

14 - 16 August 2026

Berlin , Germany

Exploring the Use of a Gamified Learning Environment in EFL Classrooms: Evidence from a Vocabulary Intervention in Palestine

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Abstract

Maintaining student engagement while improving language achievement remains a key challenge in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Although gamification has gained increasing attention as an innovative pedagogical approach, limited research has examined both learning outcomes and students' experiences, particularly in emergencies. This mixed-methods study investigated the impact of a gamified vocabulary intervention among 9th grade students in a Palestinian public school. Using a one-group pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design, approximately fifty students participated in a four-week programme integrating curriculum-based vocabulary instruction with interactive Wordwall activities. Vocabulary achievement was assessed through researcher-developed pre- and post-tests, while a semi-structured focus group explored students' learning experiences. Quantitative findings indicated a statistically significant improvement in vocabulary achievement. Qualitative findings showed increased motivation, confidence, participation, collaboration, and enjoyment of learning English. Together, these findings suggest that well-designed gamified learning can enhance both academic achievement and classroom engagement. The study contributes evidence from an underrepresented educational context and offers practical guidance for English language teachers seeking to integrate accessible digital game-based strategies that promote meaningful and engaging language learning.

Keywords: Classroom Engagement; EFL; Gamification; Learning in Emergencies; Vocabulary Acquisition