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GAMIFICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CAMBODIAN EDUCATION

Theirry Menard Crites^{1*}

¹CamEd Business School, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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Corresponding Author: Theirry Menard Crites

ABSTRACT

A systematic literature review that employed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) assessed the application and impact of gamification within English Language Teaching (ELT) through three pose questions. The first question investigates what types of game-informed strategies and mechanics have been employed with ELT learners. Results included various uses from digital reading platforms, vocabulary games and interactive quizzes to applications and flipped classroom models using AI-supported tools. These approaches used gaming aspects such as points, competitions and feedback to stimulate the motivation of learners within various age groups. The second research question explores whether game-based learning and gamified learning contributes to educational achievement. Gamification boosted learners' motivation, confidence and engagement in vocabulary and speaking skills while lowering anxiety in language across various studies (n=8). The third question explores the implications for Cambodian ELT education, arguing that gamification, if adapted to local contexts, could enhance student motivation and reduce anxiety. However, these benefits are constrained by two key barriers: inadequate digital infrastructure and chronic time shortages. In the final analysis, the review concludes that gamification can positively impact learning efficiency in ELT, provided that it is adapted with clear pedagogic goals.

KEYWORDS: Systematic Literature Review, PRISMA, Gamification, English Language Teaching, Cambodian Education. .

1. INTRODUCTION

Gamification, the use of game design elements in non-game contexts, has been utilized in language learning to increase motivation and stimulate interaction. Building on self-determination theory, points, badges and leaderboards can afford autonomy, competence and relatedness when they're ascribed to meaningful communicative tasks rather than low-level exercises (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deterding et al., 2011). Meta-analytic reviews indicate that gamification may yield small-to-moderate benefits for motivation and performance, however results are moderated by the quality of design and context (Hamari, Koivisto & Sarsa, 2014; Sailer & Homner, 2020). Gameful mechanics can organize collaborative practice in the language classroom as well: quests are posed as information-gap missions that require learners to negotiate meaning; timed challenges entice turn-taking, and badge systems can acknowledge peer feedback, thus widely accepting interactional learner behaviors that give speakers a chance not just for correct answers (Reinhardt, 2019). Experimental studies with popular systems show that short, frequent, feedback fast activities can contribute to sustained motivation and may be used as a complementary tool for instruction; however, leaderboards can dispossess students who always lag compared to their peers from intrinsic motivation unless adaptive goals and supportive teams are promoted (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012; Sailer & Homner, 2020). Mechanics work wherever they support pedagogical goals: leveling equals rising discourse complexity, points encourage comprehensible output and L2 use and narrative progress concerns intercultural features. Of utmost importance is that teachers must guard against "pointsification" by embedding reflection time and opportunities for strategy talk into the point-earning experience so that students credit success to their own effort and strategies as opposed to an extrinsic bribe (Reinhardt, 2019). In general, carefully directed gamification can promote a learners motivation and regulate structured classroom activity, if it is used to enhance communicative competence rather than purely for entertainment purposes.

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), application of gamification techniques becomes a relevant strategy to help stimulate a learners' motivation, involvement and achievement. Gamification, the incorporation of game-like elements (such as points, badges and leaderboards) into non-gaming activities, has been identified as a strategy which encourages engagement with language learning tasks that are often categorized as

mundane or repetitive (Luo 2023). Giving instant feedback, personalized progression and interactive challenges in a game based environments enables learners to overcome affective barriers like stress or low motivation, which are two emotional factors that can also impede English language acquisition (Sharifuddin & Abdullah, 2023). Furthermore, when properly integrated with pedagogical goals, gamification may foster deeper cognitive engagement and enhance language use in real-world situations. Strategically, ELT practitioners (i.e. teachers, textbook writers, and policy makers) should approach gamification as more than just a popular trend, but a calculated design intervention that can potentially change the nature of classroom interactions, helping to augment learning autonomy and leading to greater proficiency outcomes in a variety of educational settings (Wulantari et al., 2022).

Some earlier studies have discussed the impacts of gamification in an educational environment, indicating its rising importance in contemporary pedagogy. For example, Zhang et al. (2022) indicated that gamified features had a significant impact on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' attitudes, motivations and language skills. Furthermore, Al-Khresheh (2025) revealed that game-type systems improved players cognitive and motor skills like attention and memory by means of feedback provided to the user as well as incentives, goal setting and progress monitoring. These results highlight the capacity of gamifications ability to transform a classrooms interactivity by encouraging deeper engagement, autonomy and progress among learners. Additionally, the body of work has shown us significant points to consider, gamification can reliably spark higher levels of motivation, however its design needs to be aligned with educational goals in order to prevent shallow engagement (Zolfaghari et al., 2025). These studies demonstrate that gamification is a strategic pedagogical technique, which needs to be applied with care and consideration in order to achieve its maximum potential in the domain of education.

An analysis of the literature on this topic shows several areas where a systematic review may fill in potential gaps. First, the research base is primarily composed of short-term studies that rely on platform analytics, so we still know little about sustainability once the novelty wears off or whether learners actively use this knowledge in real-world situations. Second, measurement indexes for engagement are also insufficient and typically tend to index the

number of clicks, badges acquired or log-ins made meanwhile interactional quality (negotiation of meaning, repair moves, equitable turn taking and L2 output sustained by the learner) is under operationalized. Third, there are few studies isolating mixed mechanics from more heterogeneous ones; competitive leaderboards, cooperative quests, mastery paths, and adaptive goals are not often experimented with in isolation nor do we know which configuration affirms autonomy or relatedness of all rated learners without discouraging the lower-skilled learners. Fourth, fidelity of implementation and teacher orchestration are poorly reported: alignment with learning objectives, timing of feedback, reflection triggers and assessment practices are rarely described in a manner that enables replication. Fifth, equity: there is little consideration of differential effects according to proficiency level, anxiety profile, age, gender, device access and school resourcing (especially in primary and low resource ELT contexts). Sixth, the predominantly decontextualized nature of many outcome measures as well as few studies that intersect affective variables (e.g., anxiety, enjoyment) with usage traces and performance in open communicative tasks. Seventh, comparisons were most commonly made with business-as-usual controls rather than strong non-gamified active-learning designs leading to a reduced ability to attribute causality to gamification itself. Lastly, synthesis is limited by publication bias and heterogeneity in reporting (e.g., lack of theory, partial effect sizes or absence of adverse-effect data).

In this review, a systematic synthesis of work is conducted on gamification in English Language Teaching (ELT). Based on the most recent research findings, it summarizes both classroom practices and design principles following how game elements can be used to facilitate language learning. The goal is to give teachers/scientists concise direction for integrating game-based strategies into teaching in order to accelerate attainment, maintain interest and engagement. To fill in the remaining gaps in the evidentiary base, a systematic literature review (SLR) is conducted of both empirical and theoretical research into gamification within ELT. The inquiry is framed by three guiding research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What types of game-informed strategies and mechanics are being attempted with ELT learners?

RQ2: How do these perspectives relate to learning outcomes in ELT (e.g., proficiency gains, motivational aspects and interactional engagement)?

RQ3: What are the implications for Cambodian education of applying gamification in ELT?

2. METHODOLOGY

The process of the review is made according to design and methods Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Liberati et al. 2009). From the perspective of evaluating the effect of gamification on ELT learners, PRISMA provides a reliable structure to specify inclusion criteria and search databases in a systematic way, judge study quality, extract main data and report synthesis results. It guarantees that discoveries of how gamification induces motivation, engagement and language learning proficiency are fully and reproducibly described. Given that gamification interventions differ substantially in terms of design, settings, and outcome measures reported, following PRISMA will help to generate transparent methods for evidence synthesis and interpretation, elements such as effect size will be disclosed prudently alongside limitations (Page et al., 2021).

Table 1: Eligibility Criteria.

No.	Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
1	Setting	Gamification	Non gamification
2	Year of publication	2015-2025	Year < 2014
3	Document type	Article	Non article
4	Language	English	Non English
5	Keyword	EFL Learners	Non EFL Learners
6	Database	SCOPUS	Non SCOPUS

2.1. Eligibility Criteria

Relevant studies were selected based on predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria and appraised in a systematic literature review. The criteria included the year of publication, research context, type of document, language, title and database. The research papers falling between 2015 to 2025 were the focus of acceptance with gamification in ELT, whereas the studies lying before 2014 and unrelated to gamification were denied. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English were included, ensuring academic quality and availability. The studies for EFL learners were given preference over those focusing on other participants in an attempt to narrow the focus of the intended group. Second, SCOPUS was selected as the main database because it provides extensive indexation of high quality international journals. This methodological systematization guaranteed the coherence, transparency and robust nature of study

selection that represent recent lines and empirical progress made in gamification for ELT. The inclusion of these eligibility criteria strengthens the validity and reproducibility of findings, for the conclusions stated in this review.

2.2. Search Strategy

The strategic search for this research will be performed in the SCOPUS database (Advanced Document Search). This method evaluates and prioritizes academic literature by means of precision, transparency and replicability. In the advanced search interface, specific stipulating values will be entered in a query format into the search box to limit results and identify studies addressing only questions of primary interest. The search string used is:

TITLE-ABS-KEY(gamification AND learners) AND PUBYEAR > 2015 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE,"ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE,"English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Efl Learners"))

This search is limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2015-2025 that talk about gamification, EFL learners and explicitly mention this topic. The concentration of English articles seeks to avoid linguistic diversity, and by selecting "article" as document type, where conference papers, reviews or book chapters with a potential lack of empirics are exclude. Through the limitation to SCOPUS, it ensured the quality of information from indexed sources through renowned international magazines. This structured search strategy allows an

exhaustive, yet selective search of studies so that only reliable, recent and context-sensitive evidence is comprised in the systematic review. The extracted data will then be screened, coded and synthesized to identify trends and assess the impact of gamification in ELT literature.

2.3. Study Selection

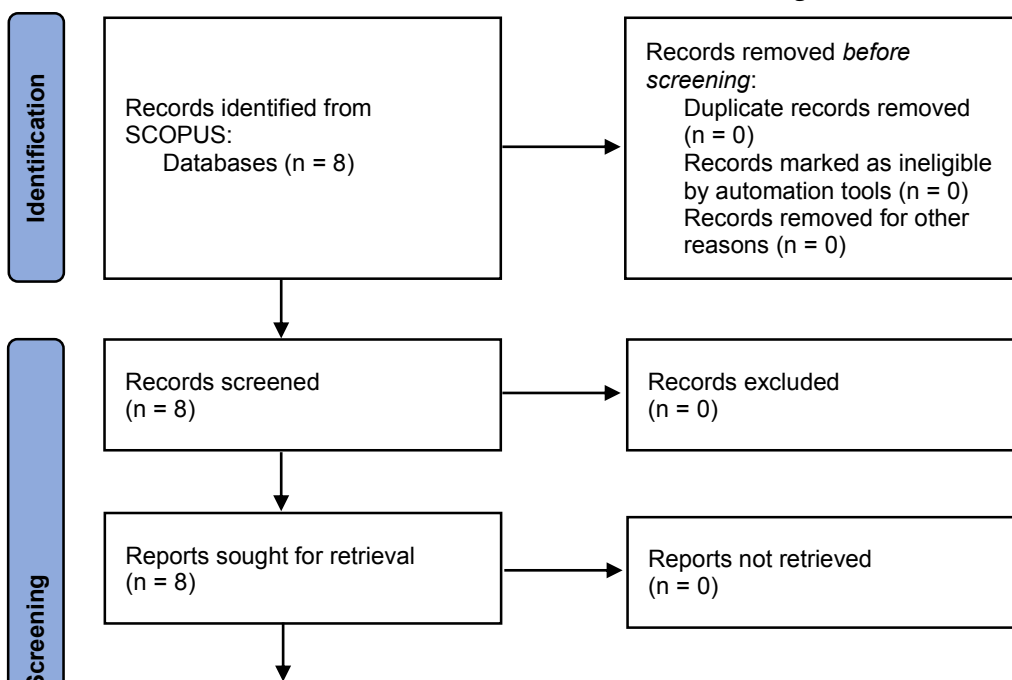
A PRISMA-based protocol guided the review process to achieve transparency and replicability. The process consisted of three stages: title and abstract screening, full text review, and final paper selection.

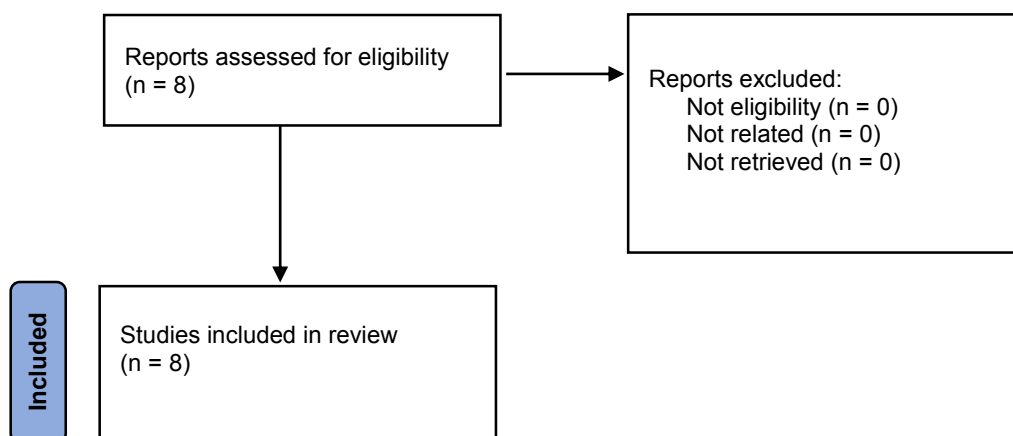
In first screening, all results of the searches were examined at title and abstract level to see if they fitted predetermined eligibility criteria (relevance to gamification, English as publication language and focus on ELT or EFL learners). At this point, studies not related to gamification or with no empirical emphasis were discarded.

All other articles were read in full text for methodological and relevance to the study objectives. This process also confirmed that the reports had (generally robust) results about the application, use or impact of gamification in ELT settings.

Lastly, following the final selection process, suitable studies that satisfied all of the inclusion criteria were selected for data extraction and synthesis. The rigorous nature of this systematic process ensured an unbiased and exhaustive examination of the evidence available to date on gamification in ELT.

Table 2: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram.





3. RESULT

The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram presents an open and structured process for identifying, screening, and including studies in a systematic review. In this study, only the articles extracted from SCOPUS database on October 2, 2025. After the identification process, an aggregate of eight articles was retrieved through database searching. No redundant records or ineligible studies were excluded prior to screening (all retrieved papers met the original search criteria).

At the screening level, all eight studies were screened by checking titles and abstracts related to eligibility on gamification and ELT without elaborating on any data. No studies were excluded or not retrieved, which means that all included papers passed the relevance check. For the purpose of eligibility, full texts for eight studies were read and subsequently scrutinized. Once more, there were no exclusions based on irrelevance, inaccessibility, or non-eligibility.

Eventually, during the inclusion phase all eight studies were found to be applicable and were included in the systematic review. This result indicates a straight and effective selection process without any loss of information between the two stages. Adherence to PRISMA standards provided methodological transparency, reduced selection bias and increased trustworthiness of the review's findings regarding the role that gamification plays in ELT research.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Millennials (also referred to as Generation Y) grew up surrounded by digital technology; this is a generation where smart mobile devices are ubiquitous mini personal computers. Their lives are largely shaped by daily digital interaction. However, research on the relationship between digital tools and students' academic achievement and

motivational outcomes is an emerging area of study. A study written by Liman Kaban and Karadeniz (2021) analyzed how three e-reading formats including: personalized, gamified and PDF based digital materials impacted a student's motivation and reading comprehension in Türkiye. In their five-week quasi-experiment, 96 students from state schools were non-randomly assigned to four experimental groups and one control group. Experimental classes read English texts on screen in one of the three formats listed above, while the control group used the same content in a printed, teacher-guided program. Although motivation to read in English increased in digital conditions, reading-comprehension scores did not differ significantly between the screen and paper groups

Vocabulary is a key part of learning in English. There are a number of things teachers can do to improve vocabulary instruction for young students. Within these methods, they have found that integrating learning games is a useful method to facilitate language acquisition. The quasi-experimental research investigates educational gaming on young children's vocabulary in early childhood education. Carried out in a Saudi Arabian kindergarten, the study involved 40 Arabic-speaking children aged 5-6 years old who were learning English as a foreign language. They were then randomly assigned to an experimental and control group. While for the control group, participants learned vocabulary in a rote fashion. Both the present and control groups took vocabulary tests which were given as pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test. The results indicated that learner participation was largely benefited by games, which contributed to student enhanced word retention and comprehension and connecting of new words with real life scenarios. As a result, the research proposes that educational games should be included in vocabulary instruction to facilitate more engaging

and effective learning in young children (Saleh & Ahmed Althaqafi, 2022).

Online interactive quizzes with gamified features have been widely adopted and have been proven to motivate students to learn, encourage increased interaction, and improve learning performances. However, the majority of studies have analyzed their use in synchronous learning situations with a poor understanding of their effect in asynchronous contexts. In this account, the current study examined students' participation in and motivation for playing gamified vocabulary learning on a cross time basis, and its influences on students' vocabulary learning outcomes in class. The study was a 10-week intervention among 300-second year university students in Thailand. The research instruments were a bank of 500 English academic words covering 10 vocabulary sets available on Quizizz.com for use alongside 10 in class vocabulary tests. Findings revealed significant positive correlation between students' engagement in asynchronous play with gamified vocabulary exercises and their face-to-face class play based on vocabularies. Moreover, females had greater performance compared to males and there were no significant differences between students of the different academic majors (Waluyo & Tran, 2023).

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of AI-supported, gamified flipped classroom using Duolingo on Thai EFL learners' speaking performance, confidence, and perceptions in response to the call for technology-enhanced learning. Although the effects of gamification and flipped learning had been investigated in separate studies, significantly less is known about their combined use. A total of 48 freshmen in university were involved over a period of 12 weeks, with the use of pre-test or post-test, survey and interview to gather data. Significant improvements were observed in speaking skills, especially on topics and discussions, and student perception of their ability jumped both conversationally and for presentations. Duolingo was described as useful for vocabulary, pronunciation and listening skills as its game context meant that the app lowered anxiety and increased motivation. However, intermediate and advanced users described use barriers at higher levels of proficiency. This review referring to gamified flipped learning, emphasizes that it is scalable way for productive learning enhancement in fundamental language ability and suggests more advanced experimental content for its extension of the application (Phanwiriyarat et al., 2025).

The rising popularity in the use of gamification as

an instructional aid is mostly attributed to its potential benefit on learners' classroom engagement and linguistic proficiency. Nevertheless, few studies have explored to what extent gamification can influence different types of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), or its impact on oral communication in the EFL context. To fill in these research gaps, the current study draws on the Broaden-and-Build Theory to examine the influences of gamified learning on inspiration and oral performance for Chinese EFL students. Using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design, two groups of learners were studied, experimental group (EG, $n = 253$) who learned English with gamified language activities and control group (CG, $n = 261$) who were treated using traditional instruction. Independent samples t -tests were used to compare scores (pre- versus post-treatment). It was found that the gamified class participants presented significantly higher autonomous motivation and developed their oral proficiency in comparison with those of the control group. In addition, the controlled motivation of the experimental group increased. These results emphasize gamification's two potential impacts on learner autonomy and oral language development. The study results imply that when teachers include gamification features in their language teaching, learning becomes more interactive and effective, offering practical implications for EFL teachers as well as course designers who aim to enhance pedagogy in EFL (Song et al., 2025).

Gamification has been emerging as a promising approach to enhance learner participation and achieve better learning outcomes in English Language Teaching (ELT). Even though it is extensively applied, discussions persist about whether its actual impact on increasing motivation and language proficiency are uncertain. The present study investigated the effect of applying gamified contexts to EFL learning on student motivation and learning outcomes. Adopting an experimental research design, the study involved two groups: one receiving gamification activities through digital education devices (Kahoot, Quizlet and Duolingo), as well as competitions in class (EG) and another control group who did not receive such treatment. The data was collected through pre and post-tests, motivation questionnaires and classroom observations. Results of the statistical analysis indicated that participants who were exposed to gamified instruction gained more in vocabulary retention and grammar than their control group counterparts. In addition, the learners in gamified condition were more motivated and engaged

according to the survey results. These results indicate that adding game-based features may be an effective pedagogical method to promote ELT learners' interest and effectiveness. The study suggests that teachers integrate gamification carefully into language teaching, and calls for further research on its long-term impact and applicability to multiple linguistic elements (Alenazi, 2025).

A study investigates the effects of gamification on student engagement, and grammar achievement in English as Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Due to low and persistent rates of academic success, renewed interest in teaching strategies that promote group member (or learner) performance and engagement in the form of social learning has been emerging—particularly motivated by grammar instruction. Quasi-experimental research was carried out in Fatima Al-Zahraa Secondary School and the sample comprised third grade female students who were divided into two groups (control group, experiment with gamified instruction). Data were collected through pre and post-in-service questionnaires as well as engagement surveys. Results indicated significant differences between experimental and control groups in favor of the former for learning grammar and classroom engagement. The findings of these studies provide ample evidence in support of the results on the effectiveness of gamified instruction in teaching EFL, which could help novice teachers raise student motivation and achievement. The paper ends with pedagogical implications for applying gamification in education and future research to explore its lasting impact on different aspects of language proficiency (Dorgham & Obiad, 2025).

Language learning anxiety was a major concern for EFL learners. A mixed-methods approach was employed to investigate English language learning anxiety in 46 Thai university students of the course English for Information Professionals who were taught with gamified instruction by ClassPoint. The duration of the intervention was one academic semester. Quantitative data were assessed using paired-sample t-tests in SPSS, and thematic analysis was conducted to extract qualitative findings with inter-rater reliability checks. By both pre- and post-intervention anxiety scales; stance was shown to decrease significantly in general anxiety parts, including classroom-related nervousness, self-confidence fearfulness, language skill nervousness and experience anxiety. Qualitative findings validated these results, suggesting that the anonymity and interactive nature of ClassPoint as a game-engendering site supported students' learning

motivation, confidence and pleasure. Some students had concerns about being competitive, as well as being able to find time to play the game, but more responses were positive towards the gamified instruction. In conclusion, the research shows that the use of gamification with ClassPoint can reduce EFL students' anxiety and increase their participation levels in higher education (Amnouyochokanant, 2025).

5. CONCLUSION

The systematic literature review in this study was guided by the three research questions posed in the introduction. Once through the reviews, the chapter below provides feedback & discussion on these three questions.

This initial query of the research aligns well with existing literature where several game-informed approaches have been experimented in ELT environments. Gamification, throughout the studies reviewed, varies: digital reading platforms, vocabulary games, interactive quizzes' posing of questions and AI-assisted applications flipped classroom. For example, the Türkiye e-reading study compared personalized, gamified and PDF reading materials and found that a gamified reading environment can increase motivation without affecting text comprehension. Moreover, the kindergarten study in Saudi Arabia included vocabulary learning games and noted increased retention and enjoyment among young learners. These examples also support the significance of RQ1 as they show how game mechanics—such as points, feedback loops, competition and interactivity are applied to language skills and age groups.

The second question corresponds to the central point of interest in the majority of gamification studies related to language learning; that is, how game approaches are correlated with learners' performance. The corpus studies add up together in favor of a range of positive effects. For instance, the Thai Quizizz research demonstrated a relationship between asynchronous and gamified vocabulary practice and better class performance and engagement. The flipped classroom intervention based on Duolingo increased speaking confidence and vocabulary production among learners, and anxiety was decreased (results that were replicated through the ClassPoint study with significant decreases in language learning anxiety). Similarly, the Chinese quasi-experimental study demonstrated that gamification promotes autonomous motivation and provides for better oral proficiency. These competitive findings support the decision of taking

learning outcomes like proficiency, motivation and engagement in RQ2.

The third question is especially useful as it links international empirical findings to a local pedagogical situation. Cambodia, along with many other countries in Southeast Asia, experiences concerns related to the lack of technology infrastructure in classrooms, high student-to-teacher ratios and traditional teacher directed instruction. The literature you examined was from Türkiye, Saudi, Thailand and China serving as culturally and equally educational contexts that allows for a robust amount of evidence to be drawn for generalization. For example, Thai and Chinese studies illuminate the utility of gamification in encouraging engagement and reducing learner anxiety in collectivist learning environments (and thus point to potential benefits for Cambodian learners, who evidence similar classroom behavior). However, the studies also mention drawbacks such as competition stress, time constraints and obstacles for high-level learners. These subtleties are necessary to understand the practicalities around the feasibility of gamification in Cambodia's ELT classrooms.

The research questions present clear cohesion, development and inclusiveness. RQ1 sketches the

gamified strategies scenario, RQ2 evaluates its educational impact and RQ3 translates findings into domain sensitive implications. The studies reviewed provide robust support for this structure; each provides empirical evidence to answer at least one of the questions.

5.1. Research Limitation

As within most research there are limitations that if addressed by future researchers could yield better understanding include further clarification on game-informed strategies such that it includes digital and non-digital mechanisms, the dialectical labeling under cognitive, affective and behavioral domains provides concise grounds for analysis; with this in mind, a comparison of Cambodia to any sociocultural or technological equivalent across at least the countries representative in the literature would deepen our findings as well. By accounting for these nuances, the systematic literature review will be able to synthesize international research in a manner that is not only generalizable but also useful for Cambodian ELT policy and practice—operationalizing all of the theoretical, empirical and contextual capabilities of effective systematic review.

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