adding some game elements to the learning process, such as competition, prizes, challenges, etc.

There are numerous benefits of using games and game elements in the lessons. Some of them are:

• <u>Active learning.</u> Using games in the lessons allows more students to practice and actively improve their skills simultaneously.

• <u>Increasing intrinsic motivation.</u> If students practice and get engaged in the activity because it's interesting, it will be more beneficial for them because they're driven by their own intrinsic motivation and true interest rather than marks, adults' approval, praise, etc.

• <u>Learning soft skills.</u> Games that we use in the lessons should have clear academic aims. Still, at the same time, many games can also help develop soft skills like creativity (e.g., making up a story using pictures), problem-solving (e.g., investigation role-plays), curiosity (e.g., *searching for unusual facts about an animal/ country/ planet and letting your partner guess what it is).*

• <u>Collaborative and teamwork.</u> Collaborative work is another soft-skill that can be developed with the help of games. If all students in a team need to contribute to get a result or win a game by doing what they can, it increases self-esteem and motivation to learn in the future and rapport in the group. Assigning roles for a game can be helpful in organizing teamwork and making sure each student will be able to contribute.

• <u>More emotional learning.</u> Games make learning more emotional. Healthy competition, desire to win, or just having fun making up a silly story provoke emotions and help build an emotional connection with the topic learned, which makes the information more memorable.

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* <u>Reduction of stress level during the lessons.</u> Using games and having fun helps students feel more relaxed and less under pressure. If your classroom (offline or online) is a place where people can have fun, the learning process there is more likely to be successful and beneficial.

We must say that there are the following types of games:

1. Online/offline/no-resources games.

<u>Online games.</u> A great variety of online games can be created and played online for free, or you can even find a ready-made game created by other teachers and use it with your students. Online games are universal and can be played in online and offline lessons (provided you have at least one gadget with an internet connection in your offline classroom). Some examples:

* *Online quizzes: Kahoot, Quizizz, Quizlet, JeopardyLabs, Gimkit.*

* *Other websites to create games and interactive worksheets:*

- Wordwall – create and use online puzzles, crosswords, quiz games, memory games, etc.

- Genially – create and use board games, tic-tac-toe, battleships, etc.

- Learning apps – create and use crosswords and puzzles, matching games, guess games, etc.

* *Websites which can be used for implementing game elements into the learning process:*

- ClassDojo – use this website for classroom management. It allows teachers to use a motivation system, noise meter, random picker, and many other options.
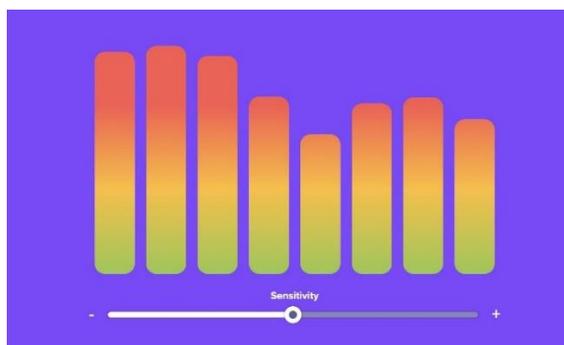
Pic. 1. **ClassDojo**
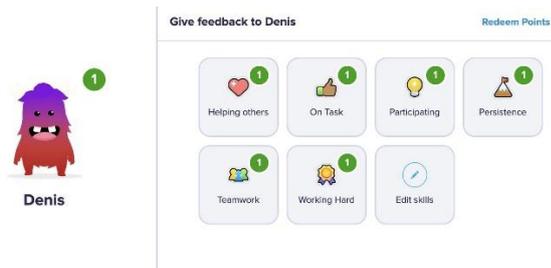
Pic. 2. **ClassDojo**

- Random Wheel – create a wheel to pick a random student, question for discussion, topic for the story, etc.

Pic. 3. **Random Wheel**

Offline games. In offline lessons, we can use games that include movement; it is effective because change of place and physical activity during lessons can make learning more effective. It improves concentration and engagement and helps to `wake up` bored students. Some examples might be:

* Basketball – set a `basket` (a box, bag, bin, etc.) and prepare a ball. Hand students some tasks to complete. For each correct answer, they can attempt to score a goal by throwing a ball into the `basket`. The team/ student who scored the most goals wins.

* Jenga – let students complete a small task; after that, they can move a Jenga block.

* Broken telephone – let students sit/ stand in a line. Whisper a word or show a flashcard to the first student; he/she whispers this word to the next student. The procedure repeats until the last student `gets` the word. After that, this student needs to say the word out loud/ write it on the board / make a sentence with it, etc.

* Running dictation – stick cards with some sentences with the target language, parts of the text, etc. around the classroom. Put students in pairs and let only one student in each pair come up to the cards, read and remember a sentence, then run back to the partner and dictate the sentence to them so that the partner can write it down. The pair who finishes first wins.

Games which can be played both online and offline. Many games were originally used for offline lessons but, with the help of online tools, can be adjusted and used in online lessons as well. Some examples of such games:

* Board games – play them offline using physical dice and counters or online, using such websites as Genially, Flippity, etc., or share your screen with the game and use online dice to pick a number.

* Flashcard games – there are so many flashcard games that can be played offline; for example, reveal a picture slowly and ask students to guess what it is; name a word and ask students to run to the corresponding card; demonstrate the cards, then hide one of them and let students guess which card is missing, etc. There are some options how for playing flashcard games online as well; for example, make a presentation and use animation to play a `What's the missing game,` create a memory game using Wordwall, or just scroll down the document with the cards slowly to let students guess the picture.

* Races – explain a word or show a picture and let students write this word on the board during offline lessons or type to the chat during online lessons.

No resources games. There are some games that don't require preparation and resources at all and, at the same time, are effective and enjoyable for students of most age groups. Some examples of such games are:

- ✓ Alias
- ✓ Hangman
- ✓ Charades
- ✓ Miming games

2. Games with different learning aims

Games can be used at different stages of the lesson:

Games as a lead-in activity. Using short games to increase students' interest in a topic is a great idea. Some examples are: start opening very small parts of a picture and ask students to guess what city it is; draw an animal with their eyes closed and let others guess what it is, etc.

Revision / warm-up games. Why not start the lesson with a revision game to refresh the topic learned in the previous lesson? Possibilities are infinite; for example, online quizzes like Kahoot, Baamboozle, Quizizz, quests, Jeopardy game, Banana game, Alias, and other guessing games.

Games to practice systems. Many games can help practice vocabulary, grammar, and functional language. Some examples are: Find somebody who …; Tic-tac-toe; Board games, etc.

Games to practice skills. Role-plays are great for practicing speaking skills, for example, a situation at a restaurant, an investigation game, organizing an event, etc. Collaborative writing games might be a nice and fun option for practicing writing or creating a story using random pictures, etc. Game elements can also be used to improve reading and listening skills, for example, asking students to watch a video without sound and try to guess what people are saying or lip-read, reading the text and transforming it into a comic or a picture, etc.

Games as homework. Yes, homework can also be fun. For example, assigning students a Kahoot game as homework might be more exciting than doing one more task in the book.

What is more, to make learning more effective and improve students' motivation, it's possible to use game elements during the whole term or academic year, it can even become your new classroom tradition. Some examples of such elements are:

- Challenges – create a challenge for your students; for example, if during one week we all speak only English in the lessons, we will spend the whole lesson next week playing Kahoot, or we will have a costume party or whatever your students like. As you proceed with this tradition, challenges can become more and more difficult, and if you lack ideas for the reward, ask your students. It can be fun and effective to create such challenges together.

- Points/ rewards – let students earn points/ badges/ stickers for completing tasks or achieving their academic aims. These points can be collected and exchanged for a bigger prize. Some teachers even set a motivation system by allowing students to `buy` something for these points, for example:
  - ➢ `buy` one more Kahoot game which will be played in a lesson;
  - ➢ `buy` the opportunity to work in a pair with your best friend next week;
  - ➢ `buy` the opportunity not to do your homework for one lesson;
  - ➢ Choose the game you want to play next week.

- Healthy competition - you can put your students into groups (make sure all the groups include academically stronger and weaker students) and let them earn points for their group during the whole term. At the end of the term, the points can be calculated, and the winners of this term will be rewarded with a special prize of their choice.

As, a matter of fact, using games in your lessons will not make them all effective and interesting by default. There are some important things to keep in mind to ensure that your students benefit from the games and game elements you use.

- Choose the games your students like, not those you like. Your students' preferences and interests are the main priority while choosing games for your lessons – ask them what they enjoy doing in the class, observe them and their reaction to different games, 'measure' the effectiveness of each game, taking into account how actively the students were involved, whether the academic aim was achieved, whether it was time-efficient.

- Make sure your games have clear and relevant learning purposes and specific academic aims. The games must be relevant to the topic learned and to the level of the students, as well as help improve students' knowledge of the topic

and practicing skills. Set specific aims for each game; for example, 'students will practice using future forms in the context of speaking about summer holidays.'

• <u>Clear and specific instructions</u> are a must to make a game effective. Show students the most effective way to play and ensure they understand the game procedure – ICQs and demonstrations are very helpful at this stage.

• <u>Provide effective feedback</u> on content (if needed) and accuracy. It will help ensure that the learning aims are achieved and make the information more memorable.

• <u>Be careful with competitive games</u> because some students can get upset if they lose. It might also be a problem in mixed-ability classes because weaker students and students who work more slowly tend to lose most games, resulting in reduced motivation and confidence. In most games, some people win, and others don't, but you can balance it by providing extra bonuses not only for those who win but for all students who take an active part and speak English all the time.

To summarize, gamification in ESL lessons is a powerful tool that enhances student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. Educators can create a more dynamic and enjoyable learning environment by incorporating points, rewards, challenges, and interactive activities. Gamification fosters a positive attitude toward language learning and helps students develop problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking skills.

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