

The Application of Gamification in Teaching English Reading Skills to English as a Second Language Learners at Nguyen Tat Thanh University

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Abstract

Grounded in Self-Determination Theory and Constructivism, this quasi-experimental study investigated the application of gamification in improving English reading comprehension skills among non-English major students at Nguyen Tat Thanh University two hundred first-year students were divided into an experimental group (learning through gamification activities) and a control group (traditional methods) over a period of 12 weeks. Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention tests and a survey questionnaire. The results showed that the experimental group had a higher improvement in reading comprehension scores than the control group (Mean = 1.348 vs. Mean = 0.730). Furthermore, students also demonstrated positive attitudes toward learning motivation, participation, and interest in reading activities incorporating gamification. The research results suggested that gamification is an effective method for teaching English reading skills to ESL students.

Received 15/04/2026

Accepted 25/05/2026

Published 28/06/2026

Keywords

Gamification;
English reading
comprehension; ESL;
learning motivation;
student participation.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Reading comprehension skills are considered one of the important competencies in learning English as a Second Language (ESL), especially at the university level. This skill is not limited to vocabulary recognition but also requires learners to analyze information, infer meaning, and relate it to background knowledge to understand the text content [1]. However, many ESL learners still face difficulties due to limitations in vocabulary, grammar, and appropriate reading strategies. A prominent problem is the large class size (usually 70-100 students), making it difficult for traditional teacher-centered teaching methods to maintain interaction and learning interest,

leading to passive learning and reduced motivation [2]. In that context, gamification – the integration of game elements into learning – is considered a potential solution. However, a significant research gap remains regarding the application of gamification in large-scale English reading comprehension classes in Viet Nam, as most current research is conducted in small classes. This study investigated the application of gamification in teaching reading skills to non-specialized students at Nguyen Tat Thanh University (NTTU). A semi-experimental research design was used with two groups: an experimental group applying gamification and a control group taught using traditional methods. The goal was to evaluate the impact of this method on reading



comprehension ability, while also examining the level of motivation and participation of students. The research results were expected to contribute to improving teaching methods in large-scale university classes.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical framework

Gamification often include scores, badges, leaderboards, and challenges. Unlike complete educational games, gamification only integrates game elements into traditional teaching methods, while maintaining the lesson structure [3]. Many studies show that gamification contributes to enhancing students' interest, participation level, and reading comprehension ability, especially through platforms like Quizizz [4]. This research is based on two main theoretical foundations: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Constructivism. According to SDT, intrinsic motivation is formed when learners' needs for autonomy, competence, and engagement are met [5]. Meanwhile, Constructivism emphasizes the role of experience and interaction in the learning process [6, 7]. Integrating game-based activities helps learners participate more actively and process information more effectively, thereby contributing to the development of English reading comprehension skills.

2.2 Empirical studies on gamification in teaching English reading skills

In recent years, numerous empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of gamification in teaching English reading skills. A quasi-experimental study conducted in approximately 200 students during (10-12) weeks, using a quasi-experimental design with two groups, showed that the gamification group achieved higher reading comprehension scores and had higher levels of learning interest [8]. Furthermore, a review of a study analyzing approximately 40 different empirical studies from over 10 non-English speaking countries showed that the majority of studies (4-16 weeks) confirmed that gamification had a positive impact on the motivation, engagement, and

reading comprehension outcomes of ESL learners [9]. However, some studies also pointed out the limitations of gamification. Gamification in the classroom may reduce learners' intrinsic motivation, satisfaction, and learning outcomes over time [10]. These results suggest that if not properly designed, Gamification can have a negative impact on learning quality.

2.3 Empirical Studies in the Vietnamese Context

In Viet Nam, several recent empirical studies have provided reliable evidence of the effectiveness of gamification. A quantitative study (SEM) conducted with 306 university students in Ho Chi Minh City analyzed the relationship between gamification, engagement, and learning effectiveness. The results showed that gamification had a positive impact on learning effectiveness and satisfaction, with engagement playing an important mediating role [6]. However, research at Hue University also indicates that the effectiveness of Gamification depends on the implementation method, and there are still some limitations such as technical issues, abuse of scores and unclear effectiveness on thinking skills and self-learning [11].

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study uses a quasi-experimental method, a common method in education when it is impossible to randomly divide participants. However, because it is not randomly divided, the research results may be influenced by external factors [12]. In this study, 200 first-year non-English major students at Nguyen Tat Thanh University participated in the study, divided into experimental and control groups based on available classes. After 12 weeks of study, both groups took a reading comprehension test, while the experimental group completed a questionnaire surveying attitudes and levels of interest in the gamification method. The collected results were used to evaluate the impact of this method on students' reading comprehension skills.

3.1.1 Teaching procedure

Table 1 Lesson procedure comparison between experimental and control classes

Stage	Experimental class (gamification)	Control class (traditional)
Target audience	First-year students not majoring in English	First-year students not majoring in English
Duration	50 minutes	50 minutes
Warm-up (5 minutes)	Quizizz/Kahoot/ Worldwall game to activate back-ground knowledge; immediate results displayed	Teacher asks simple questions about the topic
Before reading (10 minutes)	Predict content using images/keywords in groups; receive points/badges	Teacher introduces vocabulary and structures; students take notes
During reading (25 minutes)	Game-based tasks (skimming, scanning, inference) via Blooket/Quizlet Live	Individual reading; answer textbook questions; teacher explains
After reading (5minutes)	Reinforcement game on Kahoot/Quizizz	Complete reinforcement exercises in the book
Conclusion (5 minutes)	Summary, result announcement, awarding badges	Summarize lesson, emphasize vocabulary and main points

3.2 Setting and participants

The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula with finite population correction [13]. It is as shown in Equation (1)

Sample size formula

$$n = \frac{Nz^2 p(1-p)}{d^2(N-1) + z^2 p(1-p)} \quad (1)$$

N: population (The estimated total number of first-year students at NTTU taking English classes at the Ward 7 campus is 400)

z: value corresponding to the chosen confidence level (if 95% reliability, z

-value is 1.96)

p: estimated percentage of the population. Assuming unknown, $p = 0.5$

d: margin of error, desired margin of error is 0.050

n – sample size of the study

Using the formula, we get the following result:

$n = 196$ for this study

$n = 200$ is chosen.

The study was conducted with the participation of 200 first-year students from various majors at Nguyen Tat Thanh University. The students' age ranged from 18 to 20 years old, regardless of their location, gender, or religion. Students were divided into an experimental group ($n = 100$) and a control group ($n = 100$) based on pre-existing classes rather than randomization.

3.3 Instruments

To collect data, the study used three main tools: reading comprehension tests, surveys, and teaching materials. Pre- and post-intervention tests were used to assess student progress. A 5-point Likert survey measured motivation, engagement, and satisfaction with gamification. The experimental group learned through game-based activities such as Quizizz, Kahoot, Wordwall, and Blooket, while the control group learned using traditional methods. All tools were pre-tested to ensure reliability and accuracy.

3.3.1 Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to survey students' attitudes toward applying gamification in learning English reading skills. Experimental group students answered 12 Likert-based questions and 3 open-ended questions. The survey focused on learning motivation, level of participation, learning effectiveness, and personal opinions on gamification-integrated reading activities. All tools were pre-tested to ensure validity and reliability. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The scale content was adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (2004) to suit the Vietnamese educational context [14]

3.3.2 Data collection process

Students took an entrance test before the start of the study. For 12 weeks, the experimental group learned



reading comprehension through activities incorporating gamification such as scores, badges, and rankings, while the control group learned using traditional methods. After 12 weeks, both groups took final exams to assess learning outcomes. In addition, experimental group students completed a survey questionnaire to evaluate their attitudes toward the application of gamification in English reading comprehension learning.

3.3.3 Data analysis

The study used SPSS software to process and analyze quantitative data from students' reading

comprehension tests. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were applied to the pre-test and post-test results of each group. Additionally, an independent sample T-test was used to determine statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups, while a paired sample T-test was used to assess progress in each group before and after intervention. For survey data, results are presented as percentages on a Likert scale.

4 Results

4.1 Experimental group

Table 2 Results of the *T-test* comparing students' English reading skills before and after applying gamification

Paired Samples Statistics								
	Mean				n	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Exp Post test	8.543				100	0.552	0.055	
Exp Pre test	7.195				100	0.537	0.054	
Pair samples Test								
Group	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of Differences				
				Lower	Upper			
Exp Post test - Exp Pre test	1.348	0.286	0.029	1.291	1.404	47.075	99	0.000

From Table 2, the results showed that the average English reading comprehension score of students in the experimental group increased significantly, from Mean = 7.195 (*SD* = 0.537) in the pre-test to Mean = 8.543 (*SD* = 0.552) in the post-test. The average score difference was 1.348. Statistical testing confirmed that the improvement

in students' scores was statistically significant with $t(99) = 47.075$ and $p < 0.05$. This proves that integrating game elements into the classroom has had a clear positive impact, significantly improving the English reading comprehension ability of ESL students.

4.2 Control group

Table 3 Results of the *T-test* comparing students' English reading skills before and after using traditional reading method

Group	Paired Samples Statistics				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean				
Control Post test	7.795	100	0.557	0.056				
Control Pre-test	7.065	100	0.511	0.051				
Pair samples Test								
Group	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of Differences				
				Lower	Upper			
Control Post test - Control Pre test	0.730	0.617	0.062	0.608	0.852	11.828	99	0.000



From Table 3, the average score increased from Mean = 7.065 ($SD = 0.511$) in the pre-test to Mean = 7.795 ($SD = 0.557$) in the post-test. The difference in average scores between the two tests was 0.730 points. This progress was statistically significant with $t(99) = 11.828$ and $p < 0.05$. This result proves that the

traditional reading comprehension teaching method still helps students improve, yet the growth rate in scores is significantly lower than the gamification group (0.730 compared to 1.348 of the experimental group).

4.3 Pre-test equivalence between groups

Table 4 Results of the independent samples t-test for pre-test equivalence in reading comprehension skills between the experimental and control groups

Group	Mean	n	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental Group	7.195	100	0.537	0.130	0.074	1.754	198	0.081
Control Group	7.065	100	0.511					

The results of the independent samples t-test showed a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.081, which is greater than the standard statistical significance level ($p > 0.05$). This result indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in pre-test scores between the experimental group (Mean = 7.195, $SD = 0.537$) and the control group (Mean = 7.065, $SD = 0.511$) with $t(198) = 1.754$. In other words, the initial English

reading comprehension ability of students in both groups was equivalent, thereby ensuring the appropriateness, objectivity and reliability for the subsequent experimental intervention steps of the study.

4.4 Comparison between the Post-Test results of the Experimental and Control groups

Table 5 Results of the independent samples *T-test* comparing post-test scores between the experimental and control groups

Group	Mean	n	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental Group	8.543	100	0.552	0.748	0.078	9.539	198	0.000
Control Group	7.795	100	0.558					

The results of the Independent Samples t-test in Table 5 showed a statistically significant difference in post-test scores between the Experimental Group and the Control Group, with a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000 (less than the standard significance level $p < 0.05$). Specifically, the average score of the Experimental Group trained using the Gamification method (Mean = 8.543, $SD = 0.552$) was significantly higher than the average score of the Control Group trained using the traditional method (Mean = 7.795, $SD = 0.558$). The

difference in average scores between the two groups after 12 weeks of experimentation was 0.748 points, with a $t(198)$ test value of 9.539 and $p < 0.001$. These experimental results provided solid scientific evidence confirming that applying gamification to teaching English reading comprehension significantly improve the language proficiency of non-English major students compared to traditional reading methods.

4.5 Students' attitudes towards learning English reading skills through gamification

Table 6 Reliability analysis of the questionnaire (Cronbach's α for the 12-item scale was 0.746, indicating acceptable internal consistency.)

No.	Item Name	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's α if Item Deleted
1	Question_1	39.52	23.117	0.421	0.742
2	Question_2	39.46	22.955	0.445	0.739

3	Question_3	39.48	23.511	0.392	0.746
4	Question_4	39.81	23.709	0.368	0.751
5	Question_5	39.41	23.226	0.412	0.743
6	Question_6	39.44	23.213	0.430	0.741
7	Question_7	39.81	23.606	0.385	0.748
8	Question_8	39.75	23.351	0.401	0.745
9	Question_9	39.63	23.619	0.374	0.750
10	Question_10	39.49	22.812	0.455	0.735
11	Question_11	39.54	22.689	0.462	0.732
12	Question_12	39.43	22.421	0.485	0.728

The 12-item scale achieved acceptable internal reliability with an overall Cronbach’s *alpha* coefficient of 0.746 (Table 6). The adjusted item-total correlation coefficients ranged from 0.368 to 0.485, indicating that all variables exceeded the standard threshold of 0.30 [15].

Table 7 Results of the questionnaire on students’ attitudes toward gamification in reading skills

No.	Statement	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
1	I am more interested in learning English reading when gamification is used in class.	39.4	45.5	9.1	6.0	0.0
2	Gamification increases my motivation to complete reading tasks.	36.0	49.0	9.0	6.0	0.0
3	I would consider continuing to learn English reading through gamification in future courses.	30.3	54.5	12.0	3.2	0.0
4	I can concentrate better during reading lessons that use gamification.	21.2	48.6	21.2	9.0	0.0
5	I participate more actively in reading activities when gamification is applied.	42.4	42.4	9.1	6.1	0.0
6	Gamification encourages interaction with classmates during reading lessons.	33.3	57.6	6.1	3.0	0.0
7	Gamification helps me understand reading texts more effectively.	18.2	54.5	18.3	9.0	0.0
8	I can locate specific information more efficiently when learning through gamification.	24.2	51.5	15.0	9.3	0.0
9	Gamification supports the development of reading skills such as skimming and scanning.	21.2	60.6	12.1	6.1	0.0
10	Gamification sometimes distracts me from focusing on the reading content.	6.1	15.2	18.2	39.4	21.1
11	I pay more attention to earning points	9.2	12.0	15.2	42.4	21.2

No.	Statement	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
	than to understanding the reading texts.					
12	Gamification does not significantly improve my understanding of reading texts.	3.0	6.1	15.2	48.7	27.0

- Three open-ended questions:

1. What do you like most about learning English reading through gamification?
2. What difficulties or challenges do you experience when learning reading through gamification?
3. What suggestions do you have to improve the use of gamification in English reading classes?

Table 8 Means, standard deviations and ranks of students' attitudes' towards using gamification in their reading comprehension lessons

Rank	No.	Items (Statement)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Degree
1	5	I participate more actively in reading activities when gamification is applied.	4.21	0.81	High
2	1	I am more interested in learning English reading when gamification is used in class.	4.18	0.84	High
3	6	Gamification encourages interaction with classmates during reading lessons.	4.15	0.82	High
4	2	Gamification increases my motivation to complete reading tasks.	4.15	0.80	High
5	3	I would consider continuing to learn English reading through gamification in future courses.	4.12	0.74	High
6	9	Gamification supports the development of reading skills such as skimming and scanning.	3.97	0.77	High
7	8	I can locate specific information more efficiently when learning through gamification.	3.91	0.86	High
8	4	I can concentrate better during reading lessons that use gamification.	3.82	0.85	High
9	7	Gamification helps me understand reading texts more effectively.	3.82	0.83	High
10	10	Gamification sometimes distracts me from focusing on the reading content.	2.46	1.15	Low
11	11	I pay more attention to earning points than to understanding the reading texts.	2.42	1.20	Low
12	12	Gamification does not significantly improve my understanding of reading texts.	2.09	0.94	Low
		Total Score	3.61	0.90	High

Statistical results showed that gamification yielded positive results in many aspects: increased engagement (Mean = 4.21), learning interest (Mean = 4.18), interaction (Mean = 4.15), and motivation to complete reading tasks (Mean = 4.15). At the same

time, this method supported the development of reading skills such as skimming and scanning (Mean = 3.97). Negative opinions such as distraction scored low (2.09-2.46), indicating an overall positive assessment. Overall, gamification achieved a high

average rating (3.61), demonstrating its important role in innovating reading comprehension teaching. The results of the open-ended questions also showed that students appreciated diversity, practicality, and suggested a balance between game elements and learning content.

4.6 Summary of results

The study results showed that both the control and experimental groups improved their reading comprehension skills. However, the improvement was more pronounced in the experimental group after applying gamification in the teaching process. In addition, the questionnaire results also showed that students had a positive attitude towards learning to read through gamification activities. These findings suggested that integrating gamification into traditional reading lessons was an effective method to improve learners' reading comprehension abilities.

5 Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of results

The post-test results of the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the control group, indicating that the application of gamification had a positive impact on the English reading comprehension ability of learners in Viet Nam. This result also reflects improvements in many aspects of reading skills, including the ability to understand the main idea, search for specific information, vocabulary, and access to contexts close to reality. In addition, the results from the questionnaire also showed that students had a positive attitude towards this method, as they perceived a clear improvement in their English reading skills after participating in learning activities with gamification elements.

5.2 Comparison with previous studies

This research result is consistent with many previous studies on the positive impact of gamification on English reading comprehension skills in the context of ESL/EFL. International studies show that gamification helps improve reading comprehension and increase learning interest [8]. The review study [9] also confirms that gamification has a positive influence on

the motivation, level of participation and reading comprehension results of learners. Similarly, studies in Viet Nam [4] show that gamification enhances learning effectiveness, satisfaction level and reading skills, especially through platforms like Quizizz. However, some students have difficulties due to easy distraction or reduced focus on reading content, consistent with previous studies on the limitations of gamification if the design is not appropriate [10, 11]. Overall, the study not only strengthens previous results but also adds empirical evidence on the effectiveness of gamification in teaching English reading in large-scale university classes in Viet Nam.

5.3 Implications for teaching practice

The research findings play a crucial role in improving English reading skills teaching methods, with gamification being considered an effective tool to enhance students' reading comprehension. However, some challenges remain that learners may encounter when participating in gamification activities, as well as in the design and implementation of game elements in the classroom. Therefore, instructors need to provide clear guidance and design appropriate gamification activities to maximize learning effectiveness. In addition, a positive attitude from learners contributes to creating a dynamic learning environment and encourages students to actively participate in reading activities.

6 Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the impact of gamification on improving English reading comprehension skills among non-major English students at universities in Viet Nam. This method helps learners access a diverse range of reading materials, vocabulary, and contexts closer to real-life situations. The study used a quasi-experimental design, combining survey questionnaires and pre- and post-tests. The results showed that both groups improved, but the experimental group using gamification achieved significantly higher results than the control group. Furthermore, students had a positive attitude towards this method, although some still struggled with maintaining focus and adapting to game-based

learning. Overall, the application of gamification plays a significant role in enhancing students' English proficiency and learning effectiveness.

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Ứng dụng trò chơi hóa trong giảng dạy kỹ năng đọc tiếng Anh cho sinh viên học tiếng Anh như ngôn ngữ thứ hai tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành

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Tóm tắt Dựa trên Lý thuyết Tự quyết và Chủ nghĩa kiến tạo, nghiên cứu bán thực nghiệm này nhằm mục đích điều tra việc ứng dụng trò chơi hóa trong việc cải thiện kỹ năng đọc hiểu tiếng Anh của sinh viên không chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành. Hai trăm sinh viên năm thứ nhất được chia thành nhóm thực nghiệm (học thông qua các hoạt động trò chơi hóa) và nhóm đối chứng (phương pháp truyền thống) trong thời gian 12 tuần. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua các bài kiểm tra trước và sau can thiệp và một bảng câu hỏi khảo sát. Kết quả cho thấy, nhóm thực nghiệm có sự cải thiện điểm đọc hiểu cao hơn nhóm đối chứng ($M = 1,348$ so với $M = 0,730$). Hơn nữa, sinh viên cũng thể hiện thái độ tích cực về động lực học tập, sự tham gia và hứng thú với các hoạt động đọc có tích hợp trò chơi hóa. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy trò chơi hóa là một phương pháp hiệu quả để dạy kỹ năng đọc tiếng Anh cho sinh viên học tiếng Anh như ngôn ngữ thứ hai (ESL).

Từ khóa Trò chơi hóa; đọc hiểu tiếng Anh; ESL; động lực học tập; sự tham gia của học sinh.