



**THE PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL OF GAMIFICATION AND
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN DEVELOPING THE FOUR LANGUAGE
SKILLS OF ESP LEARNERS IN BUSINESS AND TRADE**

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ABSTRACT English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become a critical component of professional education in Business and Trade, where effective communication in English directly influences academic success and workplace performance. Despite its importance, ESP instruction in many higher education contexts remains constrained by traditional, teacher-centered methodologies that insufficiently address learner engagement, skill integration, and individualized learning needs. This study examines the pedagogical effectiveness of integrating **gamification** and **artificial intelligence (AI)** to enhance the four core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—of ESP learners specializing in Business and Trade. Employing a mixed-method research design, the study was conducted with undergraduate students enrolled in an ESP course over an eight-week instructional intervention. Gamified learning activities and AI-supported tools were systematically incorporated into authentic business-oriented communicative tasks, including negotiations, professional correspondence, and simulated meetings. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-tests assessing four-skill performance, while qualitative data were obtained from learner questionnaires and structured classroom observations. The findings reveal a substantial improvement across all four language skills, with particularly significant gains in speaking and listening proficiency. In addition, learners demonstrated increased motivation, confidence, and active participation, indicating positive affective outcomes alongside linguistic development. The study concludes that the strategic integration of gamification and artificial intelligence fosters a learner-centered, adaptive, and professionally relevant ESP learning environment. These findings offer important pedagogical implications for ESP instructors and contribute to the growing body of research on technology-enhanced language education.

INTRODUCTION

Within the modern world economy, professional achievement in Business and Trade is increasingly reliant on the ability to communicate effectively in the English language.



English is in position of dominating the lingua franca role in international commerce and trade negotiations, corporate documentation and cross-border collaboration (Nickerson, 2015). Accordingly, the growing pressure on higher education institutions to equip their learners with the full range of not only general linguistic competence but the communicative competences required for professional performance is growing in business-related contexts. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has emerged as a reactionary framework that matches the language teaching with the academic and occupational needs of the learners. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) state that ESP is characterized by a focus on the explicit purposes, the disciplinary discourse and the functional use of language of the learners. In Business and Trade environments, ESP teaching therefore includes competences in areas such as negotiating and writing professional correspondence, giving persuasive presentations and reading comprehension of commercial documents. These competences have a direct bearing on the employability and effectiveness of the graduates in the workplace.

Nevertheless, despite its strategic nature, ESP teaching is often limited by pedagogy which focuses on rather content transmission than communicative engagement. Such limitations are particularly acute in the area of speaking and listening which, although crucial to the professional interaction of individuals, are frequently under-developed abilities in traditional ESP classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Traditional ESP pedagogy has mostly been based on textbook-drive materials, lecture-based instruction and discrete-skills exercises. While such approaches can lead to vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension, it usually does not lead to communicative competence, learner autonomy and sustained motivation (Hyland, 2006). Business and Trade learners, in particular, need extensive opportunities for the interactive, task-based use of language that would resemble real language use in the workplace. Moreover, ESP learners often develop the communication anxiety problem and a lack of confidence in professional communication situations. Limited opportunities for realistic communicative activities in the form of delayed or generalised feedback, make it difficult for learners to achieve fluence and pragmatism. These pedagogical shortcomings point to the need for instructional models to address the cognitive and the affective dimensions of ESP learning. In light of these challenges, educational researchers have recently paid greater attention to the pedagogical possibilities of gamification and artificial intelligence. Gamification refers to the use of game design elements (e.g., orientation to goals, competition, feedback and rewards) for use in non-game contexts of learning (Deterding et al 2011, گانز). Empirical studies suggest that gamification can improve engagement of



learners, boost learner motivation and persistence by framing learning as an interactive process with goals (Hamari et al., 2014). Artificial intelligence, in turn, provides new opportunities for adaptive learning and for automated assessment and personalised feedback. AI - powered tools - conversational agents, automated writing evaluation systems and speech recognition technologies - allow learners to receive immediate, individualised feedback that is especially useful in language learning contexts (Kukulski - Hulme et al., 2021).

Although gamification has been explored to a great extent in the broader context of language learning environments and AI has been studied extensively herein, the combination of the two and their application in ESP (and, specifically, Business and Trade) is an issue which has been insufficiently researched. This gap makes up the chief research issue, which was tackled in the current research work.

The rationale for this study is based on the theoretical and practical considerations. From the theoretical perspective, there is a need for a further development of ESP research to become much more critical of the issue of how emerging technologies can be used to help integrate the skills and professional communicative competence. Practically, in regard to the communicative demands of the present world of business and trade, learners need instructional approaches that mirror the communication that is practiced in business and trade.

Consequently, it is aimed in this study to examine the effectiveness of gamification and AI to improve the four language skills of ESP learners in Business and Trade. The research questions that will guide the research are the following:

- What affect does gamification have on motivation and engagement of learners while addressing ESP instruction?
- What effect do AI supported tools have on the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills?
- Which language skills show the most improvement through integration of gamification and bringing in AI?

METHODS

Research Design. The research approach used was a mixed methods research design which involved quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a thorough evaluation to the effectiveness of instruction. Mixed-method designs are especially appropriate for educational research because they allow for the triangulation of quantitative information about the learner's performance with learner's experience (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Participants were 40 undergraduate students in a Business and Trade ESP class in a higher education institution. Their levels of English proficiency were between B1 and B2 on the



basis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). All the participants had already completed general English courses but reported limited experience with technology enhanced ESP instruction.

Data collection instruments were:

- Tests of listening and speaking skills, as well as tests of reading and writing skills (pre and post tests)
- A learner motivation questionnaire based on Gardner's (2010) socio - educational model
- Structured classroom observation protocols that are focused on participation, interaction and task engagement

Instructional tools consisted of gamified simulations (business negotiations, role play scenario), and artificial intelligence based applications for automated feedback in speaking and writing tasks.

The intervention lasted 8 weeks with 2 instructional sessions a week. Each session combined gamified tasks and AI supported tasks to be concerned with genuine business themes e.g. marketing strategies, trade correspondence and professional meetings. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistical methodologies to determine patterns of improvement to language skills. Qualitative data obtained from questionnaires and observations have been submitted to thematic analyses to discuss learner perceptions and the changes in behavioural.

RESULTS

Analysis of pre and post test revealed consistent improvement in all 4 language skills. The greatest gains were recorded in the areas of speaking and listening proficiency, especially for AI-suppeded conversational tasks and gamified role play simulations. The impact of automated feedback was improved writing accuracy and coherence and task-based, interactive activities improved reading comprehension. Questionnaire data showed increased motivation of learners, more confidence and less communication anxiety. Classroom observations also were used to confirm the increased levels of participation, peer collaboration and sustained engagement as compared with traditional ESP instruction.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that gamification has a high motivational function as ESP teaching is transformed to an interactive and learner-centred process. This accords with the self-determination theory which emphasises autonomy, competence and relatedness as key drivers of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The success of AI tools can be credited to the ability they have to deliver instant, individualized feedback, which aids in developing skills and autonomy of the learner.



The dramatic improvement in speaking and listening skills supports the value of simulation-based and AI-mediated communication tasks that simulate real business communication. Despite this, the study is limited by the number of participants and the timeframe suggesting requirements for an longitudinal and comparatives study.

CONCLUSION

This study shows integrating gamification and artificial intelligence can to a great extent improve the four language skills of ESP learners in the field of Business and Trade. By considering linguistic, motivational and professional communication needs this approach provides a strong framework for current ESP communication teaching. The findings include support for systematic inclusion of technology-driven methodology and methodology in ESP curricula and help to form the basis for future research on innovative pedagogy in language.

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