

Innovated teaching with gamification to enhance students' reading comprehension

Enseñanza innovadora con gamificación para mejorar la comprensión lectora de los alumnos

¹Maritza Elizabeth Jiménez Aguilar

²Maritza Jacqueline Villacis Lizano

¹Autor de correspondencia: mjimenez52@indoamerica.edu.ec

¹Universidad Tecnológica Indoamérica,
Ecuador.

mjimenez52@indoamerica.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7594-918X>

²Universidad Tecnológica Indoamérica,
Ecuador.

maritzavillacis@uti.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5935-707X>

Datos del artículo:

Recibido: marzo 19, 2026

Aceptado: abril 17, 2026

Publicación: julio 08, 2026

Keywords:

Gamification, reading comprehension, efl, ict, motivation, public education.

Palabras clave:

gamificación, comprensión lectora, efl, tic, motivación, educación pública.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.53877/3pj6rf87>

Este artículo está bajo la licencia



Abstract

This study examines the impact of gamification on English reading comprehension among A2-level students in an Ecuadorian public school. Using a qualitative action research design, 33 students participated in the intervention. A diagnostic test revealed predominantly basic and limited reading skills, particularly in inference and implicit interpretation. Gamified strategies were implemented through digital platforms such as Kahoot and Wordwall, incorporating points, levels, challenges, and immediate feedback. Data were collected through a diagnostic test, a reflective teacher journal, and a focus group, allowing methodological triangulation. Findings indicate increased motivation, classroom participation, and interaction, as well as improvements in identifying main ideas and specific details. Gamification also reduced anxiety associated with reading tasks. The study concludes that gamification is an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing reading comprehension in EFL contexts by fostering meaningful, engaging, and student-centered learning experiences.

Resumen

El presente estudio analiza el impacto de la gamificación en el desarrollo de la comprensión lectora en inglés en estudiantes de nivel A2 de una institución pública ecuatoriana. A partir de un enfoque cualitativo bajo el método de investigación-acción, se trabajó con una muestra no probabilística de 33 estudiantes. Inicialmente, se aplicó una prueba diagnóstica que evidenció niveles predominantemente básicos y limitados de comprensión lectora, especialmente en habilidades de inferencia e interpretación implícita. Posteriormente, se implementaron estrategias gamificadas mediante plataformas digitales como Kahoot y Wordwall, integrando elementos como puntos, niveles, desafíos y retroalimentación inmediata. La recolección de datos se realizó a través de tres instrumentos: prueba diagnóstica, diario reflexivo docente y grupo focal, permitiendo la triangulación metodológica. Los resultados evidenciaron un incremento significativo en la motivación, participación e interacción en clase, así como mejoras en la identificación de ideas principales y detalles específicos. Además, se observó una reducción de la ansiedad frente a tareas de lectura en lengua extranjera. Se concluye que la gamificación constituye una estrategia pedagógica efectiva para fortalecer la comprensión lectora

en contextos EFL, promoviendo un aprendizaje más dinámico, significativo y centrado en el estudiante.

Forma sugerida de citar (APA):

Jiménez Aguilar, M. E. y Villacís Lizano, M. J. (2026). Innovated teaching with gamification to enhance students' reading comprehension. *RICEd: Revista de Investigación en Ciencias de la Educación*. 4(8), 33-48. <https://doi.org/10.53877/3pj6rf87>

INTRODUCTION

English has consolidated its position as the most widely used language for international communication, academic Exchange, scientific production, and Access to global knowledge. In the contemporary world, English proficiency is no longer perceived as an option or complement, but rather as a fundamental competence that directly influences educational equity, academic achievement, and future professional opportunities. According to global estimates, more than 1.5 billion people worldwide use English as a first, second, or foreign language, with the majority of speakers belonging to non-native contexts (Crystal, 2019). This reality places an important pressure on educational systems, especially in developing countries, to ensure that English language instruction is effective, inclusive, and responsive to the demands of the twenty-first century.

Within this global context, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has undergone significant transformations, driven primarily by technological advances, changes in learners' cognitive profiles, and evolving pedagogical paradigms. Traditional approaches based on memorization, repetitive drills, and teacher-centered instruction have been insufficient to meet the learning needs of contemporary students. Today's learners are immersed in digital environments characterized by interaction, multimodal content, and immediate feedback, which shape their expectations and engagement with learning processes. In consequence, teachers are challenged to adopt innovative strategies that not only facilitate language acquisition but also foster motivation, autonomy, and meaningful learning.

Among the four core language skills, reading comprehension occupies a crucial role in academic success and lifelong learning. Reading is useful as a Gateway to knowledge across disciplines, enabling learners to access information, interpret meaning, and develop critical thinking skills. In EFL contexts, reading comprehension usually represents one of the most challenging competencies for students, especially at lower intermediate levels such as A, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). At this stage, learners are expected to understand short, simple texts linked to a familiar topic, identify specific information, and understand the main ideas of written materials. However, empirical evidence consistently indicates that a lot of A2-level learners struggle to meet the expectations, especially in public education systems where resources, training, and instructional innovation may be limited.

The importance of addressing reading comprehension difficulties in EFL classroom is widely recognized in international educational research. Reading comprehension is not a passive process of decoding words; rather, it involves a set of complex cognitive operations such as activating prior knowledge, making inferences, monitoring understanding, and constructing meaning from text (Laličić & Dubravac, 2021). When students fail to develop these skills adequately, their overall language proficiency and academic performance are adversely affected. Furthermore, poor reading comprehension can lead to frustration, low self-esteem, and lack of motivation to engage with English learning tasks, thereby creating a negative cycle that further hinders progress.

During the last years, the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into education has been promoted as a means of enhance teaching and learning processes across disciplines, including EFL instruction. Digital tools offer opportunities to create interactive, learner-centered environments that can address diverse learning styles and promote active engagement. However, technology alone does not guarantee significant learning outcomes. The effectiveness of ICT integration depends largely on the pedagogical strategies employed and the extent to which technological resources are aligned with clear instructional objectives. As a result, educational researchers and teachers have increasingly turned their attention to methodologies that combine technological affordances with sound pedagogical principles.

One of these methodologies is gamification, which is defined as the application of game elements and mechanics in non-game contexts with the purpose of enhancing user engagement, motivation and performance (Chan & Lo, 2024). In educational setting, gamification involves incorporating elements such as points, badges, levels, challenges, immediate feedback into learning activities. These elements are designed to stimulate learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, promote sustained attention, and transform routine task into more engaging experiences. Unlike game-based learning, which typically involves the use of complete educational games, gamification focuses on integrating specific game dynamics into existing instructional frameworks. The relevance of gamification in education has grown substantially over the past decade, in response to the learning preferences of digital-native students. Research indicates that gamified learning environments can increase student motivation, participation, and persistence, while also supporting the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills. In EFL contexts, gamification has been associated with improvements in vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, and oral participation. Nevertheless, despite the literature on gamification in language learning, its specific impact on reading comprehension remains underexplored in countries like Ecuador.

The Ecuadorian educational context presents a compelling case for investigating innovative strategies such as gamification in EFL instruction. English is a mandatory subject in schools, and national educational policies emphasize the importance of developing communicative competence aligned with international standards. Nevertheless, several structural and pedagogical challenges continue to affect the quality of English language education, especially in public institutions. Among these challenges are insufficient teacher training in ICT integration, limited availability of technological resources, and a persistent reliance on traditional, text-book centered teaching approaches.

Gamification emerges as a particularly relevant strategy for addressing both motivational and cognitive challenges associated with English reading comprehension. By integration game elements into reading activities, teachers can create learning environments that are more engaging, interactive, and linked to students' interests. Gamified platforms such as Kahoot and Wordwall, which were implemented in the present study, offer opportunities to design reading comprehension tasks that incorporate competition, collaboration, and immediate feedback. These platforms allow students to interact with texts dynamically, test their understanding in real time, and receive reinforcement for their efforts, thereby enhancing both motivation and comprehension.

The relevance of this study is further reinforced by its alignment with the research line of Educational Technology and Mediated Pedagogy. This line of research emphasizes the strategic integration of technological tools to enhance teaching and learning processes particularly in context where traditional methodologies have proven insufficient. By examining gamification as strategy for developing English reading comprehension, the

present research contributes to a growing body of knowledge that seeks to understand how technology-mediated pedagogies can address persistent educational challenges.

Ultimately, technology should be regarded as a valuable ally in enhancing educational processes, particularly in the development of English reading comprehension. This is due to students' natural inclination toward technological activities and educational games within the classroom setting. Consequently, the use of gamification can significantly reinforce the learning process by promoting greater engagement and supporting the retention of grammatical structures essential for effective communication.

Problem statement

At the global level, there is a growing emphasis on defining and implementing new educational methodologies and standards aligned with the competencies that 21st century learners are expected to acquire. Consequently, the training and preparation of all educational stakeholders within the Educational Unit must be aligned with emerging technological literacies to operate effectively in today's globalized knowledge era. Nevertheless, innovative methodologies such as gamification continue to face challenges, particularly when confronted with traditional educational models that resist change and struggle to accept play as a legitimate component of the learning process.

Technological gamification aligns with emerging educational standards and fosters student progress (Christopoulos & Mystakidis, 2023). However, the Ecuadorian public education system faces several limitations and challenges, including insufficient knowledge and the absence of public policies aimed at training both teachers and students in the effective use of ICT tools. This situation has become a widespread issue that hinders the full integration of technology into the teaching-learning process (Chan & Lo, 2024).

There are several factors contributing to the resistance toward the implementation of technological gamification as a methodology for developing English reading comprehension skills. Among the most significant is the inadequate application of reading comprehension strategies by teachers, who often rely excessively on decoding text without fostering a deeper connection to meaning (Christopoulos & Mystakidis, 2023). Additionally, many educators fail to activate students' prior knowledge or encourage reflection on the content read, which hinders the development of creativity and critical thinking. On the learners' side, there is a notable lack of motivation toward reading activities, often stemming from disinterest in the topics, difficulties with concentration, or the perception that reading is a tedious or unproductive task (Cheng et al., 2025).

These issues frequently result in monotonous classes delivered in traditional, uninspiring learning environments. Based on the experience of a teacher working with A2-level classrooms and within the public education system more broadly, it is evident that there is a significant shortage of technological resources, such as internet connectivity, digital devices, and adequate training, which negatively impacts the quality of education and contributes to a growing digital divide among students. The implementation of technological gamification at the A2 level students in a public institution enhances students' reading comprehension, motivation, and engagement in English language learning, thereby contributing to improved academic performance and the development of essential language skills.

Theoretical Framework

Use of ICT in English Language Learning

In contemporary times, global educational demands are increasingly greater regarding the incorporation of technologies to create more engaging, effective, and motivating learning environments. Today's students seek to apply innovative technological tools and generate dynamic, interactive processes both inside and outside the classroom (Pérez Cascante & Ramírez Ávila, 2022). For this reason, it is essential to update curricula, strengthen pedagogical approaches, and continuously prepare teaching staff with relevant competencies. Furthermore, educational institutions must recognize and address the evolving profile of incoming students, which directly results from their immersion in a society characterized by rapid and constant technological changes.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in English language learning have significantly transformed how students engage with content and have facilitated the development of essential language skills, such as reading comprehension. According to Chan & Lo (2024), ICTs enhance motivation and interaction by providing multimodal environments that integrate text, images, and audio, thereby stimulating diverse linguistic abilities in the process of English learning. At present, a wide variety of digital platforms and multimedia resources combining text, audio, video, exercises, and interactive games support independent and personalized practice, which are fundamental components in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.

In the EFL classroom, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be employed to design interactive, engaging, and collaborative activities aimed at enhancing reading comprehension through dynamic instructional strategies. For instance, teachers may implement inference exercises, utilize online games to reinforce vocabulary, and incorporate formative assessment tools such as automated quizzes. ICTs may also serve to present interactive content, provide immediate feedback, personalize learning pathways, and facilitate peer collaboration, among other advantages. In this manner, technology functions as a valuable ally in fostering critical reading skills and promoting deep comprehension.

Motivation in the EFL Classroom

A decisive factor in student success is learning motivation, particularly in the context of foreign language acquisition, as it directly influences learners' effort, persistence, and willingness to engage in educational activities. According to Maimaiti & Hew, (2025). Motivation may be intrinsic, arising from personal interest and satisfaction in learning, or extrinsic, stemming from external rewards such as grades, recognition, or incentives. Within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, understanding these forms of motivation enables teachers to design pedagogical strategies that effectively foster student engagement and active participation.

Motivated students can take on linguistic challenges, explore new forms of expression, and maintain continuous learning. This creates an environment conducive to building stronger, more sustainable, and transferable communicative skills across various contexts. For this reason, in the English classroom, students must be encouraged through the design of authentic, engaging, and interactive activities centered on their interests and real-life needs. For example, collaborative projects, structured debates, creative role-plays, or relevant language games can be implemented to promote active participation. The teacher's role is that

of a mediator who intentionally fosters motivation through meaningful, transformative, and enriching learning experiences (Cajamarca et al., 2020).

Developing English Reading Comprehension

Developing English reading comprehension in EFL contexts entails not only the decoding of words but also the active construction of meaning from written texts. In this regard, it highlights that effective reading comprehension requires learners to activate prior schemata, identify main ideas, and recognize specific details in order to critically interpret information (Alvarez et al., 2026). Within the process of English language learning, this skill is cultivated through structured activities that integrate both extensive and intensive reading, carefully adapted to the linguistic level of the group (Laličić & Dubravac, 2021).

The consistent application of strategies such as skimming (global reading) and scanning (focused reading) enables students to process information more efficiently (Pido & Mubarakah, 2024). The significance of these strategies lies in their contribution to cognitive development, as they require learners to connect new linguistic structures with their prior knowledge of both language and the world. A fundamental aspect of developing reading comprehension is sustained exposure to a wide range of text genres and formats that reflect real-life contexts in which English is used (De Wilde et al., 2020; Tran & Miralpeix, 2024). Consequently, teachers may select authentic and up-to-date materials, including gamified resources, with the communicative purpose of fostering interest and motivation.

The development of reading strategies mediated by ICT and gamification should enable students to plan the overall reading task, while also considering their own context, motivation, and availability (Fahad Alzuhair & Mohammed Alkhuzaim, 2022). Moreover, such strategies should support the monitoring, revision, and regulation of what has been read, as well as appropriate decision-making in accordance with the intended objectives. Some authors underscore that effective reading requires the use of strategies such as anticipation, purpose-setting, and hypothesis testing, which must be explicitly taught at each stage: pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading (Bungacho & Palacios, 2026). Consequently, it is essential to design engaging learning environments in which students utilize virtual platforms or digital games to interact with content, receive immediate feedback, and strengthen their textual analysis skills.

Levels of Reading Proficiency in a Foreign Language

Levels of reading proficiency in a foreign language correspond to the cognitive and linguistic skills that students progressively develop as they interact with written texts presented in diverse formats and authentic contexts. Beginning levels emphasize word decoding and literal comprehension, whereas intermediate levels promote inferences, synthesis, and organization of ideas, ultimately progressing toward critical and reflective reading at more advanced levels of language learning proficiency (Safitri & Melati, 2023).

These levels function as a guide for selecting the most appropriate tasks to strengthen communicative competence and are particularly valuable in EFL classrooms, where instruction seeks to balance linguistic accuracy with textual fluency. In terms of classroom application, reading activities must be carefully designed to address students' needs and proficiency levels. Teachers may employ graded texts, visual diagrams, and collaborative activities to reinforce both comprehension and written production, thereby enabling students to progress from controlled tasks to more open and authentic activities (Yamasque Martínez et al., 2024). In the case of reading, learners advance from short, adapted texts to longer and

more authentic materials, a progression that ensures increasingly meaningful and sustainable learning.

The gamification resources offered by ICTs assist students in identifying both strengths and areas for improvement in reading comprehension, thereby fostering greater autonomy and reflective learning (Julita, 2023). They also enable teachers to adjust their pedagogical practice to address the different stages of proficiency, achieving more strategic, adaptive, and effective learning outcomes across diverse educational contexts and communicative situations (Deterding et al., 2011).

Gamification in the EFL Classroom

Gamification refers to the incorporation of game elements into non-game contexts, such as classrooms, to motivate, engage, and enhance learning processes. Advances in technology have reshaped educational environments, making this strategy an effective pedagogical tool for fostering student engagement, promoting persistence, and generating more meaningful learning experiences. Gamification as the application of game dynamics, mechanics, and aesthetics in educational contexts, with the explicit aim of transforming routine academic tasks into more engaging, challenging, and rewarding activities that stimulate motivation and sustained participation (Christopoulos & Mystakidis, 2023).

In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, gamification allows students to confront linguistic challenges within a safe and motivating environment, thereby fostering greater confidence and autonomy. This perspective aligns with the notion that learning through play facilitates the acquisition of communicative skills and supports long-term knowledge retention. In this regard, gamification may be implemented in the EFL classroom through digital platforms, group dynamics, and face-to-face activities that incorporate rewards, points, badges, and progress levels (Cajamarca et al., 2020).

In line with the above, gamification can strongly engage students through its elements of challenge and recognition, while also fostering extrinsic motivation through visible rewards. Within this approach, the learner assumes the role of the central protagonist in the educational process, consistent with contemporary student-centered methodologies (Julita, 2023). It is important to highlight, however, that the effective implementation of gamification in the English classroom requires careful planning and adaptation to the specific needs and characteristics of the group (Chan & Lo, 2024; Li et al., 2024).

Essential Steps for Designing an Effective Gamification Framework

Designing an effective gamification framework necessitates a well-structured plan and a precise definition of learning objectives, as these serve to guide the selection of appropriate platforms, mechanics, and dynamics. It is crucial to identify the specific competencies to be developed and the outcomes expected from students, ensuring that gamification functions not merely as a recreational component but as a means of achieving concrete pedagogical objectives (Vásquez et al., 2025). In the context of English language learning, this process involves determining whether the primary goal is to enhance reading comprehension, foster oral production, or strengthen vocabulary acquisition (Maimaiti & Hew, 2025).

It is essential to understand the characteristics of the audience participating in gamification by identifying their motivations and interests, thereby enabling the design to be tailored to their specific needs. Furthermore, it is necessary to define the desired behaviors in learners, taking into account their prior experience. Equally important is the establishment of the game's dynamics and elements, such as points, badges (virtual rewards), or progressive

difficulty levels, ensuring that challenges remain both achievable and relevant. Emphasizes that the integration of points, levels, badges, missions, and immediate feedback serves to sustain attention and reinforce accomplishments, thereby enhancing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Christopoulos & Mystakidis, 2023).

Once all of these elements are integrated, gamification functions as an effective pedagogical tool that extends beyond its playful component. Following the completion of the gamified experience, continuous evaluation, feedback, and adjustments are necessary to ensure its effectiveness. Monitoring how students interact with activities enables educators to identify difficulties, adjust levels of complexity, and reinforce the elements that are most motivating (Chan & Lo, 2024).

Gamification Strategy and Teaching English Reading Comprehension

The gamification educational strategy for reading comprehension employs elements of game design to enhance student interest and engagement in the learning process. Its implementation involves not only the introduction of games but also the integration of reward dynamics, challenges, and problem-solving activities. These strategies, mediated by gamification through ICTs, allow reading comprehension to be approached progressively within engaging and meaningful scenarios, transforming texts into missions or challenges to be accomplished. For instance, each reading task may represent a level to be unlocked, with immediate feedback facilitating self-regulation of learning and potentially reducing the anxiety commonly associated with acquiring a foreign language.

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, gamification can be adapted to support processes that facilitate reading comprehension. This approach also requires the activation of prior knowledge, the formulation of hypotheses, and the verification of information. Understanding a text is not a passive activity, but rather involves the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Bungacho & Palacios, 2026). In this regard, gamification can strengthen these strategies by transforming reading into an intellectual challenge, employing resources such as clues, timers, and rewards to reinforce accurate comprehension (Guanotasig Cando et al., 2025).

This strategy is particularly valuable in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where linguistic limitations may occasionally diminish student motivation. Through the integration of game mechanics, educators can design more immersive learning experiences that support meaning construction, enhance vocabulary acquisition, and promote the development of inference skills in both engaging and effective ways. Gamified strategy must be aligned with clearly defined learning outcomes, ensuring that the game dynamics do not overshadow the instructional content (Rapp et al., 2019). The effectiveness of reading comprehension development relies on thorough planning and its alignment with both the learners' needs and the curricular objectives.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative approach within an action research design, aimed at understanding and improving English reading comprehension through the implementation of gamification strategies supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Action research is particularly suitable for educational contexts, as it integrates systematic inquiry with pedagogical intervention, allowing the researcher to diagnose, act, and reflect in iterative cycles (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). This approach enables not only the analysis of learning processes but also the transformation of classroom practices.

Research Design and Variables

The independent variable was the implementation of gamification strategies in reading activities, operationalized through the integration of digital platforms such as Kahoot and Wordwall, incorporating elements including points, levels, challenges, and immediate feedback. These elements are consistent with gamification theory, which emphasizes the role of game mechanics in enhancing motivation and engagement (Christopoulos & Mystakidis, 2023; Chan & Lo, 2024).

The dependent variable was students' English reading comprehension, defined as their ability to identify main ideas, recognize specific details, and make inferences from texts, in line with contemporary definitions of reading as a cognitive and interpretative process (Laličić & Dubravac, 2021). Additionally, student motivation and engagement were considered supporting constructs, given their direct influence on learning outcomes in EFL contexts (Maimaiti & Hew, 2025).

Participants

The study involved a non-probabilistic sample of 33 A2-level students from a public educational institution in Ecuador. This sampling method was selected based on accessibility and relevance to the research context, which is characteristic of qualitative and action research designs. According to Hernández Sampieri et al. (2014), non-probability sampling allows researchers to focus on participants who provide meaningful information about the phenomenon under study.

Research Instruments

Three instruments were employed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling methodological triangulation. Triangulation enhances the validity and credibility of findings by combining multiple data sources and perspectives (Creswell, 2014).

The first instrument was a Diagnostic Reading Comprehension Test, administered as a pretest to determine students' initial level of comprehension. The test consisted of eight open-ended questions designed to assess literal, inferential, and global comprehension. Responses were evaluated using a four-point analytic rubric, with a maximum score of 32 points, allowing the classification of performance into four levels: high, adequate, basic, and limited.

The second instrument was a Reflective Journal, used by the teacher-researcher during the intervention phase. This observation-based tool documented students' participation, interaction, motivation, and evidence of reading comprehension development. The journal followed a structured format, including categories such as activity description, level of engagement, observed difficulties, and reflective analysis, generating qualitative data on classroom dynamics.

The third instrument was a semi-structured Focus Group Interview, conducted after the intervention to explore students' perceptions, attitudes, and motivation toward gamified reading activities. The interview included guiding questions addressing perceived learning improvement, engagement, and the use of ICT tools. Data were analyzed through thematic categorization to identify recurring patterns and shared experiences.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, the diagnostic test was applied to establish a baseline of students' reading comprehension. Second, gamification strategies were implemented over a series of reading activities, during which the reflective journal was used to document the process. Finally, the focus group interview was conducted to gather students' perceptions after the intervention.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a triangulation approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data from the diagnostic test were analyzed descriptively to identify performance levels. Qualitative data from the reflective journal and focus group were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the identification of key categories such as motivation, interaction, and reading comprehension development. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the impact of gamification on both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning.

RESULTS

The following section presents the results obtained from the first part of the survey administered randomly to 40 higher education students in Ecuador. Section 1 focuses on the age range and self-assessed English proficiency.

In this study, the independent variable is the implementation of gamification strategies supported by ICT tools, specifically the integration of digital platforms such as Kahoot and Wordwall to design interactive reading activities. Gamification is operationalized through the incorporation of game elements, including points, levels, challenges, and immediate feedback, within English reading comprehension tasks. The dependent variable is students' English reading comprehension development, which refers to their ability to identify main ideas, recognize specific details, make inferences, and demonstrate critical understanding of written texts at the A2 level. Additionally, student motivation and engagement are considered associated constructs, as they are explored through qualitative evidence collected during the intervention. These variables are examined through methodological triangulation using a diagnostic test, a reflective journal, and focus group discussions.

The three instruments were designed to allow methodological triangulation. The diagnostic test provided baseline quantitative data, the reflective journal documented behavioral and engagement evidence during the intervention, and the focus group offered qualitative insight into students' perceptions and attitudes. Together, these instruments allowed a comprehensive understanding of the impact of gamification strategies on reading comprehension.

Diagnostic Test of Reading Comprehension

The diagnostic test of reading comprehension was applied at the beginning of the research process in order to identify students' initial level of English reading comprehension. This instrument is directly related to the first specific objective of the study, which aims to determine students' initial level of reading comprehension before the implementation of gamification strategies.

The diagnostic test consisted of a short reading text followed by open-ended comprehension questions. Students' responses were evaluated using an analytic rubric that

classified performance into four levels: Excellent, Good, Basic, and Limited. The analysis of the results reveals that most students demonstrated difficulties in higher-order reading skills, such as inference, identification of implicit information, and elaboration of complete answers.

Although several students were able to identify the main idea of the text, their responses were often literal and showed grammatical inaccuracies. This indicates that while students possess basic decoding abilities, they struggle to construct deeper meaning from the text. The results confirm that students' initial reading comprehension level is predominantly basic or limited, which justifies the implementation of gamification-based strategies as an instructional intervention.

Table 1

Reading Comprehension Levels Based on the Diagnostic Test

Performance Level	Description of Reading Skills	Observed Trend
Excellent	Accurately identifies explicit and implicit ideas and provides coherent answers	Rare
Good	Identifies the main idea and some supporting details	Moderate
Basic	Demonstrates literal comprehension with partial or inaccurate responses	Predominant
Limited	Shows significant difficulty understanding the text	Predominant

Note. Source: own elaboration based on the results.

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that the majority of students fall within the Basic and Limited performance levels. This finding highlights the need for innovative pedagogical strategies that promote motivation, engagement, and meaningful interaction with reading texts.

Reflective Teacher Journal

The reflective teacher journal was used during the implementation phase of the gamified activities. Its purpose was to document classroom experiences, student behavior, emotional responses, and evidence of reading comprehension development. This instrument is aligned with the second specific objective of the study, which focuses on implementing gamified activities to promote English reading comprehension skills. The reflective journal did not measure the independent variable directly. Instead, it documented observable student behaviors, participation patterns, and engagement indicators during the implementation of gamification strategies.

The analysis of the reflective journal entries shows a notable transformation in classroom dynamics after the introduction of gamification through digital platforms such as Kahoot and Wordwall. Students displayed higher levels of motivation, active participation, and collaboration compared to traditional lessons. The journal records that even students who were previously shy or passive became more engaged in the learning process.

From a pedagogical perspective, the teacher observed improvements in students' ability to identify the main idea of texts, recognize key vocabulary, and make simple inferences. Additionally, the use of gamified activities contributed to a reduction in anxiety commonly associated with reading tasks in a foreign language. The playful and competitive elements of gamification created a positive learning environment that encouraged risk-taking and confidence.

Table 2*Emerging Categories from the Reflective Teacher Journal*

Category	Observed Evidence	Pedagogical Interpretation
Motivation	Increased enthusiasm and participation	Gamification enhances learner engagement
Interaction	Spontaneous collaboration among students	Learning becomes socially mediated
Reading Comprehension	Improved identification of main ideas and details	Cognitive reinforcement of reading skills
Emotional Climate	Reduced anxiety and increased confidence	Supportive and motivating learning environment

Note. Source: own elaboration based on the results.

Focus Group

The focus group was conducted at the end of the intervention phase in order to explore students' perceptions, experiences, and opinions regarding the use of gamification in English reading comprehension activities. This instrument corresponds to the third specific objective of the study, which aims to explore students' perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of gamification strategies in reading comprehension lessons.

The focus group analysis reveals that students hold highly positive attitudes toward gamified learning activities. Participants reported feeling more comfortable, motivated, and interested during English classes that incorporated digital games. Many students emphasized that gamification helped them better understand reading texts, retain vocabulary, and improve grammatical awareness.

Students also highlighted the importance of healthy competition and immediate feedback as motivating factors. While some technical difficulties were mentioned, particularly related to internet connectivity, these challenges did not significantly diminish the overall learning experience. The majority of participants expressed a clear preference for gamified lessons over traditional instructional methods.

Table 3*Students' Perceptions of Gamification in Reading Activities*

Theme	Recurrent Opinions	Educational Significance
Motivation	Learning is more enjoyable and engaging	Increased commitment to learning
Reading Comprehension	Texts are easier to understand	Enhanced meaning construction
Participation	All students are encouraged to participate	Inclusive learning environment
Challenges	Connectivity issues	Contextual limitations

Note. Source: own elaboration based on the results.

The focus group findings support the idea that gamification fosters a student-centered learning environment that promotes active participation and meaningful reading comprehension.

Triangulation of Results

In order to strengthen the credibility of the findings, a triangulation of data from the three research instruments was conducted. The convergence of results from the diagnostic test, reflective journal, and focus group provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of gamification on English reading comprehension.

Table 4
Triangulation of Research Instruments

Research Objective	Instrument	Main Evidence
Diagnose reading comprehension level	Diagnostic Test	Predominantly basic and limited reading skills
Implement gamified strategies	Reflective Journal	Increased motivation and interaction
Reflect on reading improvement	Focus Group	Positive student perceptions and engagement

Note. Source: own elaboration based on the results.

The triangulated results demonstrate consistency across instruments, confirming that gamification contributes positively to students' motivation, participation, and development of English reading comprehension skills.

The findings indicate that A2-level students initially presented low levels of reading comprehension; however, the implementation of gamification-based strategies led to increased motivation, improved classroom interaction, and enhanced reading comprehension skills. These results provide empirical support for the effectiveness of gamification as a pedagogical strategy in the EFL classroom.

DISCUSSION

The discussion is organized according to the specific objectives of the study, allowing a coherent interpretation of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework. Regarding the first objective, the diagnostic test revealed that most A2-level students demonstrated basic and limited reading comprehension skills, especially in higher-order processes such as inference and interpretation. Although some learners identified main ideas, their understanding remained largely literal, confirming a gap between decoding and meaning construction. This finding aligns with Lalić and Dubravac (2021), who determined that reading comprehension requires complex cognitive processes, including inference and integration of prior knowledge. Likewise, Bungacho and Palacios (2026) emphasize that effective reading depends on the development of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, which appear insufficiently developed. In consequence, the diagnostic validates the need for pedagogical intervention.

In relation to the second objective, the implementation of gamification by using platforms such as Kahoot and Wordwall produced a significant improvement in motivation, participation, and interaction. The results are consistent with Chan and Lo (2024) and Christopoulos and Mystakidis (2023), who consider that gamification enhances engagement by integrating elements such as points, challenges, and immediate feedback. From a cognitive perspective, students showed progress in identifying main ideas, developing inferential skills and recognizing key vocabulary. This is linked to the idea that ICT-mediated contexts promote meaningful learning by combining interaction and feedback. Moreover, gamification reduced anxiety and fostered a positive classroom environment, which is essential in the EFL context where affective factors influence learning (Maimatu & Hew, 2025).

Concerning the third objective, the focus group findings indicate that students perceive gamification as an engaging and effective learning strategy, reporting enjoyment, comprehension, and willingness to participate. These perceptions are linked to the research by Cajamarca et. al. (2020) and Julita (2023), who showed that gamification promotes student-centered learning and active participation. However, some limitations were analyzed, particularly related to technological obstacles such as Internet connectivity, which may affect its implementation in public educational contexts.

To sum up, gamification positively impacts both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. While students initially led to increased motivation, improved interaction, and enhanced reading skills. These findings suggest that gamification is an effective pedagogical strategy in the EFL context, provided that it is carefully plan.

CONCLUSIONS

The diagnostic assessment revealed that most A2 level students initially demonstrated limited or basic reading comprehension skills. Although some learners were able to identify the main idea of short texts, they experienced difficulties with inference, interpretation of implicit information, and complete responses. The results show that the student relied on literal comprehension and showed weaknesses in higher-order reading skills. The findings confirm the existence of a gap between students' decoding abilities and their capacity to construct meaning from texts. In consequence, the diagnostic stage validated the need for pedagogical intervention and justified the implementation of innovative strategies, such as gamification, to address students' motivational and cognitive challenges in English reading comprehension.

The implementation of gamified activities using digital platforms such as Kahoot and Wordwall had a positive impact on the learning process. The findings show that gamification significantly increased student motivation, participation, and interaction during reading activities. Students became more engaged and willing to participate, including those who were reluctant or passive in regular lessons. Furthermore, the gamified environment reduced anxiety and fostered a supportive classroom climate. From a pedagogical perspective, gamification facilitated the reinforcement of reading strategies, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension of main ideas. The implementation phase demonstrated that gamification is an effective instructional strategy for promoting active learning and meaningful engagement in English reading comprehension.

The reflection phase, supported by the focus group and the reflective journal, indicated a clear improvement in students attituded toward reading in English. Students reported greater enjoyment, confidence, and understanding when engaging in gamified reading tasks. The results suggest that gamification contributed not only to cognitive improvement but also to positive emotional and motivational outcomes. Students considered reading activities as more accessible and less intimidating, which encouraged sustained participation and collaboration. Although contextual challenges such as Internet connectivity were identified, they did not outweigh the overall benefits of the strategy. To sum up, gamification proved to be a valuable approach for enhancing English reading comprehension and fostering a learner-centered, motivating educational experience.

It is recommended that English teachers integrate gamification strategies in a regular basis into reading comprehension lessons in order to keep student motivation and engagement. Educators should receive ongoing training on the effective pedagogical use of digital tools such as Kahoot and Wordwall to ensure their alignment with learning objectives rather than using them for entertainment. Schools should strengthen technological infrastructure, especially internet connectivity, to support the consistent implementation of

ICT-based strategies. In addition, future research could combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to measure the long-term impact of gamification on reading comprehension development. Finally, curriculum designers are encouraged to incorporate gamified activities into official instructional planning, especially in public school contexts, as a means of fostering inclusive, Dynamic, and meaningful English language learning experiences.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Alvarez, A. N. M., Patiño, A. E. C., Caicedo, J. A. L., & Arevalo, T. V. O. (2026). Reading comprehension skills and lexical knowledge among second-year high school learners of English as a foreign language in Azogues. *Ciencia y Reflexión*, 5(1), 260–282. <https://short.do/d-ZNUy>
- Bungacho, S. J. C., & Palacios, A. de J. R. (2026). Reading comprehension in EFL young learners. *RECIAMUC*, 10(Especial 1), 463–471. <https://short.do/Wj0bYw>
- Cajamarca, L. P. R., Herrera, D. G. G., Vizcaíno, C. F. G., & Álvarez, J. C. E. (2020). Alianza entre aprendizaje y juego: Gamificación como estrategia metodológica que motiva el aprendizaje del inglés. *Revista Arbitrada Interdisciplinaria Koinonía*, 5(1), 370–391. <https://short.do/JZy4Lh>
- Chan, S., & Lo, N. (2024). Enhancing EFL/ESL instruction through gamification: A comprehensive review of empirical evidence. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1395155. <https://short.do/PXyygQ>
- Cheng, J., Lu, C., & Xiao, Q. (2025). Effects of gamification on EFL learning: A quasi-experimental study of reading proficiency and language enjoyment among Chinese undergraduates. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1448916. <https://short.do/J8tBUM>
- Christopoulos, A., & Mystakidis, S. (2023). Gamification in education. *Encyclopedia*, 3(4), 1223–1243. <https://short.do/byYkz4>
- De Wilde, V., Brysbaert, M., & Eyckmans, J. (2020). Learning English through out-of-school exposure: Which levels of language proficiency are attained and which types of input are important? *Bilingualism*, 23(1), 171–185. https://short.do/fA-k_t
- Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L. (2011). From game design elements to gamefulness: Defining gamification. In *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference* (pp. 9–15). <https://short.do/qz3kE1>
- Fahad Alzuhair, N., & Mohammed Alkhuzaim, K. (2022). The effectiveness of a gamified electronic application in developing reading comprehension abilities among first-grade intermediate students in Saudi Arabia. *Education Research International*, 2022. <https://short.do/izCCCu>
- González Mares, M. (2019). Reseña de Metodología de la investigación: Las rutas cuantitativa, cualitativa y mixta. *Revista Universitaria Digital de Ciencias Sociales (RUDICS)*, 10(18), 92–95. <https://short.do/TPzK13>
- Guanotasig Cando, M. B., Baño Claudio, J. E., & Corrales Suárez, N. A. (2025). Incidencia de la gamificación en las habilidades lectoescriptoras en estudiantes de básica superior. *Explorador Digital*, 9(2), 65–81. <https://acortar.link/k6rgLu>
- Hernández Sampieri, R., Fernández Collado, C., & Baptista Lucio, P. (2014). *Metodología de la investigación* (6ª ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Julita, R. (2023). The impact of gamification on EFL students' reading comprehension. *Journal of English as a Foreign Language Education (JEFLE)*, 4(2), 136–149. <https://acortar.link/S9l5pv>
- Laličić, A., & Dubravac, V. (2021). The role of reading in English language classrooms. *MAP Social Sciences*, 1(1), 23–36. <https://acortar.link/wNE75Q>

- Li, L., Hew, K. F., & Du, J. (2024). Gamification enhances student intrinsic motivation, perceptions of autonomy and relatedness, but minimal impact on competency: A meta-analysis and systematic review. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 72(2), 765–796. <https://acortar.link/opPMyp>
- Maimaiti, G., & Hew, K. F. (2025). Gamified self-regulated learning improves EFL reading comprehension, motivation, self-regulation skills and process patterns. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 67, 101042. <https://acortar.link/OnFTnY>
- Pérez Cascante, L., & Ramírez Ávila, M. R. (2022). EFL research series for teachers: Pedagogical innovations facilitated by ICT in the classroom. Universidad Casa Grande.
- Pido, N. W., & Mubarakah, A. (2024). The effectiveness of using skimming and scanning techniques in improving reading comprehension: A systematic literature review. *VISA: Journal of Vision and Ideas*, 4(2), 995–1001. <https://acortar.link/UU436N>
- Rapp, A., Hopfgartner, F., Hamari, J., Linehan, C., & Cena, F. (2019). Strengthening gamification studies: Current trends and future opportunities of gamification research. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 127, 1–6. <https://acortar.link/vmaLbX>
- Safitri, N. T., & Melati, M. (2023). EFL learners' reading comprehension level: ¿What do they portray? *Scope: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 7(2), 247–253. <https://acortar.link/8zTdis>
- Tran, L., & Miralpeix, I. (2024). Out-of-school exposure to English in EFL teenage learners: ¿Is it related to academic performance? *Education Sciences*, 14(4). <https://acortar.link/db42YW>
- Vásquez, I. M. M., Almeida, M. A. V., & Ortega, M. R. M. (2025). Design of a pedagogical gamification tool for improving interaction in online EFL education in the province of Imbabura. *Arandu UTIC*, 12(3), 3898–3921. <https://acortar.link/t7PONR>
- Yamasque Martínez, E. E., Andrade, N. S., & Martínez, Y. E. (2024). Estrategias de lectura intensiva en la mejora de la comprensión lectora en EFL. *Pacha: Revista de Estudios Contemporáneos del Sur Global*, 5(13), e240240. <https://acortar.link/gBhBRt>