

EXPLORING LOWER SECONDARY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GAMIFIED GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This study explores lower secondary school students' perceptions of gamified grammar instruction in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. While grammar is widely recognised as a central component of communicative competence, it is often associated with low motivation, anxiety, and limited engagement. In response to these challenges, gamification has been proposed as a pedagogical approach capable of enhancing learners' affective and motivational experience.

The study adopts a classroom-based, exploratory design involving 37 students aged 12–15. Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention questionnaires examining students' attitudes toward grammar learning, self-perceived competence, confidence, and emotional responses. During the intervention phase, a range of game-based activities was integrated into regular grammar instruction.

The findings indicate a shift toward more positive learner perceptions following the introduction of gamified activities. Students reported increased engagement, greater confidence in using grammatical structures, and a more positive emotional experience during grammar lessons. At the same time, the results reflect learners' subjective evaluations and should not be interpreted as evidence of measurable gains in grammatical competence.

The study contributes to ongoing discussions on gamification in language education by providing insight into how low-tech, classroom-based game strategies may influence the affective dimension of grammar learning. The findings suggest that gamification can function as a supportive pedagogical tool within traditional instruction, particularly in fostering learner engagement and reducing negative emotional responses. However, further research using controlled designs and objective measures is needed to assess its impact on language development.

Key words: Gamification; Grammar teaching; EFL; Student Engagement; Lower secondary education.

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1 Introduction

In the context of globalisation, English has become a dominant medium of communication across academic, professional, and social domains. Consequently, the effective teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has attracted sustained scholarly attention within applied linguistics and language education research. Among the various components of language proficiency, grammar plays a central role in enabling learners to construct meaning accurately and participate in effective communication. Within communicative competence frameworks, grammatical competence constitutes a foundational dimension of language ability, supporting both accuracy and fluency in language use (Canale & Swain, 1980; Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010).

Despite its recognised importance, grammar instruction remains one of the most challenging aspects of EFL teaching. Traditional approaches often rely on rule-based instruction and mechanical exercises, which may not promote meaningful engagement or communicative use of language (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Ellis, 2006). As a result, grammar learning is frequently perceived by students as difficult, abstract, and monotonous, which can negatively affect motivation and classroom participation. These perceptions are particularly evident among younger learners, who may require more interactive and engaging learning environments in order to sustain attention and involvement in the learning process.

Motivation has been consistently identified as a key determinant of successful language learning, influencing learners' effort, persistence, and achievement (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). From a psychological perspective, motivation is shaped by both individual and contextual factors, including teaching methods and classroom practices. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) provides a useful framework for understanding this process, suggesting that learners are more intrinsically motivated when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported. In more traditional grammar classrooms, however, these needs may not always be fully addressed, potentially resulting in disengagement, low confidence, or anxiety related to language use.

In response to these challenges, gamification has emerged as a pedagogical approach aimed at enhancing learner engagement and motivation. Gamification is commonly defined as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011). In educational settings, it involves the incorporation of elements such as points, competition, rewards, and structured challenges in order to create more interactive and motivating learning experiences. Research has suggested that gamification can support learner participation and foster more positive attitudes toward learning tasks, including those related to language learning (Hamari et al., 2014; Sailer & Homner, 2020; Waer, 2021).

Within language education, gamified approaches have been associated with increased engagement and more positive learner attitudes, particularly in areas that are traditionally perceived as difficult, such as grammar instruction. By embedding practice within interactive activities, gamification may encourage learners to engage

more actively with linguistic forms while reducing the perceived pressure associated with accuracy and error correction. At the same time, its effectiveness should not be assumed as uniform, as it depends on factors such as instructional design, learner characteristics, and classroom context (Dicheva & Dichev, 2015; Ratinho & Martins, 2023). Furthermore, much of the existing research relies on learners' self-reported perceptions, raising questions about how these perceptions relate to actual learning outcomes.

In addition, a considerable proportion of studies on gamification in language learning focus on digital environments or higher education contexts, while less attention has been given to everyday classroom practices at lower secondary level. This suggests the need for further classroom-based research that explores how gamification is experienced by learners in authentic instructional settings.

Against this background, the present study adopts a classroom-based, exploratory approach to examine lower secondary students' perceptions of gamified grammar instruction in an EFL context. Rather than aiming to establish causal relationships, the study focuses on learners' self-reported attitudes, confidence, and emotional responses before and after the integration of game-based activities into grammar lessons. In doing so, it seeks to provide insight into the affective dimension of grammar learning and the potential role of gamification as a supportive pedagogical strategy within regular classroom practice.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Grammar in EFL learning

Grammar has long been recognised as a central component of language proficiency, forming a core dimension of communicative competence. Within the influential model proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), grammatical competence encompasses knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, and sentence formation, all of which are essential for producing meaningful and accurate communication. While communicative language teaching has shifted attention toward fluency and interaction, grammar remains indispensable, particularly in formal educational contexts where accuracy and clarity are emphasised (Ellis, 2006).

However, the role of grammar in language instruction has been the subject of considerable debate. Traditional approaches, often associated with form-focused instruction, have been criticised for relying heavily on explicit rule presentation and mechanical practice, which may not lead to effective communicative use (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). At the same time, purely communicative approaches that neglect grammar instruction have also been shown to limit learners' ability to achieve accuracy (Ellis, 2006). As a result, contemporary perspectives advocate for a balanced approach that integrates form and meaning, combining explicit instruction with meaningful practice.

Despite these developments, grammar continues to be perceived by learners as one of the most difficult aspects of language learning. Research has shown that students frequently associate grammar with complexity, abstract rules, and repetitive tasks, which can lead to reduced motivation and engagement (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). These perceptions are particularly pronounced among younger learners, who may struggle with decontextualised grammar exercises and require more interactive and engaging learning environments. These perceptions are particularly pronounced among younger learners, who often require more interactive and contextualised learning environments. In addition, young learners tend to benefit from varied, attractive, and multimodal activities that sustain attention and support engagement in the learning process (Ilieva, 2021).

2.2 Motivation and affective factors in language learning

Motivation plays a crucial role in second language acquisition, influencing learners' effort, persistence, and overall achievement. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) emphasise that motivation is not a static trait, but a dynamic process shaped by both individual and contextual factors, including teaching methods, classroom environment, and task design. In particular, learners' attitudes toward classroom activities can significantly affect their willingness to participate and engage with the learning process.

From a psychological perspective, Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) provides a useful framework for understanding motivation in educational settings. According to this theory, intrinsic motivation is enhanced when learners' basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are satisfied. In contrast, learning environments that fail to support these needs may lead to disengagement, anxiety, and reduced performance.

In the context of grammar learning, affective factors such as anxiety and self-confidence are particularly relevant. Grammar tasks often require learners to produce language accurately, which may increase fear of making mistakes and lead to reluctance in participation. As a result, students may develop avoidance behaviours or negative attitudes toward grammar instruction (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Creating a supportive and engaging learning environment is therefore essential for reducing anxiety and fostering confidence.

2.3 Digital transformation and the emergence of gamification

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly reshaped educational practices, leading to the integration of online learning environments, teleconferencing, and web-based instructional models (Kearsley, 2000). These transformations have created new opportunities for interactive and learner-centred pedagogies, particularly in language education, where engagement and motivation are central to successful learning.

Within this evolving educational landscape, gamification has emerged as a prominent instructional approach aimed at enhancing learner participation and

sustaining motivation. The increasing interest in gamification since the early 2010s reflects educators' efforts to respond to the challenges of maintaining student engagement in both digital and traditional learning environments (Dicheva & Dichev, 2015).

2.4 Conceptualising gamification in education

Gamification is commonly defined as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011). This conceptualisation emphasises the integration of elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, levels, and feedback mechanisms into instructional settings in order to enhance engagement and participation.

In educational contexts, gamification is understood as the incorporation of game elements and gameful experiences into the design of learning processes (Dicheva & Dichev, 2015). This approach aims to influence learners' behaviour, encourage participation, and foster collaboration. Similarly, Hamari et al. (2014) argue that gamification can increase user activity and engagement, particularly when game elements are meaningfully aligned with pedagogical objectives.

More recent research further highlights the complexity of gamification. Ukgoda (2025) suggests that while gamification can enhance engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes, its effectiveness depends on contextual factors, including instructional design, learner characteristics, and the specific combination of game elements employed.

2.5 Gamification and motivation: theoretical perspectives

The effectiveness of gamification is closely linked to established theories of motivation, particularly Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which emphasises the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation. Gamified learning environments often support these needs by offering structured challenges, immediate feedback, and opportunities for achievement and social interaction.

Empirical research supports the motivational potential of gamification. Sailer and Homner (2020), in a meta-analysis, report that gamification has a positive overall effect on cognitive, motivational, and behavioural learning outcomes, although these effects vary depending on implementation. Similarly, Ratinho and Martins (2023) highlight that gamification strategies operate at the intersection of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, using reward systems and competition to stimulate engagement while also promoting deeper involvement in learning tasks.

At the same time, research cautions against assuming uniform effectiveness. The impact of gamification is influenced by learner characteristics, including prior knowledge, motivation, and individual preferences. As a result, gamification should be viewed not as a universally effective solution, but as a context-dependent instructional approach.

2.6 Gamification in language learning and grammar instruction

In the field of language learning, gamification has been increasingly explored as a strategy for enhancing engagement and improving learning outcomes. Research suggests that gamified approaches can support language acquisition by creating interactive, feedback-rich environments that encourage active participation (Waer, 2021).

Grammar instruction, in particular, presents specific challenges, as it is often associated with rule-based learning and repetitive practice. Gamification offers a potential solution by transforming these traditionally perceived limitations into opportunities for more meaningful and interactive learning. By embedding grammatical practice within game-based activities, learners are encouraged to engage actively with language structures and to experiment with language use in a supportive environment.

Earlier classroom-oriented work in TEFL also argued that grammar games can create a more engaging and less stressful learning atmosphere, increasing learner participation and supporting more implicit, activity-based grammar teaching (Thekes, 2011).

Furthermore, gamification can contribute to reducing anxiety associated with grammar learning. Traditional grammar instruction often emphasises accuracy and error correction, which may discourage participation. In contrast, gamified environments shift the focus from error avoidance to participation and experimentation, where mistakes are treated as part of the learning process. This aligns with research suggesting that positive affective conditions support language acquisition and learner confidence (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021).

2.7 Benefits and limitations of gamification

A growing body of research highlights the potential benefits of gamification in educational settings. For example, Lister (2015) found that gamification can increase student motivation, participation, and academic performance in post-secondary contexts. Similarly, Sailer and Homner (2020) report overall positive effects on learning outcomes.

However, the literature also emphasises important limitations. The effectiveness of gamification is not uniform, and individual differences in learning preferences, prior knowledge, and attitudes toward competition can significantly influence outcomes. Some learners may respond positively to competitive elements, while others may experience discomfort or reduced motivation.

Moreover, the design of gamification plays a critical role in its success. Overreliance on extrinsic rewards, such as points and badges, may undermine intrinsic motivation if not carefully integrated into meaningful learning activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Recent research also suggests that the motivational impact of gamification may diminish over time, particularly when novelty effects wear off (Sailer & Homner, 2020; Ukgoda, 2025).

2.8 Rationale for the present study

In light of the literature reviewed, it is evident that grammar instruction continues to present both cognitive and affective challenges for learners, and that motivation plays a central role in shaping learning outcomes. At the same time, gamification has been identified as a potentially effective strategy for enhancing engagement and creating more positive learning environments.

However, there remains a gap in research concerning how gamification influences students' perceptions of grammar learning in authentic classroom settings, particularly at the lower secondary level. Much of the existing research focuses on digital platforms or higher education contexts, with comparatively limited attention given to everyday classroom practice.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining students' attitudes, confidence, and emotional responses before and after the integration of game-based activities into grammar lessons. By focusing on learners' perspectives and classroom experience, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the pedagogical value of gamification and its potential to improve grammar instruction in EFL contexts.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

The present study adopts a classroom-based, exploratory research design aimed at examining students' perceptions of gamified grammar instruction in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The research combines elements of quantitative and qualitative inquiry, relying primarily on questionnaire data complemented by classroom-based observations of instructional practice.

The study follows a pre-intervention/post-intervention structure, allowing for the comparison of students' self-reported attitudes, confidence levels, and emotional responses toward grammar learning before and after the integration of game-based activities. Rather than seeking to establish causal relationships or measure objective learning gains, the research focuses on learners' subjective experiences and perceptions of the instructional approach. This orientation is consistent with research in applied linguistics that emphasises the importance of affective and motivational factors in shaping language learning experiences (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021).

3.2 Research aim and objectives

The main aim of the study is to explore how lower secondary school students perceive the integration of gamified activities into grammar instruction. More specifically, the research seeks to examine whether the use of educational games is

associated with changes in students' reported engagement, motivation, confidence, and emotional responses to grammar learning.

The objectives of the study are:

- to assess students' attitudes toward the importance of English grammar;
- to identify the main difficulties students report in learning grammar;
- to examine the relationship between grammar learning and affective factors such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety;
- to explore students' perceptions of game-based activities integrated into grammar lessons;
- to investigate whether gamification is associated with changes in students' reported engagement and participation;
- to examine whether students perceive a reduction in anxiety and an increase in confidence during gamified lessons;
- to identify types of game-based activities perceived as suitable for lower secondary grammar instruction.

3.3 Research hypothesis

The study is guided by the following exploratory assumption: the integration of game-based activities into grammar instruction is associated with more positive student perceptions of grammar learning, including higher reported engagement, increased confidence, and reduced negative emotional responses.

This assumption is informed by previous research on motivation and gamification, which suggests that interactive and learner-centred approaches may support more positive learning experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deterding et al., 2011). However, it is important to note that the present study does not aim to establish causal relationships or measure objective improvements in grammatical competence.

3.4 Participants

The study was conducted with a sample of 37 lower secondary school students, aged between 12 and 15, enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language programme. All participants had been studying English since the preparatory grade; however, the group was not homogeneous in terms of grammatical competence, motivation, or attitudes toward grammar learning.

The sample included students with varying levels of self-perceived proficiency, ranging from beginner to advanced, as well as differing degrees of interest and engagement. Some students demonstrated high levels of participation, while others showed reluctance, often associated with lack of confidence or perceived difficulty. This diversity provided a relevant context for exploring how different learners experience gamified grammar instruction.

Given the relatively small and context-specific sample, the findings of the study are not intended to be generalised beyond the immediate educational setting.

3.5 Data collection instruments

Data were collected using two structured questionnaires designed to investigate students' perceptions and attitudes toward grammar learning (Popescu, 2025, p. 160).

3.5.1 Pre-intervention questionnaire

The first questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the study and aimed to capture students' initial perceptions of grammar learning. It included items related to: perceived importance of grammar; self-assessed grammatical competence; confidence in using grammar; attitudes toward grammar learning; emotional responses during grammar lessons; perceived difficulties; preferences for improving grammar instruction. The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice items and Likert-scale statements, allowing for the identification of general trends in students' responses.

3.5.2 Post-intervention questionnaire

The second questionnaire was administered following the implementation of gamified instructional activities. Its purpose was to explore students' perceptions of the role of game-based activities in their learning experience. The questionnaire focused on:

- perceived changes in understanding of grammar;
- changes in confidence levels;
- emotional responses during gamified lessons;
- attitudes toward the use of games in grammar instruction;
- perceived effects of gamification on engagement, motivation, and anxiety.

As in the pre-intervention phase, the instrument included a combination of multiple-choice and Likert-scale items.

3.6 Research stages

The study was conducted over a period of three instructional modules, during which game-based activities were integrated into regular grammar lessons.

The research followed three main stages:

Initial stage (pre-intervention)

Students completed the first questionnaire, providing baseline data on their perceptions, attitudes, and emotional responses toward grammar learning.

Intervention stage

A range of educational games was incorporated into grammar lessons across different grade levels. These activities included both individual and group-based tasks, such as tic-tac-toe, mime games, grammar auctions, role-play activities, and chain games. The activities were adapted to various grammatical structures, including tenses, conditional clauses, passive voice, and reported speech.

The purpose of this stage was to introduce a more interactive instructional approach and to observe how students respond to the inclusion of game-based elements in grammar practice.

Final stage (post-intervention)

At the end of the intervention period, students completed the second questionnaire, which captured their perceptions of the gamified instructional approach.

3.7 Data analysis procedures

The data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequencies and percentages, in order to identify patterns in students' responses (Popescu, 2025, p. 234). The analysis focused on comparing trends in students' self-reported perceptions before and after the intervention.

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the reliance on self-reported data, no inferential statistical analysis was conducted. The findings are therefore interpreted as indicative of general tendencies in students' perceptions rather than as statistically generalisable results.

4 Results

4.1 Pre-intervention results

The first questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the study in order to examine students' initial perceptions of grammar learning, their level of confidence, and their emotional responses during grammar lessons. These results establish a baseline for evaluating the impact of the subsequent gamification-based intervention.

4.1.1 Perceived importance of grammar

As illustrated in Figure 1, students demonstrated a strong awareness of the importance of grammar in effective communication. A clear majority of participants (62%, $n = 23$) considered grammar to be *very important*, while an additional 19% ($n = 7$) rated it as *extremely important*. A smaller proportion (16%, $n = 6$) viewed grammar as *moderately important*, and only one student (3%, $n = 1$) reported it as *slightly important*. Notably, no respondents considered grammar to be unimportant.

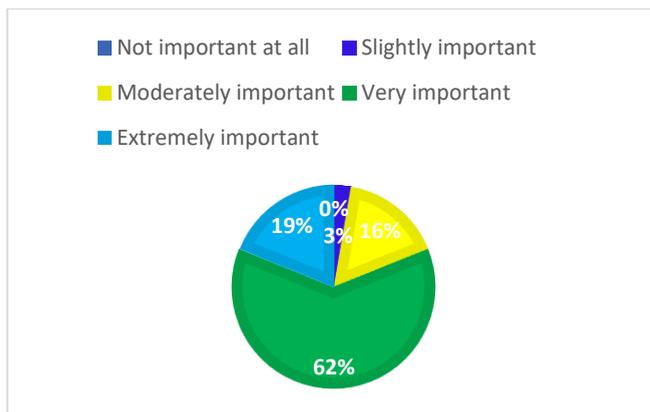


Figure 1. Distribution of responses on the perceived importance of grammar (Pre-intervention)

These findings indicate that learners do not question the relevance of grammar in language learning. On the contrary, they display a high level of metalinguistic awareness regarding its role in communication. This supports theoretical perspectives that position grammatical competence as a core component of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980).

At the same time, the absence of negative responses suggests that difficulties associated with grammar learning are not due to a lack of perceived value, but rather to other factors such as instructional methods, task design, or affective barriers. This distinction is important, as it implies that pedagogical interventions should focus on *how* grammar is taught rather than *why* it should be taught.

4.1.2 Self-assessed grammatical competence

Students' self-assessment of their grammatical competence reveals a heterogeneous distribution across proficiency levels, as shown in Figure 2. The largest group of respondents (35%, n = 13) identified their level as *basic*, followed closely by 32% (n = 12) who considered themselves *advanced*. Equal proportions (16%, n = 6) reported *intermediate* and *beginner* levels, while no participants identified as *expert*.

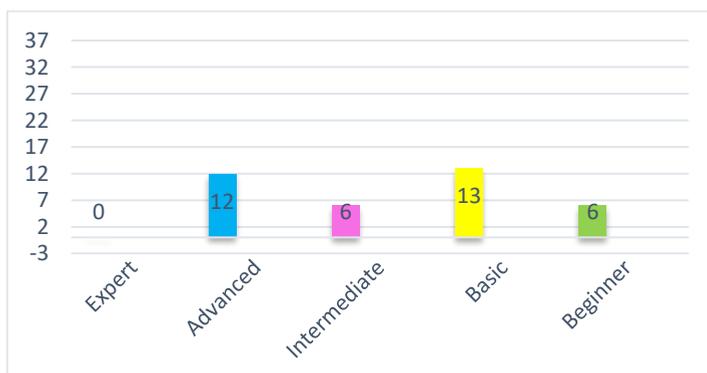


Figure 2. Self-assessed grammatical competence level of participants

This distribution suggests a diverse classroom profile, with students positioned across multiple levels of grammatical competence. The relatively high proportion of learners identifying as *basic* or *beginner* indicates that a significant number of students may experience challenges in mastering grammatical structures.

At the same time, the presence of students who perceive themselves as *advanced* highlights variability in prior knowledge and learning experiences. This diversity has important pedagogical implications, as it requires differentiated instruction that can address the needs of both lower- and higher-performing students.

Moreover, the absence of “expert” self-assessments may reflect either a realistic self-perception among learners or a lack of confidence in achieving full mastery of grammar. This finding aligns with the idea that grammar is often perceived as a complex and ongoing learning process rather than a fully attainable skill.

4.1.3 Confidence in grammar skills

Students’ responses regarding their confidence in using English grammar indicate predominantly moderate levels of self-assurance, as presented in Figure 3. The largest proportion of participants (43%, n = 16) reported being *moderately confident*, while 32% (n = 12) described themselves as *slightly confident*. Only 19% (n = 7) indicated that they were *very confident*, and a small minority (5%, n = 2) reported being *not confident at all*. Notably, no students identified as *extremely confident*.



Figure 3. Distribution of learners’ self-reported confidence in grammar skills

These results suggest that although students recognise the importance of grammar, this awareness is not necessarily accompanied by high levels of confidence in their own abilities. The predominance of moderate and low confidence levels indicates a potential gap between perceived importance and perceived competence.

This gap may be explained by the nature of grammar learning, which often involves rule application, accuracy demands, and fear of making mistakes. As a result, learners may hesitate to use grammatical structures actively, even when they understand them at a theoretical level.

The absence of “extremely confident” responses further reinforces the idea that grammar remains an area of uncertainty for many learners. This highlights the importance of instructional approaches that not only develop knowledge, but also foster confidence and willingness to use the language in communicative contexts.

4.1.4 Attitudes toward grammar learning

Students' attitudes toward grammar reveal a generally positive orientation, although this is accompanied by a clear perception of difficulty, as illustrated in Figure 4. Nearly half of the participants (49%, $n = 18$) reported that they find grammar difficult but make an effort to learn it, while 40% ($n = 15$) indicated that they consider grammar important and are interested in learning it.

A smaller proportion of students expressed more negative attitudes: 5% ($n = 2$) reported significant difficulty in understanding grammar, 3% ($n = 1$) associated grammar with boredom, and another 3% ($n = 1$) indicated a lack of interest altogether.

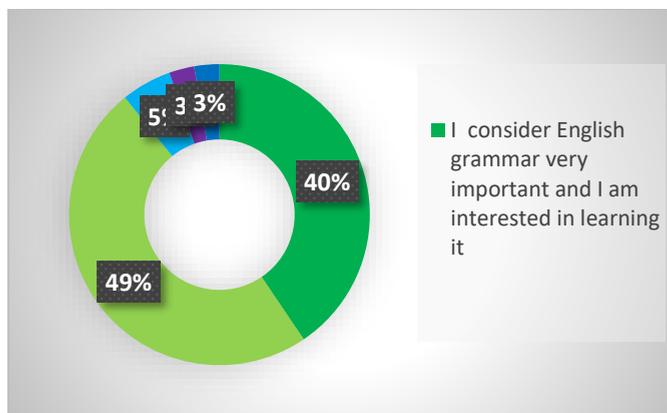


Figure 4. Learners' attitudes toward English grammar learning

These findings suggest that, although grammar is widely recognised as important, it is also perceived as cognitively demanding. The coexistence of positive attitudes and perceived difficulty indicates that students are not resistant to grammar learning per se, but rather challenged by its complexity.

Importantly, the relatively low percentage of strongly negative responses suggests that disengagement is not widespread. Instead, most learners appear willing to engage with grammar despite its perceived difficulty. This willingness represents a valuable pedagogical opportunity, as it indicates that appropriate instructional strategies could significantly improve learners' experiences and outcomes.

4.1.5 Perceived grammar learning difficulties

Students' responses regarding grammar learning difficulties are presented in Figure 5. The data indicate that learners experience challenges across multiple aspects of grammar learning, with varying degrees of difficulty reported.

The most frequently identified area of difficulty is understanding grammar rules (n = 13), followed closely by using grammatical structures in exercises (n = 12). A smaller number of students (n = 4) reported difficulties related to differences between Romanian and English grammar. Notably, a subset of participants (n = 8) indicated that no aspect of grammar presents a significant challenge for them.

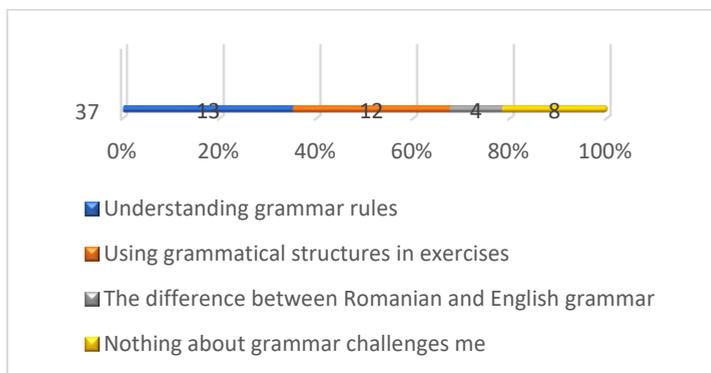


Figure 5. Distribution of learners' reported grammar learning difficulties

These findings suggest that difficulties are primarily associated with the comprehension and application of grammatical rules, rather than cross-linguistic differences. At the same time, the presence of learners reporting no difficulties highlights variability in perceived competence within the group. Overall, the results point to a heterogeneous profile, with learners differing in both the type and extent of challenges encountered in grammar learning.

4.1.6 Attitudes toward Grammar Learning

As illustrated in Figure 6, the Likert-scale responses provide further insight into learners' attitudes toward learning grammar in class. Overall, the results suggest that students do not strongly endorse negative views of grammar learning. A substantial proportion of participants disagreed with statements indicating fear of making mistakes, which suggests that negative perceptions of grammar learning are not predominant among this group.

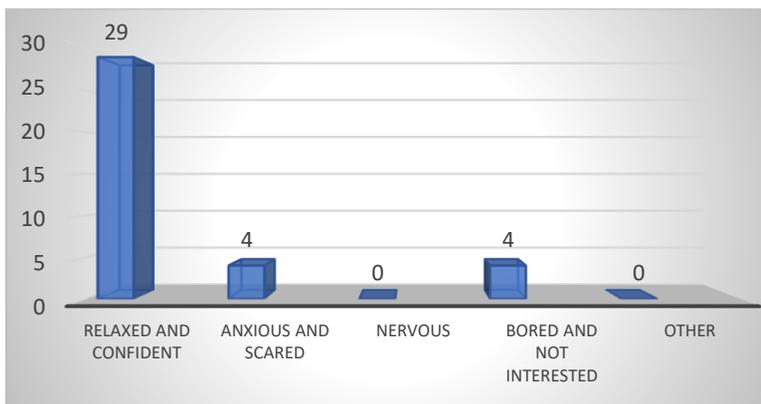


Figure 6. Attitudes toward grammar learning

In addition, many respondents agreed with statements indicating that grammar lessons can be engaging. This pattern suggests that learners are generally open to grammar instruction and do not uniformly associate it with negative classroom experiences.

At the same time, the responses indicate that students recognise a connection between grammar learning and communicative competence. This suggests that learners view grammar as relevant to language use rather than as an isolated system of rules.

Taken together, these findings point to generally favourable attitudes toward grammar learning, while also indicating that learner engagement may vary depending on the instructional approach.

4.1.7 Classroom experience of grammar lessons

As illustrated in Figure 7, learners' responses to the Likert-scale items provide insight into their classroom experience of grammar lessons. Overall, the results indicate that students do not report strongly negative experiences in relation to grammar instruction.

Responses to the statement *During grammar lessons I am often afraid of the possible mistakes I could make* are distributed across the scale, with a concentration in the middle categories, suggesting that while some concern about making mistakes is present, it is not strongly pronounced. Similarly, responses to *Traditional grammar lessons are enjoyable and engaging* cluster around the middle values, indicating that traditional approaches are generally perceived as acceptable, though not strongly engaging.

A clearer pattern emerges in relation to participation. For the statement *I am not afraid of participating in grammar lessons*, the highest frequencies are observed in the agreement categories, indicating that most students feel comfortable taking part in grammar-related activities. In addition, responses to *When I hear the term "grammar" I get nervous and annoyed* are concentrated on the disagreement side of the scale, suggesting that grammar is not widely associated with negative reactions.

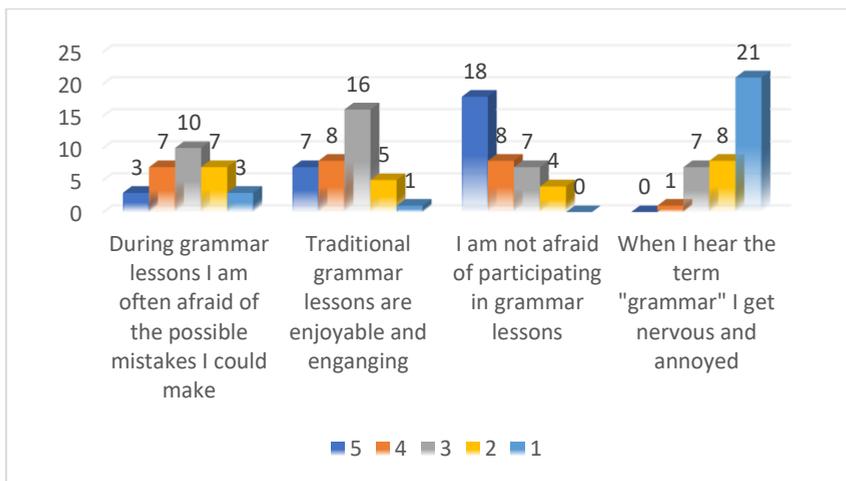


Figure 7. Classroom experience of grammar lessons

Taken together, these findings indicate that learners’ classroom experience of grammar lessons is generally balanced to positive, although moderate concern about making mistakes and limited enthusiasm for traditional instructional formats are also evident.

4.1.8 Beliefs about grammar and instruction

As shown in Figure 8, learners’ responses to the Likert-scale items provide insight into their beliefs about grammar and its role in language learning. Overall, the results indicate that students recognise the importance of grammar and its connection to communication, while also acknowledging the role of teaching approaches in shaping their learning experience.

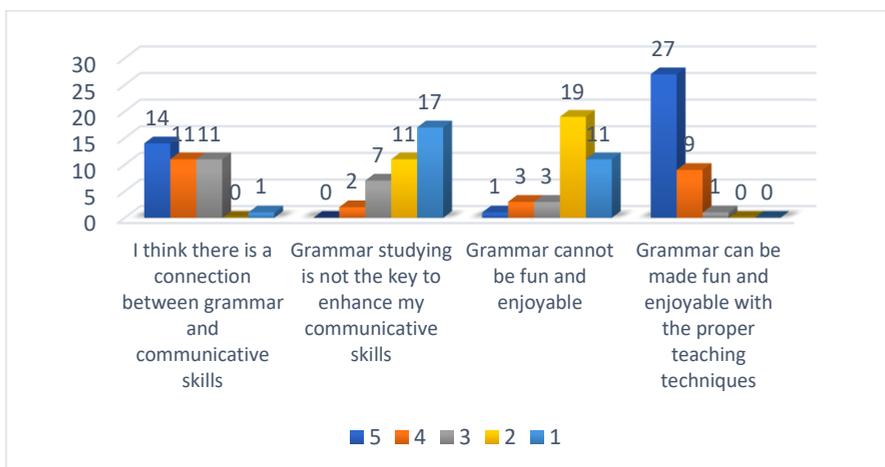


Figure 8. Beliefs about grammar and instruction

Responses to the statement *I think there is a connection between grammar and communicative skills* are distributed across the agreement categories, indicating that most students perceive grammar as relevant to communication. This is further supported by responses to *Grammar studying is not the key to enhance my communicative skills*, where the highest frequencies are found on the disagreement side of the scale, suggesting that learners generally reject the idea that grammar is irrelevant to communication.

With regard to enjoyment, responses to *Grammar cannot be fun and enjoyable* are concentrated in the disagreement categories, indicating that students do not strongly endorse negative views of grammar learning. This pattern is reinforced by the statement *Grammar can be made fun and enjoyable with the proper teaching techniques*, which shows a strong concentration of responses in the highest agreement category, suggesting that learners consider instructional approach to be a key factor in making grammar learning engaging.

Overall, these findings indicate that students hold generally positive and nuanced beliefs about grammar learning: grammar is viewed as important and potentially engaging, while its effectiveness and appeal are seen as dependent on the way it is taught.

4.2 Post-intervention results

The second questionnaire was administered following the implementation of game-based activities in grammar lessons. Its purpose was to examine students' perceptions of the use of gamification and to explore potential changes in their self-reported competence, attitudes, and classroom experience in comparison with the pre-intervention stage.

Overall, the results indicate a tendency toward more positive evaluations of grammar learning following the intervention. Students' responses suggest that the integration of game-based activities was generally perceived as beneficial for their learning experience.

4.2.1 Perceived improvement in grammatical competence

As illustrated in Figure 9, students reported that the use of game-based activities contributed to their understanding of grammar to varying degrees. A substantial proportion of participants indicated that these activities helped improve their grammatical competence to a moderate extent (46%) or to a great extent (43%). In contrast, a smaller number of students reported improvement to a low extent (8%), while only a minimal proportion indicated that the activities did not help them at all (3%).

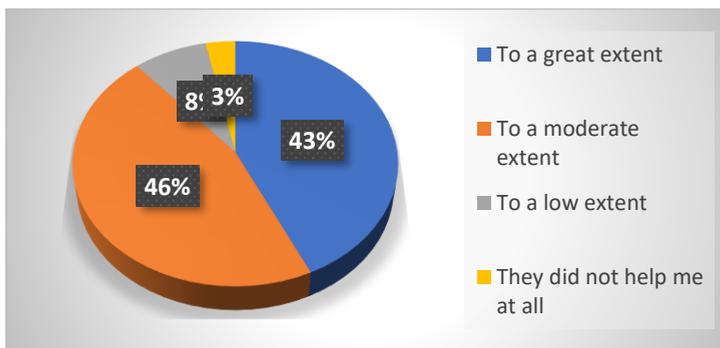


Figure 9. Perceived improvement in grammatical competence

These findings suggest that students perceive game-based activities not merely as engaging, but also as pedagogically effective. The results indicate that gamification can support the consolidation and application of grammatical structures by providing opportunities for repeated practice in meaningful contexts.

Importantly, this perceived improvement reflects learners’ subjective evaluation of their progress, which is closely linked to motivation and confidence. When students feel that they are improving, they are more likely to engage actively in learning tasks and persist in their efforts.

4.2.2 Changes in confidence levels

Students’ responses regarding confidence, presented in Figure 10, indicate an overall increase in self-reported confidence following the intervention.

A substantial proportion of participants reported higher levels of confidence, with 13 students indicating that they felt slightly more confident, 9 reporting moderate increases, and 8 stating that they felt a lot more confident after engaging in game-based activities. In contrast, 7 students reported no change, indicating that their confidence remained at the same level as before.

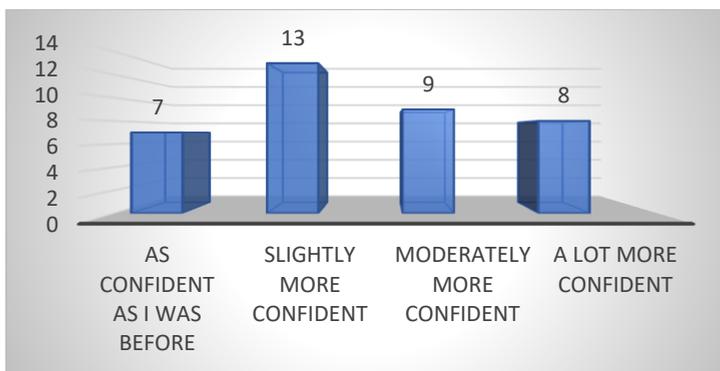


Figure 10. Changes in self-reported confidence in grammar use

These results suggest that many learners perceived an increase in their confidence in using grammar following the implementation of game-based activities. However, the

presence of participants reporting no change indicates that this pattern was not consistent across all learners.

4.2.3 Classroom experience during gamified grammar lessons

Students' reported classroom experience during gamified grammar lessons is presented in Figure 11. The results indicate a strongly positive pattern of responses. All participants (100%) reported feeling relaxed and confident during lessons that incorporated game-based activities. No students selected categories associated with less positive classroom experiences, such as anxiety or lack of interest.

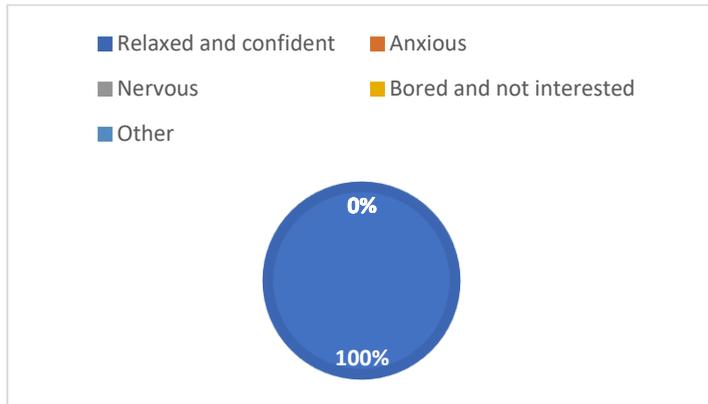


Figure 11. Classroom experience during gamified grammar lessons

Compared to the pre-intervention results, these responses suggest a shift toward more favourable classroom experiences during grammar lessons that included game-based activities. While the responses indicate a highly positive reported experience, the absence of variation may reflect limitations of self-report measures or response tendencies.

4.2.4 Attitudes toward gamification in grammar lessons

Students' attitudes toward the use of game-based activities in grammar instruction are presented in Figure 12. The results indicate a strongly positive orientation toward gamification.

A clear majority of participants (32 students) agreed that games definitely make grammar lessons more enjoyable, while a smaller number (5 students) indicated that games make grammar lessons more enjoyable to a certain extent. No participants selected responses indicating that games do not bring improvement or are useless and meaningless.

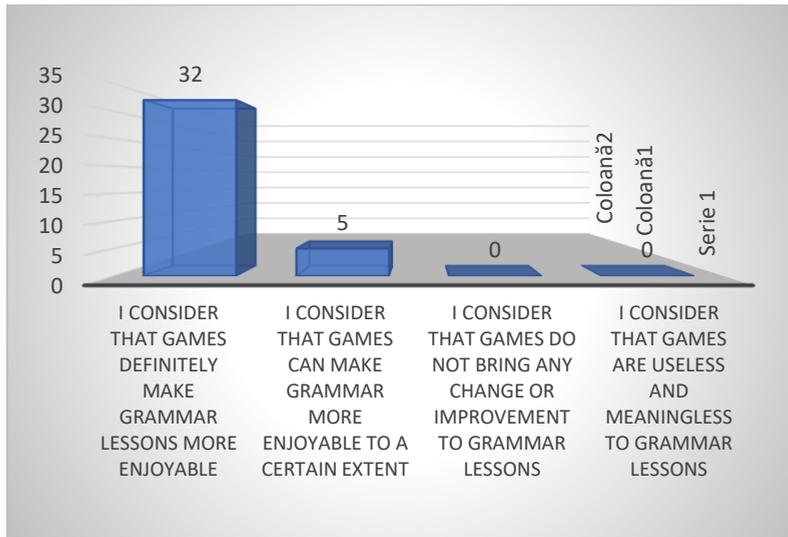


Figure 12. Attitudes toward gamification in grammar lessons

These findings suggest that learners hold highly favourable attitudes toward the use of game-based activities in grammar lessons. However, as with other self-reported measures, these results should be interpreted with caution.

4.2.5 Frequency preferences for game-based activities

Students' responses regarding how often game-based activities should be used in grammar lessons are presented in Figure 13.

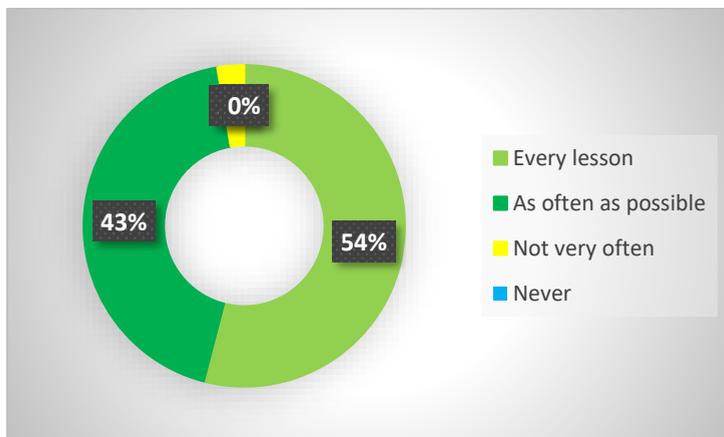


Figure 13. Frequency preferences for game-based activities in grammar lessons

The results indicate that most participants expressed a preference for frequent use of games. A majority of students (54%) selected “every lesson”, while a substantial proportion (43%) indicated “as often as possible”. In contrast, only a very small number of respondents selected “not very often”, and no participants chose “never”.

These findings suggest that learners favour the regular inclusion of game-based activities in grammar instruction. However, as with other self-reported data, these responses should be interpreted with caution.

4.2.6 Perceived effects of gamification

The Likert-scale responses presented in Figure 14 provide further insight into students' perceptions of the effects of game-based learning in grammar instruction

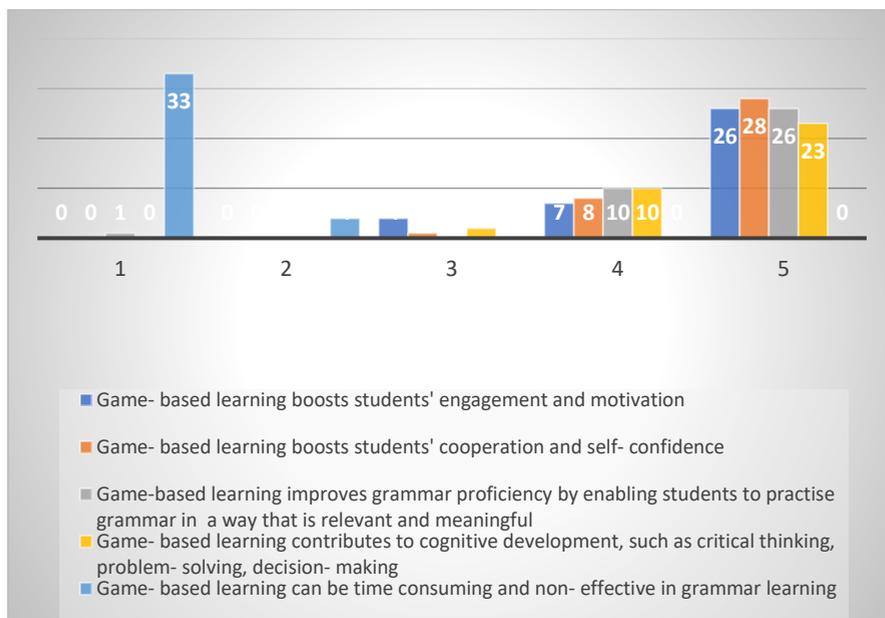


Figure 14. Perceived effects of gamification in grammar learning

Overall, responses are concentrated in the higher end of the scale, indicating general agreement with statements describing the positive effects of gamification. High levels of agreement are observed for items indicating that game-based learning enhances engagement and motivation, supports cooperation and self-confidence, and facilitates the understanding and practice of grammatical structures.

In addition, responses to the item referring to cognitive development are also predominantly located in the agreement categories, suggesting that students associate game-based activities with broader learning benefits.

In contrast, the statement that game-based learning can be time-consuming and non-effective shows a different pattern, with responses concentrated in the lower end of the scale, indicating that most participants do not endorse this view.

Taken together, these findings suggest that students perceive multiple positive effects associated with the use of game-based activities in grammar instruction, while generally rejecting negative evaluations of this approach. As with the other results, these findings should be interpreted with caution, given their basis in self-reported data.

4.2.7 Comparative overview: pre- vs post-intervention

A comparison between the pre- and post-intervention results reveals several consistent patterns across the data.

First, while students initially recognised the importance of grammar, their self-reported confidence levels were generally moderate. In the post-intervention data, a greater proportion of participants reported higher levels of confidence, suggesting a tendency toward increased self-assurance following the implementation of game-based activities.

Second, the pre-intervention results indicated a generally positive classroom experience, with some variation in responses related to anxiety and engagement. In the post-intervention data, responses are more uniformly positive, with fewer indications of less favourable classroom experiences.

Third, students' pre-intervention preference for game-based activities is reflected in the post-intervention results, where learners report positive evaluations of their use and express a preference for their frequent inclusion in grammar lessons.

Taken together, these findings indicate a consistent pattern of positive evaluations associated with game-based grammar instruction across multiple dimensions, including confidence, classroom experience, and attitudes. However, these results are based on self-reported data and should be interpreted with caution.

5 Discussion

The present study set out to explore lower secondary students' perceptions of gamified grammar instruction in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The findings indicate a general shift toward more positive learner perceptions following the integration of game-based activities, particularly in relation to engagement, confidence, and emotional responses. These findings can be interpreted in light of existing research on grammar teaching, motivation, and gamification, while also taking into account the exploratory nature and methodological limitations of the study.

One of the most notable findings is the discrepancy observed in the pre-intervention phase between students' recognition of the importance of grammar and their relatively moderate levels of confidence in using it. While most participants acknowledged grammar as essential for effective communication, their self-reported competence and confidence remained limited. This pattern is consistent with previous research suggesting that grammar is often perceived as both important and challenging, particularly in formal instructional settings (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). It also reflects the possibility that traditional instructional approaches may not fully support learners in developing confidence alongside knowledge.

Following the introduction of gamified activities, students reported increased levels of engagement and a more positive orientation toward grammar learning. These findings are in line with existing research indicating that

gamification can contribute to more interactive and motivating learning environments (Deterding et al., 2011; Hamari et al., 2014). From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), such changes may be associated with the extent to which gamified activities support learners' psychological needs. For example, game-based tasks may enhance learners' sense of competence through immediate feedback and achievable challenges, while also supporting relatedness through collaborative or competitive interaction. In addition, the interactive nature of games may provide learners with a greater sense of involvement in the learning process, which can contribute to sustained engagement.

A further finding concerns students' reported confidence in using grammatical structures. The post-intervention data suggest that learners perceived an increase in their confidence following exposure to gamified instruction. This perception may be linked to the relatively low-pressure environment created through game-based activities, where errors are often treated as part of the learning process rather than as failures. Such environments may encourage learners to take risks and participate more actively, which is consistent with research emphasising the importance of supportive classroom climates in language learning.

In terms of emotional responses, the findings indicate a reduction in reported anxiety and a more positive classroom experience during gamified lessons. This is particularly relevant in the context of grammar instruction, where learners often experience apprehension related to accuracy and error correction. Gamified activities may help reframe grammar practice as an interactive and less threatening process, thereby contributing to a more positive affective experience. However, it is important to note that these conclusions are based on self-reported data and reflect learners' perceptions rather than objectively measured changes in anxiety levels.

At the same time, the results should be interpreted with caution. The positive perceptions observed in the post-intervention phase may be influenced by factors other than the instructional approach itself. For instance, the novelty of game-based activities may have contributed to increased engagement, particularly if such activities were not previously used on a regular basis. Similarly, teacher-related factors, such as increased enthusiasm or changes in classroom dynamics during the intervention, may also have influenced students' responses. These alternative explanations highlight the need for careful interpretation and suggest that the observed changes cannot be attributed solely to gamification.

Furthermore, while students reported a perceived improvement in their understanding of grammar, the present study does not provide objective evidence of changes in grammatical competence. The reliance on self-reported data represents a significant limitation, as learners' perceptions of improvement do not necessarily correspond to measurable learning outcomes. This distinction is important, as much of the existing literature on gamification similarly relies on attitudinal data, raising broader questions about the relationship between engagement and actual language development.

Another important aspect concerns students' strong preference for the continued use of game-based activities. While this suggests a high level of

acceptance and perceived value, it also raises questions regarding the sustainability of such effects over time. Previous research has indicated that the motivational impact of gamification may decrease once the novelty of the approach diminishes (Sailer & Homner, 2020). As a result, the long-term effectiveness of gamification as a pedagogical strategy remains an open question.

Overall, the findings of the study suggest that gamification may function as a supportive instructional approach that enhances learners' experience of grammar learning, particularly in terms of engagement and affective response. However, these findings should not be interpreted as evidence of improved learning outcomes or as support for the universal effectiveness of gamification. Rather, they point to the potential of game-based activities to complement traditional instruction by creating more interactive and learner-centred classroom environments.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The present study explored lower secondary students' perceptions of gamified grammar instruction in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The findings indicate that the integration of game-based activities is associated with more positive learner perceptions of grammar learning, particularly in relation to engagement, confidence, and emotional response.

One of the key observations is that, although students recognise the importance of grammar, they often report moderate levels of confidence in their ability to use grammatical structures. The findings suggest that the introduction of game-based activities may contribute to a more supportive and engaging learning environment, in which students feel more comfortable participating and experimenting with language.

In addition, students reported a more positive emotional experience during grammar lessons that incorporated gamified elements, including lower levels of perceived anxiety and increased enjoyment. These findings highlight the importance of addressing affective factors in grammar instruction and suggest that instructional approaches which promote interaction and participation may enhance learners' classroom experience.

At the same time, it is important to emphasise that the results are based on self-reported perceptions and do not provide objective evidence of improvement in grammatical competence. The findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative of changes in learners' experiences and attitudes, rather than as evidence of measurable learning gains.

Overall, the study suggests that gamification may function as a supportive pedagogical approach that complements traditional grammar instruction by enhancing learner engagement and contributing to a more positive classroom environment.

6.2 Pedagogical implications

The findings of this study have several implications for teaching practice in EFL contexts. First, teachers may consider integrating game-based activities into grammar lessons as a way of supporting student engagement and participation. Even simple, low-resource activities can contribute to a more interactive learning environment.

Second, grammar instruction may benefit from approaches that reduce the emphasis on error avoidance and instead encourage participation and experimentation. Game-based activities can support this shift by creating contexts in which learners feel more comfortable taking risks and using language.

Third, the results suggest that gamification is most appropriately viewed as a complementary strategy rather than a replacement for traditional instruction. A balanced approach that combines explicit teaching with interactive and communicative activities may be particularly effective in addressing both cognitive and affective dimensions of grammar learning.

6.3 Limitations of the study

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted with a relatively small sample of 37 students within a single educational context, which limits the generalisability of the findings.

Second, the study relies primarily on self-reported data, which may be influenced by subjective perceptions and does not necessarily reflect actual learning outcomes. No objective measures of grammatical competence were included, and therefore no conclusions can be drawn regarding the impact of gamification on language development.

Third, the research design did not include a control group, which makes it difficult to attribute the observed changes in student perceptions exclusively to the use of gamified activities. Other factors, such as the novelty of the approach or classroom dynamics, may have contributed to the results.

Finally, the duration of the intervention was relatively short, and therefore the findings do not provide insight into the long-term effects of gamification on motivation, engagement, or learning.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

Future research could build on the findings of this study by adopting more robust research designs that allow for a clearer examination of the relationship between gamification and language learning outcomes. In particular, studies incorporating control groups and objective measures of grammatical competence would provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of gamified instruction.

In addition, further research could explore the impact of different types of gamification strategies, as well as the role of individual learner differences in shaping

responses to game-based activities. Longitudinal studies would also be useful in examining whether the positive perceptions associated with gamification are sustained over time or influenced by novelty effects.

Finally, research conducted in diverse educational contexts would help to determine the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other EFL settings and learner populations.

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