AUGMENTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH GAMIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

'English rules the world' is an appropriate expression to describe the significance of English. More than 430 million people in the world speak English as an official language. So, acquiring competence in English is an inevitable process. Several methods and approaches have been proposed to help learn a language but acquiring a language needs a highly motivated and positive learning environment along with effective strategies. One of those effective trending strategy is Gamification, which could make learning a pleasurable activity. This paper emphasizes the effectiveness of Gamification elements in English language acquisition. Gamification can reinforce learner's active participation by avoiding the negative conditions such as anxiety, fear of failure and shyness. It can create curiosity and competitive spirit in the learners, which could allow the learners to acquire the language.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

Acquiring English is a challenging task in 21st century as it lacks an appropriate learning environment. English is a global lingua franca, which has a dominant hand in almost every field. As, David Crystal rightly stresses, "'English Rules' is an actual example, presenting to the world an uncomplicated scenario suggesting the universality of the language's spread and the likelihood of its continuation" (1). More than 430 million people in the world speak English as an official language and on the whole 1.5 billion people all around the world speak English for different purposes.

Acquiring competence in English is an inevitable process to be successful. English language teaching is a highly productive field, as there are many methods and approaches available from traditional teacher-centered to the modern learner-centered ones to help the learners in language learning. One such learner centered hottest trending strategy is Gamification. Gamification helps the learners to acquire the language sub-consciously. Furthermore it boosts learner's engagement and motivation by employing Gamification elements.

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

First language is acquired by an infant peacefully in a natural environment without any conscious effort. Linguists like Krashen, Dulay, Burt and Terrel have conducted several experiments by involving children and adults in learning second languages. Krashen states that Second Language can be learnt in two ways, sub-conscious acquiring and conscious learning. Acquisition is 'picking up' a language sub-consciously whereas learning is 'knowing about' the language consciously. Acquisition is more important than learning as it uses language for real communication. "Language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning" (Krashen and Terrel 55).

Learners acquire the language only when they are willing to acquire it. Language teachers should act as a language counselor and be a friend to their learners as acquisition on the whole deals with the positive attitude of the learners. In order to make the learning more effective comprehensible input is given, which should be one step ahead of the learners current competence. It challenges the learner to learn something new. There are some

mental blocks that act as a barrier to language acquisition. Affective filters are the negative attitudes such as lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence and learning anxiety act as filters that hinders language learning. Socio-affective filter plays a dominant role in language acquisition. "Performers with high or strong filters will acquire less of the language directed at them, as less input is "allowed in" to the language-acquisition device" (Krashen 22) It is the duty of the language teacher to resolve the prejudices against the language and to provide favorable environment where the learners are allowed to interact without any hesitation. Second language can also be acquired just like the first language with the similar conditions.

GAMIFICATION

Computer games or games apps are very popular among the young learners across the world as it attracts the interest of the players. Gamification has been employed in multiple domains, including business, health domains, and now in education too. Gamification in education is the hottest trending strategy to keep learners motivated, engaged and competitive. It also helps in developing 21st century skills. As quoted by Mark Peterson and Mariusz Kruk from K. M. Kapp's The Gamification of learning and instruction: Case-based methods and strategies for training and education defines Gamification as "using game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems" (95). In general Gamification in education means using game based elements in the non-game contexts to promote learning. It advocates the application of certain game elements to reach desired goals.

As said by Kapp there are two types of Gamification. They are structural and content based Gamification. Structural gamification implies no change in the teaching as it adds only game elements for motivation. For instance, teachers provide progress bars and leader boards based on the performance of the learner in the learning activity. Content Gamification offers a change in the content to make it more similar to games to promote learners performances (Peterson and Kruk 97).

For example, if the teacher wants to check the learners fluency in accordance Gamification. Teacher could play a video story which is visually pleasing the learners. When it is visually pleasing, the learner tends to focus and enjoy the story. As the video captures the attention of the learners the content is sub consciously acquired. They produce the story better with the Gamification elements in the mind such as, Instant feedbacks, handshake from a teacher awards, rewards and badges etc. Gamification activities in language learning, the learners forget that they are actually learning a language, rather acquiring a language unconsciously.

It's impossible to conclude without addressing the misconceptions that Gamification is making everything a game and 3D virtual world. It is not only confined to the technological element but also open for non-technological aspects. Game Based Learning is also a different phenomenon from Gamification. Game Based Learning uses an actual game to teach something whereas gamification employs game design or elements in teaching to reach the desired goal in the non-game contexts. Considering technology as a boon, learners have got various Gamification apps like memrise, duolingo, Mindsnacks, brain scape, drops, book widgets, class craft and etc. Gamification is used as a tool to create positive environment for acquiring a language.

GAMIFICATION ELEMENTS

"The elements of gamification are the essential 'construction materials' which are used 'to build' a gamified learning experience" (Peterson and Kruk 96).These elements are destined to create a design of patterns which organizes a learning activity and used to boost learner's motivation, active participation and facilitate learning experiences. Some of the game elements are: awards, badges, challenges, competition, handshake, instant feedback, leader boards, levels, medals, progress bars, points, quests, rewards, time limits, trophies, and using some specific phrases (see table 1).

Table 1

Jorge Francisco Figueroa Flores has given brief definition for some elements.

Points	Numeric accumulation based on certain activities.
Badges	Visual representation of achievements for the use shown online.

Leaderboards	How the players are ranked based on success.
Progress bars/ Progression	Shows the status of a player.
Performance graph	Shows player performance.
Quests	Some of the tasks players have to fulfill in a game.
Levels	A section or part of the game Avatars Visual representation of a player or alter ego.
Social elements	Relationships with other user through the game.
Rewards/reward system	System to motivate players that accomplish a quest.

Source: Flores, Jorge Francisco Figueroa. "Using Gamification to Enhance Second

Language Learning ." digital EDUCATION,2015, pp. 32-54.

EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMIFICATION IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Language learners are exhausted with the traditional teaching methods and approaches. There is no use of teaching when students are not engaged and motivated as no learning happens. The word 'game' itself creates enthusiasm in the learners. Gamification creates a rich environment that produces lower affective filter in the learners. It reduces the language barriers such as anxiety, fear of failure, shyness and stress to exercise the language. Activities with gamification elements stimulate language learning. For example, if a class is divided into four groups for Gamification, activities conducted and points gained by the learners are enrolled in the progress bars. They work hard with seriousness and full involvement to achieve the goal.

Gamification is connected with the concept of flow in positive psychology, which refers to the mental state experienced by doing challenging activities in a comfort zone and finds pleasure while completing the task. By involving in the enthusiastic activities "Respondents frequently describe a loss of selfconsciousness during flow. In the terms that George Herbert Mead introduced, the "me" disappears during flow, and the "I" takes over" (Lopez 398). It also enhances some of the 21st century skills like creativity, communication, critical thinking, flexibility and productivity.

Learning experiences reinforce learner's competitive spirit and autonomy, as it allows them to believe in themselves. Learners are motivated when they are in game environment and have autonomy over their idea as stated by Self-Determination Theory. There are some challenges in Gamification too. Teachers should act as moderators and resolve if the conflict arises. He/she should be aware that everyone equally participates in the activities conducted.

CONCLUSION

Acquiring the language needs highly motivated and positive learning environment. Gamification elements attempt to create conducive atmosphere where the learners exercise the language without any hesitation. Gaming is a structured process as such gamification elements act as a mechanics in the non-game contexts. Effective game elements should be chosen by the language teacher as it organizes the gamification process. It makes the learning better than reality as it provides healthy competition between the learners, which increases production sub consciously. It stimulates the positive effects on learning, motivation, effort making, positive attitudes, retention and attention. Second language could be acquired as the first language with the similar conditions.

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