The role of gamification in fostering inclusivity for Vietnamese adult EFL learners in continued education

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Abstract

As adult learners may encounter various challenges and constraints in continued education, it is important to maintain their engagement and resilience in their academic pursuit. This article explores the role of gamification in fostering inclusivity for Vietnamese adult learners undertaking a second degree program in English linguistics. Drawing on a narrative frame and semi-structured interviews with nine professionals aged 22-47, the present study examined the impacts of incorporating gamified elements into an English grammar course. The findings highlighted that gamification effectively catered to the diverse learning needs and styles of adult learners, enhancing their confidence, engagement, and motivation while reducing anxiety. The collaborative nature of gamified activities promoted social connections and a community of practice. However, some learners experienced certain challenges in gamified environments concerning technical issues and their unfamiliarity with platform functionality. This study presents important implications for teachers and curriculum developers in employing gamification to provide a more inclusive and engaging environment for adult learners.

Keywords: *Adult learners; continued education; gamification; grammar instruction; inclusivity.*

Introduction

Globalization and the escalating role of English as a lingua franca have resulted in a rising population of adult EFL learners seeking better educational and occupational mobility (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Kirkpatrick & Sussex, 2012). Adult learners are typically characterized as independent and self-directed, but they are confronted with various difficulties in balancing their responsibilities and overcoming anxieties about learning and social interaction (Mei et al., 2023). Since adult learners' educational needs and preferred learning styles differ significantly from those of younger learners, their learning journeys can be further complicated by life and family obligations. The increased integration of technology into language education may further challenge adults' learning experiences (Azman & Yunus, 2019). In this regard, gamification has become a promising technology for fostering inclusivity and engagement in classrooms (Alsawaier, 2018; Tan, 2018). The use of gamification aligns with the evolving educational landscape in which technology is utilized to enhance learning experience and efficiency (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Gamification promotes self-directed learning by empowering learners to manage their learning processes, particularly through mobile applications and online platforms that reinforce learner autonomy and flexibility (Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021).

The positive effects of gamification on learners' motivation and engagement in language education have been well documented (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018; Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020). The interactive, game-based activities, such as quizzes, leaderboards, challenges, and reward systems, foster enjoyment and reduce anxiety, thereby promoting a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for learners, regardless of their background or prior experiences (Mufidah, 2016). Gamification creates a stimulating and rewarding learning environment that inspires active participation, collaboration, and fun competition. These elements are the driving force behind adult learners' engagement, boosting their performance in educational settings (Ardi & Rianita, 2022; Huang et al., 2020). The flexibility and adaptability of gamified activities allow teachers to cater to different learning styles, preferences, and proficiency levels.

In the context of higher education in Vietnam, the population of professionals pursuing continued language education by taking a second degree program in English linguistics has increased significantly (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). However, they are entangled in multiple roles and responsibilities that present barriers to their academic commitment and impede their language learning experiences. The lack of time and distractions due to workplace and personal commitments, as well as limited prior exposure to English, result in the low levels of self-confidence in learning English among most adult learners (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). Although contemporary literature confirms the positive effects of gamification on motivation and engagement, adult EFL learners' needs for inclusivity and the challenges they encounter have been relatively underexplored (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018; Lin et al., 2018).

Literature review

Inclusivity in language education for adults

Inclusive education is a comprehensive approach that aims to provide equal opportunities for all learners regardless of their differences in abilities, cultural backgrounds, or socioeconomic status (Oranga et al., 2024). It involves altering educational content and instructional methods to harmonize with learners' varying needs and age ranges. Being inclusive involves recognizing and valuing learners' idiosyncrasies within a supportive learning environment that promotes and celebrates diversity (Ojong & Addo, 2024). Inclusivity encompasses the experiences of individuals from marginalized groups based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and social class (Kaur & Jaiswal, 2024). Inclusive education is crucial for making learning enjoyable and welcoming for all learners, emphasising the need for collaboration among stakeholders to build a stronger and more inclusive community of practice (Awang-Hashim et al., 2019). In addition, Wakat et al. (2023) highlight that creating an inclusive environment involves more than technology integration; it requires teacher-mediated strategies that actively adapt curricular content and instructional practices to learners' diverse identities and foster open dialogue for learners to share their unique perspectives. In adult education, inclusivity is particularly critical due to their diverse experiences, professionally oriented needs, and personal circumstances. Teachers are expected to tailor their instructional strategies and classroom activities to respond to learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds (Ulla et al., 2025). These involve creating learning spaces and classroom environments that foster a sense of belonging, collaboration, and mutual support among learners. Such collaborative interactions enable them to actively engage in their learning process and achieve their goals (Kaur & Jaiswal, 2024).

Gamified grammar instruction

Gamification has been increasingly employed in grammar instruction, particularly due to the digitization of educational tools and platforms (Hong et al., 2022; Pham, 2023). Gamification transforms non-game educational contexts into engaging learning experiences by integrating game design elements (Kapp, 2012). Several studies have examined the effectiveness of gamification in grammar instruction. For instance, Zainuddin et al. (2020) investigate the impact of gamified e-quizzes on student learning and engagement. Their study, involving 112 undergraduate Malaysian students using gamified formative assessments, reveals that gamification significantly enhanced student engagement and classroom interaction, demonstrating its potential to improve learning outcomes and promote a more engaging environment. Similarly, Ardi and Rianita (2022) examine the implementation of gamification in EFL grammar courses to improve student involvement. This quasi-experimental study with the participation of 68 students indicates that gamification made grammar training more intriguing, therefore enhancing retention and performance. Similarly, Pham (2023) employs Quizizz to teach grammar, showing that gamified learning improved grammar performance

among ESL learners and raised their readiness to participate actively in grammar tasks. These studies highlight the efficiency of gamification in providing diverse and interactive opportunities for grammar practice. However, they tend to overlook its role in fostering learner inclusivity, especially among adult learners who may have differing learning styles.

Gamification as a contributor to inclusivity

The implications of gamification in inclusive language education are far-reaching, addressing the discrepancies in competencies and learning styles, especially among adult learners (Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli, 2021). Gamified activities provide a source of incentives, driving them to be more proactive in classroom participation, making learning a more enjoyable and rewarding process and resulting in a sense of achievement (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020). Gamification facilitates personalized learning by allowing learners to progress at their own pace and concentrate on their language weaknesses. Gamified platforms accommodate a wide range of adult learning styles and preferences, increase peer interaction and support, and foster a sense of belonging in the classroom (Ardi & Rianita, 2022). They cater to adult learners' specific needs by easing their anxiety and elevating their confidence. The playful and non-threatening nature of gamified activities reduces the fear of making mistakes, which is a major barrier for many adult learners (Mei et al., 2023). In gamified classrooms, adult learners can seize the opportunities for instant feedback and self-assessment that shape their learning progress and enable them to develop their own learning plans (Huang et al., 2020).

Klock et al. (2024) conducted a systematic literature review on gamification and equity, diversity, and inclusivity. The findings reveal that gamification can improve performance, enrich experiences, and foster change, but it requires careful consideration of factors such as gender, age, and disability to ensure inclusivity. In relation to grammar instruction, Fadhilawati (2024) explored the use of Quizizz in paper mode to enhance grammar mastery among 10th-grade students at a senior high school in Indonesia. The study employed a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test assessments to measure grammar mastery of 64 students. Findings suggest that Quizizz effectively promoted engagement and interaction among students, leading to improved grammar mastery. This research emphasizes the potential of Quizizz, even in paper mode, to enhance learning outcomes and cater to diverse learning environments. These studies highlight the role of gamification in fostering inclusivity by providing personalized learning experiences and reducing anxiety among learners with diverse needs and backgrounds.

Despite these promising findings, a research gap remains regarding the nuanced exploration of how gamification specifically contributes to fostering inclusivity and accommodating adult EFL learners' idiosyncratic needs in continuing education contexts. This study examines the value of gamification in promoting an inclusive learning environment for adult learners taking an English grammar course in continued education. The research question guiding the present research is: What is the impact of gamification on enhancing inclusivity in an English grammar classroom for adult EFL learners in continued education?

Methodology

Setting and participants

This study was conducted at a multidisciplinary public university in Vietnam that offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs in social sciences and humanities. The student body consists of different groups, including full-time students (four-year degrees) and professionals in continued education who pursue second degree programs (two-year degrees). Nine Vietnamese adult learners who were halfway through their two-year bachelor's program in English Linguistics were invited to join this research. The second author was responsible for their grammar course. The grammar lessons were delivered through an intervention utilizing Quizizz, an interactive, gamified platform. The instructional slides were integrated directly into the Quizizz interface, enabling seamless transitions between instructional content and interactive exercises. These exercises included various question types such as multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, open-ended questions, and word clouds, providing students diverse opportunities for immediate practice and discussion. These activities were not simply in a reading mode but also included audio and visual elements. Students could earn points and badges as rewards for correct answers and active participation. To maintain anonymity and reduce anxiety, students participated using nicknames. High-performing students, identifiable through the platform's leaderboard feature, were eligible to receive additional bonuses and recognition from the teacher. Additionally, collaborative learning was fostered through group-based activities in which students were randomly assigned into groups by Quizizz for discussions, collaborative writing, and debates. For out-of-class practice, students worked on assignments on Quizizz independently and at their own pace. These assignments offered unlimited attempts through the mastery mode feature, encouraging students to engage with the materials until they became familiar with the grammar points they were learning. Further, the platform's automated feedback mechanism identified specific areas of difficulty, offering targeted recommendations for additional practice. A class leaderboard was also available for out-of-class assignments, helping students track their progress and fostering sustained engagement through visible achievements.

Participation in this investigation was voluntary, and the researchers made a firm commitment to their confidentiality and anonymity. They could withdraw from the research at any point or refuse to respond to any questions they considered personal or irrelevant. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participants' information.*

Participants	Age	Gender	Learning goals	Job title
Participant 1	22	Female	Career change	Office staff
Participant 2	24	Female	Career advancement	Editor
Participant 3	30	Male	Career advancement	Office staff
Participant 4	31	Female	Personal development	Teacher
Participant 5	33	Female	Personal interest	Office staff

Participant 6	35	Male	Career advancement	Businessman
Participant 7	39	Male	Career advancement	Laboratory staff
Participant 8	45	Female	Personal development	Accountant
Participant 9	47	Male	Professional development	Teacher

As Table 1 shows, the participants varied in their age, ranging from 22 to 47, occupational backgrounds, and career goals. This diversity in age and professional experiences contributed to a rich exploration of the role of gamification in fostering inclusivity. A key motivator for pursuing continued education was their desire to improve career mobility. The participants recognized the importance of English proficiency in the globalized job market and sought to enhance their employability through this program.

Instruments

This study employed a two-stage qualitative research design, utilizing a narrative frame and semi-structured interviews as the primary instruments for gathering data. The participants' mother tongue, namely, Vietnamese, was used in all materials and discussions to facilitate their responses. In the first stage, a narrative frame was used to capture participants' personal experiences and reflections on gamified grammar instruction. A narrative frame aims to encourage participants to draw on their experiences in developing a written reflective account of their lifeworld by filling in a story-based template with incomplete sentence prompts and blank spaces (Barkhuizen, 2011). This tool is particularly effective in eliciting rich and highly descriptive data (Barkhuizen, 2011, 2014; Pham, 2024), thus providing in-depth insights into the participants' perspectives on the role of gamification in fostering inclusivity. Drawing on contemporary literature on the interplay between gamification and inclusivity (Fadhilawati, 2024; Klock et al., 2024; Mekler et al., 2017; Mufidah, 2016), the five main themes guiding the narrative frame include (1) responding to diverse learning needs and styles, (2) fostering engagement and motivation, (3) reducing anxiety and building confidence, (4) promoting collaboration, and (5) the challenges and negative impacts of gamification (see Appendix A). The second author distributed a printed copy of the narrative frame to the participants and invited them to complete it within two weeks. Each participant worked on the narrative frame independently at their convenience and handed it back to her when they met in class.

The second stage involved semi-structured interviews designed to gain further insights into the issues emerging from the narratives. An interview guide (see Appendix B) was developed based on the findings from the first stage to gather more specific information on how gamification fostered inclusivity in grammar classes. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in probing participants' responses while ensuring consistency in addressing key themes relevant to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interviews provided an opportunity to delve deeper into the participants' experiences and gather examples of how gamification impacted their learning process and sense of inclusivity. The second author set up appointments with the participants to interview them offline at their convenience. Each interview lasted about 15 minutes and was recorded with the interviewees' permission.

Data analysis

The qualitative data from both the narrative frame and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using deductive content analysis (Bingham et al., 2022), drawing on the five themes identified in the *instruments* section. The researchers read through the narrative accounts and interview transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data. Then, segments of text relevant to the prescribed themes were highlighted and chosen for analysis. Only selected excerpts were translated from Vietnamese into English and the translation was cross-checked between the two authors, who were fluent in both languages. The narrative and interview data were labelled as "*nar*" and "*int*" respectively to differentiate between these two types of data. In the writing-up stage, the researchers synthesized the findings by opting for excerpts of data from multiple participants that best illustrated each of the themes.

Results

Responding to adult learners' diverse learning needs and styles

Gamification demonstrated a significant capacity to address the diverse learning needs and styles of Vietnamese adult EFL learners through their control over learning content and pace. The data revealed that the majority of participants found the topic selection (seven learners, 77.78%) and replay features (eight learners, 88.89%) beneficial for addressing their learning needs. They pointed out that the gamified activities facilitated their interaction during grammar lessons in ways that aligned with their preferred learning approaches, enabling them to select grammar topics aligned with their learning goals [Excerpts 01-02] and replay exercises targeting their own weaknesses [Excerpt 03].

> Excerpt 01: *I do not need to do all the practices at a time. I can choose the lesson that I am weak at and practice with that first. Besides, there is also the mock test or the review practices that combine different topics. (Participant 3_int)*

> Excerpt 02: *The platform also allowed me to choose which topics to focus on and when to work on them. This helped me to target areas where I needed more practice and review. (Participant 7_nar)*

> Excerpt 03: *I liked being able to choose which activities to do first. It made me feel more in control of my learning. I can prioritize practicing the topics that I do not understand or remember well. Repeated practices allow me to improve my weaknesses. (Participant 9_int)*

For these adult learners, having control over their learning experience was crucial as they had specific goals and preferences. The gamified activities supported autonomous learning by allowing them to make choices according to the task types and levels of difficulty [Excerpts

04-05]. In addition, Quizizz's "mastery mode" allowed multiple attempts, helping learners to focus on personal gaps without time pressure [Excerpt 06].

> Excerpt 04: *I found it really good that I could choose which grammar points I wanted to work on. (Participant 4_int)*

> Excerpt 05: *With the set of assigned homework on online gamified platforms, I could easily choose the one I wanted to review or practice more at home. (Participant 9_int)*

> Excerpt 06: *We had limited time for the activities in class. However, the teacher assigned a link to games for us to practice more at home. I could play according to my preferences and replay them many times. The mastery mode is very helpful, so I can redo the wrong questions. (Participant 9_int)*

Seven participants (77.78 %) considered that the gamified platform supported the multimodal learning styles with interactive activities such as word clouds and audio-visual quizzes, which could cater to visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learners [Excerpts 07-08].

> Excerpt 07: *The gamified activities provided various activities that appealed to my preference for visual and audio learning. I enjoyed the interactive exercises and the opportunity to apply grammar rules in a game-like setting. (Participant 1_nar)*

> Excerpt 08: *Having word clouds and audio-visual quizzes helped me see and hear the rules in action. It was more than just reading from a book. I could actually engage with the material in different ways, which made it much easier to understand. (Participant 2_nar)*

Eight participants (88.89%) valued the independence in progressing at their own pace, ensuring that both beginners and more advanced learners could engage with the material without feeling overwhelmed or bored in the mixed-level classroom, which was essential for maintaining inclusivity and engagement [Excerpts 09-10].

> Excerpt 09: *I could move on at my own pace as the game would adjust to my level, so I didn't feel left behind. (Participant 7_int)*

> Excerpt 10: *I liked how the platform adjusted to our levels. If the exercises were too easy, I could move on quickly; if they were challenging, I could repeat them until I got it right. That way, I never felt bored, and my classmates who needed more practice didn't feel overwhelmed. (Participant 8_int)*

Evidently, gamification effectively addressed adult EFL learners' varied needs by prioritizing autonomy and multimodal approaches, transforming grammar study into a learner-centered

process. Learners could select topics, set their own pace, and repeat exercises to target weaknesses, fostering inclusivity across proficiency levels.

Fostering engagement and motivation

Gamification cultivated engagement and motivation among adult learners by integrating goal-oriented mechanisms and interactive challenges, transforming passive grammar instruction into a dynamic, achievement-driven process. Seven participants (77.78%) identified specific gamified elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards as powerful external drivers [Excerpts 11-13]. They provided tangible milestones that fostered friendly competition and real-time progress visibility, as unveiled in Excerpts 11-13.

> Excerpt 11: *The points and levels encouraged me because I could see my progress in real time, and this challenged me to improve. (Participant 2_nar)*

> Excerpt 12: *Of course, knowing that after each round I have a higher score encourages me further. (Participant 4_int)*

> Excerpt 13: *It is fun and motivating as a game and because we use nicknames to play, it is fine if I fail. It is not so serious if I am at the bottom of the leaderboards. (Participant 8_int)*

Such features reinforced ongoing practice and endeavours for higher scores, reflecting their desire for continuous improvement [Excerpt 14]. These participants highlighted that Quizizz's leaderboard used anonymized nicknames, reducing peer confrontation while preserving the incentive to "win":

> Excerpt 14: *It is playing and competing in the game at the same time. Of course, as the gamer, I always want to win. Therefore, I need to review and practise at home a lot, knowing that I can compete with my other classmates. (Participant 8_int)*

This design balanced competition and inclusivity, ensuring that learners of various proficiency levels remained motivated without feeling isolated. Alongside extrinsic rewards, participants emphasized personal goals and the sense of achievement as major intrinsic motivators. Many reported a shift from rote learning to purposeful grammar practice [Excerpts 15-16].

> Excerpt 15: *It is not always rote learning, but it is like a goal I have to accomplish. The sense of achievement pushes me more. (Participant 1_nar)*

> Excerpt 16: *I found the gamified activities to be more engaging and motivating than traditional grammar instruction because they were interactive and*

challenging. I felt like I was actively participating in my learning rather than just passively listening to a lecture. (Participant 9_nar)

Consequently, the interactive nature of gamified tasks through quizzes, timed challenges, and collaborative elements further heightened students' engagement [Excerpt 17].

> Excerpt 17: *The timed quizzes and group challenges transformed our grammar lessons into an engaging, interactive experience. Instead of passively memorizing rules, I was actively solving problems and discussing ideas with classmates, which made learning both dynamic and enjoyable. (Participant 11_int)*

By combining extrinsic and intrinsic motivators with interactive activities, gamification transformed conventional grammar instruction into a dynamic, achievement-driven process. While intrinsic drivers such as goal-setting and the enjoyment of overcoming obstacles encouraged personal commitment to learning, the extrinsic rewards such as points and badges provided tangible milestones and friendly competition that spurred continuous improvement.

Reducing anxiety and building confidence

The study indicated that gamification played a pivotal role in reducing anxiety and boosting confidence among eight participants (88.89%) by creating a low-stakes environment where mistakes were normalized. This emotionally safe space allowed them to focus on progress rather than fear, thereby enhancing both confidence and overall language learning success. Anonymous participation minimized criticism and reduced hierarchical pressure [Excerpt 18].

> Excerpt 18: *I am quite afraid of making mistakes; however, being anonymous in the games makes me feel so comfortable. (Participant 3_int)*

In addition, immediate, non-penalizing feedback transformed errors into opportunities for growth [Excerpt 19]. Automated corrections and post-quiz reports further ensured that errors were deemed natural steps in the learning process, reinforcing a positive attitude toward learning.

> Excerpt 19: *The gamified environment helped me feel more comfortable and less anxious about making mistakes in grammar because it provided a safe space to experiment and learn from my errors. The game mechanics made it clear that mistakes were part of the learning process, so I didn't feel penalized for making them. (Participant 8_nar)*

Seven participants (77.78%) indicated that incremental achievements such as level completions, and the accumulation of points validated learners' competence and boosted their confidence. This steady progress not only enhanced self-efficacy but also provided tangible

evidence of improvement, vital for maintaining motivation [Excerpt 20]. Progress tracking through features such as anonymized leaderboards ensured that achievements were celebrated without fostering undue competition. Such an inclusive design was beneficial for learners with limited prior exposure to English, ensuring that all participants felt valued and empowered to take risks without fear of embarrassment [Excerpt 21].

> Excerpt 20: *Every time I finish a level or earn points, I feel more confident. It's like I'm proving to myself that I can actually do this. (Participant 5_int)*

> Excerpt 21: *With the set of games on Quizizz to review and practice at home, I have the report of my progress and points. It also shows the ranks in my class. I feel really happy and satisfied with what I achieved. (Participant 8_int)*

As such, gamification reduced anxiety and built self-efficacy by establishing a low-stakes, emotionally supportive learning environment. Features such as anonymous participation, immediate error-friendly feedback, and progress-driven milestones not only normalized mistakes but also empowered learners to build confidence in their language abilities.

Promoting collaboration

The integration of gamified activities significantly enhanced collaboration and social connection among the participants during grammar lessons. Seven learners (77.78%) viewed group challenges and team-centred competitions as catalysts for peer interaction, thus cultivating a supportive learning environment. They bridged gaps between learners of varying proficiency levels, creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment [Excerpts 22-23].

> Excerpt 22: *During our team challenges, we broke down complex grammar tasks together. I was impressed by how our group pooled ideas and supported one another, making the learning process both engaging and effective. For example, when we had the challenge to write a story using the second conditional, the members were very supportive and helpful. If I worked alone, I could not complete that. (Participant 4_int)*

> Excerpt 23: *Working on collaborative grammar puzzles allowed us to share diverse perspectives and strategies. Sometimes, I could not remember the grammar points exactly. Working in a team helps remind me of that. It is also fun to have rotating teams and partners each time. I always wait for this part. (Participant 7_int)*

The interactive and anonymous nature of gamified activities promoted a sense of friendliness and shared goals among eight participants (88.89%). This environment fostered peer support and established a community of practice where learners could learn collectively [Excerpt 24].

Excerpt 24: *The interactive and anonymous design of the gamified activities allowed me to speak freely without any fear of judgment. This not only made the class feel friendly and supportive but also created a real sense of shared purpose, as we all worked together and learned collectively. It is ok if I beat someone on the leaderboards, as we were all anonymous. (Participant 8_nar)*

These excerpts show that group activities and team-focused competitions in gamified platforms motivated the participants to work together to reach their common goals. They offered opportunities for the learners to interact and feel more connected, thus elevating a sense of social cohesion and inclusivity.

Challenges and negative impacts

Despite predominantly positive feedback, some learners reported challenges associated with the gamified materials and platform functionality. Three participants (33.33%) highlighted occasional technical issues, such as lagging interfaces or slow response times, causing minor disruptions to their engagement during class activities [Excerpts 25-26]:

Excerpt 25: *Sometimes the game was slow, and the screen froze. It interrupted my practice and made me lose motivation at that moment. (Participant 3_int)*

Excerpt 26: *There were a few times the app responded slowly, especially during class quizzes, which made me worried I would fall behind. (Participant 6_int)*

Furthermore, two learners (22.22%) encountered difficulties navigating the Quizizz user interface, particularly older students or those less familiar with technology, which initially impacted their user experience and confidence [Excerpts 27-28]:

Excerpt 27: *At first, it was confusing because I am not good with technology. I needed extra time to understand how to use the app properly. (Participant 4_nar)*

Excerpt 28: *I am older than most classmates, and it took me a while to get used to Quizizz. Initially, I felt a bit stressed figuring out how to participate. (Participant 7_int)*

Additionally, while anonymity reduced anxiety for many, the competitive aspects of gamification, such as leaderboards and scoring systems, occasionally heightened pressure or stress for two other participants (22.22 %) [Excerpts 29-30].

Excerpt 29: *Seeing my name at the bottom of the leaderboard sometimes made me anxious. I felt pressure to improve quickly. (Participant 5_int)*

Excerpt 30: *I liked the games, but sometimes competing made me nervous, especially if I made mistakes in front of classmates. (Participant 8_nar)*

Despite these minor figures, the reflections from the learners, to some extent, underscored the importance of addressing potential limitations related to technical accessibility, familiarity with the platform interface, and learners' emotional responses when implementing gamified approaches.

Discussion

It is evident from this study that gamified grammar instruction contributed to enhancing inclusivity for adult EFL learners by addressing their diverse needs and circumstances. Firstly, the platform's design features, such as "mastery mode" with unlimited attempts and flexible, out-of-class assignments, afforded learners the autonomy to control their pace and tailor their practice to their specific weaknesses. This level of autonomy is especially critical for adult learners juggling professional and personal responsibilities, echoing findings by Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) and Redjeki and Muhajir (2021) that emphasize the importance of flexible learning modalities in overcoming time constraints. In contrast to earlier studies that focused primarily on younger populations (Zainuddin et al., 2020), the results highlight that when adult learners are given control over their learning progress, gamification effectively bridges traditional classroom constraints and provides equitable access to learning opportunities.

Secondly, the integration of gamified elements, such as points, badges, and leaderboards, transformed rote grammar drills into goal-oriented tasks that bolstered both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. By using pseudonyms to preserve anonymity, the platform reduced the pressure associated with public performance, thus lowering anxiety and promoting a willingness to take risks in language use. These results align with previous research by Mufidah (2016) and Huang et al. (2020) in which gamification can create a low-stakes environment conducive to self-improvement. The present study extends these findings by showing that such motivational strategies are particularly effective for adult learners, who benefit from both tangible progress markers and the psychological safety provided by anonymous participation in gamified classrooms.

Thirdly, the embedded collaborative components in gamified grammar lessons, such as randomized group challenges and team-based tasks, fostered peer interaction and the development of a community of practice. The opportunity for learners to share knowledge, exchange feedback, and collaboratively solve grammatical problems enhanced their learning experiences and strengthened classroom cohesion. This observation is consistent with Awang-Hashim et al. (2019) and Wakat et al. (2023) in that inclusive classrooms are marked by strong social connections and mutual support. The results further demonstrate that structured, collaborative, gamified activities can break down social barriers, ensuring that learners of varying proficiency levels feel supported and valued, a critical factor in maintaining an inclusive educational environment.

Fourthly, technological flexibility and accessibility played a pivotal role in the feasibility of gamified learning spaces. Mobile compatibility and asynchronous practice options allowed learners to engage with the content anytime and anywhere, thereby overcoming the technical challenges typically faced by adult learners. This finding supports previous studies (Azman & Yunus, 2019; Godwin-Jones, 2011; Mekler et al., 2017; Pham, 2023) that underscore the benefits of mobile learning while also extending the literature by showing how such flexibility directly translates into enhanced inclusivity for professionals with limited time. The platform's ability to deliver content outside of fixed classroom hours ensured that learners from remote or resource-limited settings could participate equally, thereby reinforcing the equitable nature of the intervention.

Finally, the participants reported occasional technical disruptions and heightened pressure that hindered engagement, particularly during time-sensitive activities. These challenges are consistent with those identified by Azman and Yunus (2019) in that technological instability may disproportionately affect adult learners' performance. While many found anonymity less stressful in gamified environments, competitive features like leaderboards unintentionally caused tension for learners with low levels of language proficiency. This subscribes to the findings by Klock et al. (2024) that psychological safety should be prioritised during gamified activities to avoid alienating technologically challenged or low-achieving learners. These results reiterate the necessity of addressing affective dimensions in continued education for adult EFL learners to foster inclusivity (Huang et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study provides in-depth insights into the ways in which gamification contributes to enhancing inclusivity among EFL professionals in the context of a grammar course in Vietnam. The findings proffer a strong approach to creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for adult learners with various language learning backgrounds, levels of proficiency, experiences, and preferences. As such, gamification serves as a useful tool to augment inclusivity by accounting for various learning styles, promoting collaboration, and fostering positive learning attitudes. The narrative and interview data provided concrete examples and recommendations for integrating gamification into EFL classrooms for adult learners. The incorporation of gamified elements and other game mechanisms creates opportunities for personalized learning experiences, caters to different learning styles, and induces more interaction and collaboration among learners. However, it is important to empower adult learners with technical readiness through digital literacy training, restructure competitive features to promote cooperation, and infuse flexibility into gamified workflows. Pre-training courses that cater to learners' varying degrees of digital literacy might acquaint them with platform navigation, thus easing their access to technically laden environments. Simplified interface designs, assisted tutorials, and peer mentoring systems would also help to further lower entrance obstacles. These practical strategies contribute to redressing the

challenges and negative impacts in gamified activities and promoting inclusivity in language classrooms for adult learners.

Some limitations of this study pertain to the small sample size and a rather narrow context of a grammar course for EFL professionals taking a second degree program in English Linguistics. Future research can explore the effects of gamification on adult learners' cognitive, affective, behavioural, and social engagement and their language achievement in a broader setting of language learning across multiple learning spaces within and beyond classrooms. Further research on best inclusivity practices with adult learners that draw on different dimensions of gamification is also recommended.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Narrative frame (for two sample themes)

Theme 1: Responding to diverse learning needs and styles

The gamified activities _____ (cater/ did not cater) to my individual learning style by _____.

The gamified approach _____ (accommodate /did not accommodate) my specific learning needs because _____.

Gamification _____ (contributed/ did not contribute) to a more inclusive learning experience for me in the following ways: _____.

Theme 2: Fostering engagement and motivation

I found the gamified activities to be _____ (more/less) engaging and motivating than traditional grammar instruction because _____.

The specific game elements or features that contributed to my engagement and motivation were _____.

Gamification _____ (helped /did not help) me stay focused on my grammar learning goals because _____.

Appendix B: Sample interview questions

Theme 3: Reducing anxiety and building confidence

- Did you feel more comfortable and less anxious about making mistakes during gamified grammar activities? How did this environment affect your confidence in using grammar?
- How did the gamified setting create a supportive atmosphere for practicing and experimenting with grammar? Did it provide a safe space for learning?

Theme 4: Fostering collaboration

- How did gamified activities encourage collaboration and interaction with your classmates? Were there opportunities to engage with peers with whom you wouldn't normally interact?
- Did gamification contribute to creating a more inclusive learning experience? In what ways did it foster collaboration among diverse learners?

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