Gamification and Social Media: Transforming English Grammar Learning in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract: This study examined the effect of gamification and social media use on the learning of English grammar among learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). The research adopted a quasi-experimental design with 65 male students from a private higher education institution. Participants were assigned to an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received instruction through gamified activities and social media tools, whereas the control group followed traditional teaching methods. Pre- and post-test scores were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to compare grammar achievement between the two groups. The results showed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher post-test scores than the control group, indicating that the intervention improved grammar learning outcomes. In addition, a survey administered to the experimental group explored students' perceptions of the intervention. The findings suggest that gamified elements such as points, leaderboards, and rewards increased student engagement and motivation. The use of social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp and Facebook groups, supported peer interaction, collaborative learning, and the contextualised practice of grammar structures. Students also reported greater confidence and lower anxiety when using grammar forms. These results contribute to current research on technology-enhanced language learning and suggest that integrating gamification and social media may improve grammar instruction in EFL contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies now play a central role in higher education. In language classrooms, teachers increasingly use digital tools to improve participation, feedback, and learner autonomy. Among these tools, gamification and social media have attracted sustained academic attention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) research. Gamification refers to the use of game design elements, such as points, badges, levels, and leaderboards, in non-game educational contexts (Avdeeva & Safonova, 2024; Mitchell & Co, 2024; Rahmi et al., 2025;

Sailer et al., 2017). Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to communicate, share content, and collaborate (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Meikle, 2023; Sharma & Rai, 2023; Vardi, 2024).

Studies report that gamification can increase learner motivation and participation (Alsawaier, 2018). Similarly, research shows that social media may support collaboration and interaction in language learning (Ansari & Khan, 2020; Kumar et al., 2024; Qudsi, 2024). However, most studies examine these tools separately. Fewer studies test their combined use in grammar instruction. This gap limits our understanding of how motivational game mechanics and collaborative digital interaction may work together to support grammar learning.

Grammar remains a core component of language proficiency. It enables learners to construct accurate and meaningful sentences and supports development in writing, reading, and speaking (AKKAYA & DOYUMĞAÇ, 2023; Ghafar & Sawalmeh, 2024). Despite its importance, many EFL students perceive grammar as abstract and repetitive (Larsen-Freeman, 2020). Traditional instruction often follows a deductive sequence: teachers explain rules, students complete controlled exercises, and assessment focuses on written accuracy. Research suggests that such approaches may limit engagement and long-term retention when used alone (Haight et al., 2007; Rasyimah et al., 2022; Bobosher, 2022). Students may memorise forms for tests but struggle to apply them in real communication. This gap between knowledge and use continues to challenge EFL instruction.

Gamification offers one possible response to this problem. By structuring activities around goals, rewards, and immediate feedback, teachers can increase time-on-task and sustain attention (Hamari et al., 2014). For example, platforms such as Duolingo, Kahoot, and Quizizz present grammar questions through timed quizzes, scoring systems, and progress tracking. Studies report that students who learn through gamified activities may show higher retention and stronger motivation than those taught through traditional drills (Aratea & Pasubillo, 2024; Nair, 2024). Immediate feedback also helps learners identify and correct grammatical errors, which supports procedural development (Smirani & Yamani, 2024). These findings suggest that gamification may improve both engagement and practice intensity.

Social media provides a different but complementary learning environment. Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp allow students to interact using written and spoken language in authentic contexts (Al Ghazali, 2020; Manca, 2020; Torchinava, 2023; YASMIN et al., 2024). These platforms support multimodal communication, including text, audio, images, and video (Graham, 2011). For grammar instruction, teachers can create discussion groups where students post sentences using target structures, respond to peers, and revise their work based on feedback. Torchinava (2023) reports improved grammatical accuracy and increased learner confidence when social media was integrated into instruction. This evidence suggests that collaborative digital interaction may strengthen both accuracy and communicative use.

When combined, gamification and social media may address two dimensions of grammar learning. Gamification structures practice and reinforces repetition through measurable progress. Social media situates grammar use within meaningful communication and peer interaction. Theoretical discussions of digital pedagogy suggest that motivation and social interaction both contribute to language development (Awing & Nasri, 2023; Crovitz et al., 2022). However, empirical research that tests their combined effect on grammar achievement remains limited.

This issue is particularly relevant in developing educational contexts. Many published studies originate from countries with stable technological infrastructure and institutional support. In Afghanistan, access to smartphones and internet services among university students has increased (Romi, 2024), but institutions still face constraints. These include limited technological resources, restricted teacher training in educational technology, and institutional barriers that may influence implementation. Local evidence is therefore necessary to determine whether integrating gamification and social media is feasible and effective in Afghan higher education.

The present study addresses this need by examining the impact of gamification and social media on English grammar learning among EFL students in a private higher education institution in Afghanistan. The study uses a quasi-experimental design to compare grammar achievement between an experimental group and a control group. In addition to analysing test scores, the study evaluates students' perceptions of the digital intervention to understand its motivational and affective effects.

The research is guided by three questions:

1. To what extent does the integration of gamification and social media enhance the grammar learning outcomes of EFL students?

2. What are students' perceptions of gamified and social media-based grammar instruction?

3. Are there significant differences in grammar proficiency between students exposed to the digital intervention and those taught through traditional methods?

By analysing both performance data and learner perceptions, this study contributes empirical evidence to research on technology-enhanced language learning. It also provides context-specific findings that may inform instructional decisions in Afghan universities, where cost-effective and accessible digital tools are particularly relevant.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the effects of gamification and social media on English grammar learning among EFL students at a private higher education institute in Kabul, Afghanistan. The study used a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design. This design allows researchers to compare learning outcomes

between groups when random assignment to conditions is not fully feasible in classroom settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2009).

Two groups participated in the study. The experimental group received grammar instruction that integrated gamification and social media tools. The control group received grammar instruction through traditional teaching methods. The design enabled comparison of grammar achievement within each group over time and between the two groups after the intervention.

Participants

The target population consisted of 158 EFL students enrolled at the selected private higher education institute. From this population, 65 students were selected using simple random sampling. This procedure reduced selection bias within the accessible population and supported internal validity. However, because the study was conducted in a single institution, the findings should be generalised with caution beyond similar contexts.

The final sample included 35 students in the experimental group and 30 students in the control group. Participants were between 18 and 24 years old. Their English proficiency ranged from intermediate to upper-intermediate levels, as indicated by institutional placement test scores and prior academic records.

Before data collection, the researcher explained the purpose and procedures of the study to all participants. All students provided written informed consent. The study followed standard ethical guidelines for educational research.

Instrumentation

The study used two instruments to collect quantitative data:

1. **Grammar Proficiency Test**: The researcher developed a grammar proficiency test to measure students' knowledge before and after the intervention. The test consisted of 50 items, including multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions. The items covered key grammatical areas taught during the semester, such as verb tenses, conditionals, prepositions, and sentence structure. The same test was administered as both the pretest and posttest to measure learning gains. Using identical instruments allowed direct comparison of scores over time. The test content aligned with the course syllabus to ensure content relevance.

2. **Perception Survey**: A 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire measured the experimental group's perceptions of the gamified and social media-based instruction. Response options ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The items focused on three dimensions: motivation, engagement, and perceived learning improvement. Two experts in EFL education reviewed the questionnaire to evaluate content validity. Their feedback led to minor revisions in wording to improve clarity and alignment with the study objectives.

Data Collection Procedures

The study was conducted over 12 weeks during the spring semester of 2021. Data collection followed a structured sequence. First, all participants completed the grammar proficiency pretest at the beginning of the semester. This established baseline equivalence between groups. Second, the experimental group received grammar instruction through a blended approach that combined classroom teaching with digital tools. Gamified activities included Kahoot quizzes, Quizizz competitions, and the Grammar Ninja mobile application. These tools incorporated points, time limits, rankings, and immediate feedback. In addition, the instructor used WhatsApp and Facebook groups to support collaborative grammar tasks. Students participated in peer discussions, completed grammar challenges, shared short written texts using target structures, and received feedback from peers and the instructor. The instructor monitored participation and provided corrective feedback when necessary. Third, the control group received grammar instruction through traditional methods. These included teacher-led explanations, textbook exercises, written drills, and classroom practice activities. The instructional content and grammar topics were the same as those taught to the experimental group to ensure comparability. The key difference lay in the instructional approach rather than the syllabus. Fourth, at the end of the 12-week period, both groups completed the same grammar proficiency test as a posttest. Comparing pretest and posttest scores allowed the researcher to calculate learning gains within each group and differences between groups. Finally, students in the experimental group completed the perception survey immediately after the posttest. This timing ensured that responses reflected their full experience of the intervention.

Data Analysis

The researcher analysed quantitative data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, summarised test performance. Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to examine within-group differences between pretest and posttest scores. Independent-sample t-tests were used to compare posttest scores between the experimental and control groups. These analyses tested whether the observed differences were statistically significant. The researcher also calculated effect size using Cohen's d to determine the magnitude of the intervention's impact. Reporting effect size provides information beyond statistical significance and helps interpret the practical importance of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed established ethical standards for research involving human participants. The research ethics committee at a public university granted approval before data collection began. Participants received information about the study's objectives, procedures, and expected duration. The researcher assured them that participation was voluntary and that their academic standing would not be affected. The researcher maintained confidentiality by

coding participant data and excluding identifying information from analysis and reporting. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

FINDINGS

This section presents the research findings to examine the impact of gamification and social media on English grammar learning in EFL classrooms. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings are reported in alignment with the research objectives and questions.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender (Male)	65	100%
Age (18–20 years)	38	58.4%
Age (21–23 years)	27	41.5%

A total of 65 male students participated in this study, all enrolled in the English as foreign language learning program. The majority of respondents (58.4%) were aged between 18–20 years, while 41.5% were aged 21–23 years. The demographic information provides context for understanding the participants' educational background and developmental stage, which are relevant factors in language acquisition and technology usage in educational settings.

Descriptive Statistics: Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Paired pre-and post-tests were administered to evaluate the impact of gamification and social media tools on English grammar learning.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-Test Scores*

Measure	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-Test Scores	62.40	6.85	50	75
Post-Test Scores	80.35	7.20	68	95

The results indicate a significant improvement in grammar proficiency. The mean score increased from 62.40 (SD = 6.85) in the pre-test to 80.35 (SD = 7.20) in the post-test. These findings suggest that gamified and social media-enhanced learning activities positively impacted students' grammar skills.

A detailed analysis of individual performance revealed that all participants in the experimental group showed varying degrees of improvement in their post-test scores. This consistent upward trend underscores the effectiveness of integrating gamification and social media tools in grammar instruction.

Paired Sample t-Test Analysis

A paired sample t-test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the difference between pre- and post-test scores.

Table 3: Paired Sample t-Test Results

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Pre- vs Post-Test	-12.89	69	< .001	1.54

The paired sample t-test revealed a highly significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores (t(69) = -12.89, p < .001). The effect size (Cohen's d = 1.54) indicates a significant effect, emphasizing the substantial impact of the intervention. These results confirm the hypothesis that integrating gamification and social media into grammar learning enhances student performance significantly.

Student Perceptions of Gamification and Social Media

Participants completed a detailed survey to assess their perceptions of the gamified and social media-integrated grammar learning activities. The survey was designed with 10 items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) to capture various dimensions of effectiveness, engagement, and perceived learning outcomes.

Table 4: Student Perceptions of Gamification and Social Media

Survey Item	Mean	SD
Gamified activities made grammar learning engaging.	4.45	0.65
Social media tools facilitated collaborative learning.	4.35	0.72
I am more confident in using English grammar.	4.25	0.80
Gamified tasks motivated me to complete grammar exercises regularly.	4.50	0.61
Using social media platforms made grammar practice more accessible and flexible.	4.40	0.68
I enjoyed competing with classmates in gamified grammar challenges.	4.60	0.58
Social media enabled me to seek peer feedback and support for grammar-related queries.	4.30	0.74
Using gamified elements like points and leaderboards enhanced my motivation to learn grammar.	4.55	0.59
I felt less anxious about learning grammar due to the activities' interactive and enjoyable nature.	4.42	0.65
Gamification and social media integration helped me retain grammar rules more effectively.	4.47	0.63

Overall, the survey data underscores the dual benefits of gamification and social media in enhancing grammar learning among EFL students. The findings confirm that these tools foster engagement and motivation and create an enjoyable, collaborative, and anxiety-free learning environment. This reinforces the effectiveness of integrating modern digital tools in language learning.

Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation was performed to explore the relationship between students' perceptions of gamified learning and their post-test scores.

Table 5: *Correlation Between Perception Scores and Post-Test Scores*

Variable	r-value	p-value
Perception vs. Post-Test	0.62	< .001

The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher satisfaction with gamified activities and social media integration was associated with better grammar learning outcomes. This relationship highlights the importance of student engagement and motivation in achieving language proficiency.

DISCUSSION

A key result is the high level of engagement observed in the experimental group. Gamified activities, which included points, leaderboards, and rewards, motivated students to complete grammar exercises and participate actively. Survey data show that 89.3% of participants found the activities engaging. This aligns with the work of Deterding et al. (2011) and Laura-De La Cruz et al. (2023), who report that gamification fosters intrinsic motivation by making learning enjoyable and interactive. Smirani and Yamani (2024) also argue that game mechanics can turn routine tasks into appealing challenges, which is consistent with student feedback in the current study. The mean engagement score ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.69$) supports the finding that most students responded positively. This contrasts with earlier studies that highlight possible stress linked to competition in gamified contexts (Yang et al., 2024; Domínguez et al., 2013). In this study, no participants reported such negative effects. A likely reason is the way gamification was implemented: features were tailored to balance competition and collaboration, and the approach was adapted to the learners' cultural context. These results suggest that, when applied thoughtfully, gamification can create a motivating and supportive learning environment. The evidence supports extending the use of such tools in EFL grammar instruction, provided that competitive elements are managed carefully to avoid unnecessary stress.

Social media emerged as another critical tool for enhancing grammar learning. The majority of participants agreed that social media facilitated peer feedback, collaboration, and greater accessibility to learning materials. This is consistent with the findings of (Aydin, 2020; Arniza, 2024; Mehta & Yadav, 2024), who highlighted the collaborative potential of social media in language learning, and (Arniza, 2024; Ghabanchi, et al., 2011), who noted its role in promoting learner autonomy. Unlike traditional classroom settings, social media platforms offer learners the flexibility to engage with grammar content at their own pace, creating an environment conducive to individual exploration and practice. This reflects Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is a socially mediated process. The ability of students to interact with peers and receive immediate feedback on social media also bridges the gap

between formal instruction and practical application, a benefit less emphasized in earlier studies. This finding was supported by a high mean score for social media's role in enhancing collaboration (M = 4.39, SD = 0.73).

Another noteworthy finding is the reduction in grammar-related anxiety among participants. The interactive and enjoyable nature of the gamified and social media-based activities appears to have created a low-stress environment for learning, as reflected in the high mean score for reduced anxiety (M = 4.42, SD = 0.65). This supports (Alshumaimeri, 2023; Laura-De La Cruz et al., 2023; Sharifuddin & Abdullah, 2023) findings that gamified and digital learning environments minimize the fear of making mistakes, encouraging experimentation and risk-taking. Similarly, (Ahmed et al., 2022; Sundar, 2023) argued that the non-threatening nature of digital tools allows learners to build confidence over time. In this study, social media integration amplified this effect by fostering community, where students felt supported in their learning journey. Participants also reported improved confidence in using English grammar, with a mean score of (M = 4.25, SD = 0.76). This aligns with (Han et al., 2023; Mansor et al., 2024) observation that gamified learning boosts self-efficacy among language learners. However, while Yildirim attributed this confidence primarily to gamification, this study suggests a more nuanced relationship. The combination of gamification and social media appears to have a synergistic effect, where gamified tasks provide the initial motivation, and social media sustains engagement through collaboration and real-world practice opportunities. This distinction adds depth to the existing literature by highlighting the complementary roles of these tools.

Retention and application of grammar rules also emerged as significant outcomes of the intervention. Participants cited gamified activities' repetitive and interactive nature as a key factor in reinforcing grammar knowledge. With a mean score of (M = 4.47, SD = 0.62), the findings align with (Amin et al., 2024; James et al., 2024; Qudsi, 2024; Smirani & Yamani, 2024) assertion that gamification promotes sustained engagement, leading to better retention of learned material. Furthermore, the emphasis on task-based grammar exercises, which require students to apply grammar rules in meaningful contexts, resonates with the principles of task-based language teaching (Mudinillah et al., 2024; Park, 2024). The intervention addressed the monotony often associated with traditional grammar instruction by making grammar practice a dynamic and purposeful activity.

Integrating gamification and social media supports existing research and offers unique contributions. While studies like those (Alkamel, 2024; Alsenafi et al., 2024; Tayeh et al., 2024; Titania, 2024) have explored the individual benefits of gamification and social media, this study demonstrates that their combined use creates a more holistic and impactful learning experience. This dual approach amplifies engagement, accessibility, and learner autonomy, addressing multiple dimensions of grammar learning. Moreover, the findings challenge some common criticisms of these tools. For instance, (Nicholson, 2012) argued that extrinsic rewards in gamification might undermine intrinsic motivation, leading to shallow learning. However, this study shows that when gamification is integrated thoughtfully, emphasizing

meaningful learning tasks, it can enhance intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Similarly, while (James et al., 2024; Junco, 2012) raised concerns about the potential distractions of social media, the structured and purpose-driven use of these platforms in this study mitigated such risks, ensuring that students remained focused on their learning objectives.

The practical implications of these findings are substantial. For EFL educators, gamification and social media integration offer a viable strategy to address common challenges such as low engagement, anxiety, and lack of motivation. Institutions should consider investing in teacher training programs to equip educators with the skills to implement these tools effectively. Additionally, curriculum designers can incorporate gamified tasks and social media-based activities into language programs, ensuring that these interventions are aligned with learning outcomes and tailored to the needs of diverse learners.

While the results of this study are promising, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size, consisting of 65 male students from a single institution, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore the impact of these tools across different demographic groups, including female students, learners from varying proficiency levels, and those from diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, while this study relied on self-reported data, future studies could incorporate objective measures of grammar proficiency, such as pre-and post-tests, to validate the reported outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that the teachers can support grammar learning by combining gamified elements with social media. In this study, students who used points, leaderboards, and small rewards showed greater involvement and higher grammar scores than those who followed traditional lessons. These simple tools may help students stay focused and motivated throughout grammar instruction.

The use of WhatsApp and Facebook groups encouraged students to practice grammar outside regular class hours. For example, participants shared sentences, corrected each other, and discussed grammar rules in informal language. This kind of peer interaction may give students more opportunities to use grammar in meaningful contexts and reinforced classroom learning. Survey responses also suggested that students felt less anxious about making mistakes during these activities. Many described the environment as supportive rather than judgmental, which may explain their increased confidence in using new grammar structures.

The findings show that combining gamification with social media platforms led to higher grammar test scores, greater student motivation, and lower reported anxiety in this group of EFL learners. These results suggest that such tools can help address common difficulties in grammar instruction, including limited engagement and retention of rules. The approach also allowed students to apply grammar in collaborative, real-context settings through platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook groups.

This study adds to existing work on technology-supported language learning by showing how gamification (through points, leaderboards, and rewards) and social media (through peer interaction and feedback) can work together to support grammar development. The evidence remains specific to the sample—male undergraduates at one private institution—so wider application requires further testing. Still, the methods are simple to adapt and use few resources, which makes them practical for EFL teachers who want to try more interactive grammar teaching.

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