

Gamified Tools in the Development of Communicative Production in Remote EFL Learning

Lucila E. Quezada, Indoamérica University, Ecuador

Daniel P. Ripalda, Indoamérica University, Ecuador

Jessica P. Cuenca, Indoamérica University, Ecuador

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Abstract

One of the most critical challenges of Foreign Language teaching is developing students' oral communicative competences, enhancing productive skills, and expressing thoughts in another language. This teaching process requires using different resources to acquire cognitive experiences that promote meaningful learning. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers emphasized virtual learning environments (VLE) and other digital resources to achieve the expected learning outcomes. In this context, quasi-experimental research was developed over six months, which analyzed the effectiveness of learning oral communicative skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through regular formative tests, according to international standards, prioritizing fluency, use of language, interaction, and pronunciation areas. This work involved specialist teachers in assessment development and teaching resources production; this study registered the progress of 107 first level students of the Language Centre at the Indoamérica University of Ecuador, the first one non-randomly group used external gamified resources, and the second one used the default activities of the LMS, during the teaching-learning process in the remote modality. The results of this work show a correlation between the use of gamified resources and the assimilation of some oral language skills; therefore, from this experience, it is recommended for teachers to incorporate these kinds of resources to improve this productive oral skill within the communicative standards of the Common European Framework for Teaching English.

Keywords: Digital Resources, Remote Learning, Gamification for Productive Oral Skill

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Introduction

The development of productive oral competence has always been the primary concern of EFL teachers since it is one of the skills that allow us to communicate immediately with our interlocutors. That is why this research aims to establish specific gamified resources to interact in the remote modality since the global pandemic we are going through has forced us to explore new tools to turn our class into the ideal space to develop and strengthen these skills.

The communicative skill (speaking) plays a significant role in conveying ideas with the right words correctly with proper pronunciation. Besides, explicitly three areas of knowledge are considered: language input with a diversity of activities that provide the learner with the resource he requires to start building his knowledge; the output structure refers to structured exercises and is a phase between presentation and practice (Setiyadi, 2020) and communicative output where the production phase is oriented. (Hamidova & Ganiyeva, 2020)

To improve these goals, the model was centered on the classroom and blended learning modality. All activities were carried out in the classroom, which the students attended regularly. The speaking practice was done in situ through voice recording due to the number of students, one-minute recording, role-playing, oral repetition, and rubrics to show each student's progress. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the pedagogical strategies had to be redefined because there was no physical contact with the students.

The pandemic situation led to a disruptive change and allowed digital technology to become the main ally of teachers and students to carry out different academic activities. Thus, the educational field went from face-to-face mode to remote mode to continue with their work. With this transition, both teachers and students had to adapt to a new way of studying even though students were mainly prepared for this shift, but some teachers felt unprepared to integrate digital teaching techniques in their curricula. The academic staff, especially mid and late-career teachers, had often incorporated technology use in their objectives to perform teleworking more effectively and incorporate digital resource. (van der Spoel, Noroozi, Schuurink, & van Ginkel, 2020).

That is why, in the search for incorporating digital resources, the foreign language teacher faced this question: How to develop the communicative competencies (speaking) of English as EFL through an LMS due to the pandemic? Several studies have highlighted the benefits of using this medium to develop speaking skills since they bring together aspects such as economy, privacy, simplicity, and flexibility (Irawan, 2020). Additionally, these resources allow diversification of strategies, models, and methodologies that meet the current context requirements (García, 2014)

Taking into account the literature review, in our work, we suggest the following objectives: to propose gamified tools that improve the assimilation of EFL by students when developing the skill (speaking) in the context of Covid-19 and to analyze the comparative results between the intervention and experimental groups concerning the use of gamified resources applied to the English language through remote learning.

Background

The leap of gamification as a virtual tool in the education field involves solving the problems of lack of concentration and motivation, study environment unsuitable for learning, emotional factors that hinder the execution of a specific task, which through a gamified system helps to overcome all these barriers, (Teixes, 2015). Its application in the classroom becomes innovative support to the current pedagogical methodologies to educate in the Knowledge Age, competencies, and skills of the curriculum, whose methods and design visualize a comprehensive education, where gamification plays a fundamental role.

“The classic vision of Gamification consists of the use of strategies, models, dynamics, mechanics, and game elements in non-game contexts, to convey a message or content or change behavior through a playful experience that promotes motivation, involvement, and fun, (...) (Llorens-Largo et al., 2016, pág. 1). Through gamified interactive resources, different activities can be carried out to effectively link the teacher and students within the teaching-learning process in a dynamic way to turn a virtual session into a space of interaction.

Additionally, through gamification, teachers can include activities such as formal study, observation, evaluation, reflection, practice, management, skills improvement, trial, and error or problem-solving activities can occur in an individual or group context and in a determined or undetermined time (Espinosa & Eguia, 2016). A gamifying process is an answer to a specific need in the class where the aim is to work on content by providing educational experiences.

For (Kapp, 2012) gamification is a teaching mechanism based on games that motivate students and promote their learning. Besides, gamified tools designed virtually are the gear that promotes thinking to positively attract and incite to solve the problems posed and is a teaching support tool for learning processes to be meaningful and successful.

According to, (Ključević & Krumes, 2020) talks about play in teaching, about the teacher's importance of finding the appropriate method to impart knowledge to the students according to their age. One of the ways to teach a foreign language is the game, the double action of "learning and playing at the same time" allows the acquisition of new knowledge and makes learning grammar and spelling less tedious and more attractive activities that are gamified, creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom and better learning performance.

Meanwhile, (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011) suggest categorizing the elements of a game into three groups: mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics. Mechanics refers to how games transform specific inputs into specific outputs, where it maintains a direct connection with the learning content and in educational contexts includes the application of challenges. Dynamics indicate the needs to be satisfied in the activity. These, together with the mechanics, interact during the game and the aesthetics. However, refer to how the mechanics and dynamics of the game interact with each other to produce emotional results. According to these categories, the teacher should consider the dynamics to apply concerning each group's needs and class objectives.

Gamification is a learning tool implemented as the mechanics of games in the educational field to achieve better results, such as: acquiring knowledge to develop some skill and reward specific actions. In English as a foreign language, technological tools can be used as part of

educational strategies for the effective development of speaking, based on the use of new technologies to raise the teaching practice and the student's knowledge to be more meaningful and functional. Enhancing the students' skills and, in turn, generating a greater motivation being the student more involved in their learning. (Moreira & González, 2015).

The existing literature on using gamified resources for English language teaching is not conclusive, although authors such as Moreira speak of having tested gamified resources, obtaining favorable results. Likewise, Camilo Corchuelo presents a study in which he uses gamified resources to motivate and dynamize the contents in the classroom and points out that he has achieved significant results.

However, given the global situation, it became evident that these technologies have not reached their full potential because they have not been thoroughly tested in remote learning modalities. Due to the pandemic, several studies are just beginning to be developed, considering that one of the main variables is that the teacher has limited contact with the students and can only use digital media to communicate, evaluate and execute the teaching process.

Another essential aspect to consider is that studies involving digital educational tools are rapidly losing relevance due to the dizzying advance of technology. Several of the resources that now exist were not available years ago, and those that were available were not used as regularly as they are now, mainly due to the technological gap, teacher's professionalization, connectivity, and infrastructure.

Background of the Study

The Language Institute at the Indoamérica University of Ecuador, due to the confinement policies established by the National Government to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In March 2020, all academic activities went to virtual mode; that is, the interaction of teachers and students in physical spaces was eliminated, moving to a remote learning model that forced all academic community members to use the technological resources that the institution has in different platforms.

At the end of the first academic period during the confinement, there was a 21% reduction in the students' general average in the acquisition of oral skills at the Language Institute. Several possibilities were analyzed among the teachers to understand the reasons for this situation, different review committees were established, and it was found that one of the areas in which there had been less development was speaking.

This institutional situation generated that several alternatives were proposed to improve the area of language development and acquisition. Among the proposed alternatives was the possibility of establishing a multidisciplinary team to generate gamified resources that were integrated into the (virtual) remote learning classrooms of students. This team then proposed a study to measure the impact of this proposal and its effectiveness in developing language skills, contrasting the ratings in the different areas of development.

Methodology

In order to determine the impact of gamified resources on the academic performance of language students at Indoamérica University, a quasi-experimental study was proposed, using

moderating and controlled variables. A group of teachers specialized in EFL prepared a series of guidelines to develop gamified pedagogical resources; teachers developed the products from the Graphic Design area of the University.

The specific objective of the study was to determine the incidence of gamified resources in the acquisition of oral production skills of students throughout an academic period. The number of sessions that students had contact with teachers for tutoring was considered a controlled variable; the study did not consider the demographic and socioeconomic aspects of the participating students.

In each modality, one of the groups had access to different gamified resources in its LMS platform throughout the academic period, while the other was allowed to use only the default resources of the institutional platform. After analyzing the ethical implications, it was established that the study did not compromise the students' grades or their right to quality education. Additionally, an informed consent process for the study was not required, and a confidentiality protocol was established so that the students would not know that they participated in this study, nor would their identity be revealed at the end of the study. Furthermore, the teachers are protected by their teaching freedom, which implies the possibility of planning, executing, and evaluating without undue and unreasonable interference.

Finally, to guarantee the study results and avoid unknown variables, an overview protocol was established, through which the same teacher was in charge of the four groups involved in the process. The teacher received constant advice and support from the project's research team throughout the process.

Involved Groups in the Study

The study involved 107 students of the first level of EFL, who were non-randomly distributed into four groups, according to the Table 1.

Table 1: Modality Group Study

Groups	Modality	Descriptions	Students
Group 1	Remote learning	First EFL level 5 Weekly sessions Gamified resources were applied	26
Group 2	Remote learning	First EFL level 5 Weekly sessions Restricted Gamified Resources	28
Group 3	Blended learning	First EFL level 1 weekly session Gamified resources were applied	27
Group 4	Blended learning	First EFL level 1 weekly session Restricted Gamified Resources	26

Tools Used in the Development of Resources

Once, understanding the conceptualization of the gamification feature in education and its benefits detailed above, this study is based on the use of gamified tools that allow developing

the areas of interaction, fluency, pronunciation, and accuracy to incorporate them in remote learning classes such as Kahoot, Lyrics training, Wordwall, Educaplay, H5P in free versions where each of them contributes to specific areas to acquire the EFL: elements of the skill of Speaking such discourse management, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, pronunciation, e interacción (Lazaraton, 2014) besides technological tools can provide students practice in real-time with sufficient language input. (Shumin, 2002)

KAHOOT!

Kahoot! It is a game student response system (GSRS) where in this case, the remote learning of the synchronous classroom is temporarily transformed into a game show in which the teacher is the game show host, and the students are the participants (Wang, 2015). Besides (Navarro, 2017) states that as a free platform, it allows the creation of evaluation questionnaires based on the game; therefore, it is a tool for the teacher to create debates, contests in the EFL learning space, making the students the central part of the learning with the help of their mobile devices.

It was used as a vocabulary test, use of grammar, useful expressions elements that take into account in the speaking skill development of the students of the planned units, as well as phonetic aspects and reading comprehension, individually and as a group and allows the student to know instantly their successes and errors, the score they are getting until reaching the end of the exercise. It also contributes to improving the memorization of concepts, facilitating the student the reduction and study time (Rodríguez-Fernández, 2017) Finally, the answers are stored on the teacher's home page carrying a follow-up and feedback.

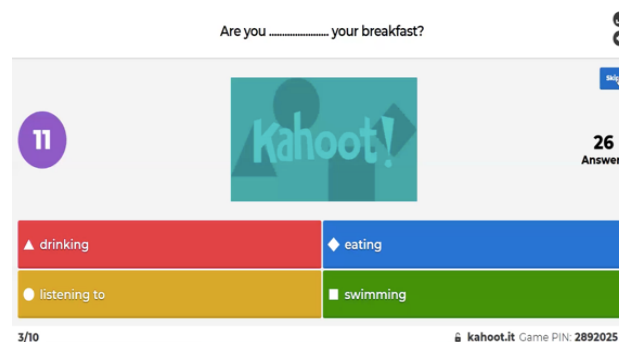


Figure 1: Interactive Tool Kahoot!

Wordwall

Wordwall creates interactive activities; this tool enables users to set up a countdown or a count forward as well as a leader board. The game mechanics stimulates a positive sense of competition among the participants (Bassani, Bezzi, & Mă, 2018) and (Jackson & Narvaez, 2013), increase vocabulary as a learning strategy through playing with new words, besides the dynamics of Wordwalls helps to remember terms that have been forgotten and are not usually handled of Wordwalls helps to remember terms that have been forgotten and are not usually handled.

The use of Wordwall game media was used to facilitate the student's learning of any foreign language vocabulary, in this case, in Vocabulary EFL classes according to the syllabus. When the student has already recorded in his memory the vocabulary, he can handle the lexicon with greater fluency for speaking and writing, (Aruperes, Liando, & Rorimpandey,

2018) being speaking skill one of the essential objectives of this research, that is to say, to achieve that the student, by increasing vocabulary, can communicate and develop appropriately in the productive oral skill of speaking.

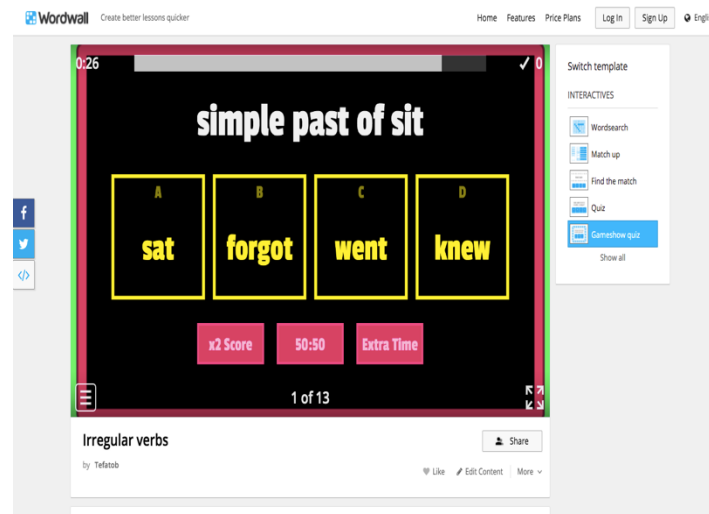


Figure 2: Interactive Tool Wordwall"

Lyrics Training, Listening, Didactic Strategy

The gamified tool "lyrics training" is an entertaining and effective way to acquire a language by using music videos through YouTube and developing listening skills. The songs that are applied in this type of English language teaching are popular and well known. The facilities it presents in scope, accessibility, and mastery make it a fun and optimal activity to practice the language.

Lyrics training is an invaluable open educational resource because it motivates and encourages to practice the language using authentic material presented in a friendly way, allowing reusing and adapting the same. Being authentic material, students will face different pronunciations and idioms, which makes the activity more attractive. (Batista, 2020) Speaking is closely related to or interwoven with listening, which is the primary mechanism through which language rules are internalized. (Cambridge, 2011; Shumin, 2002)

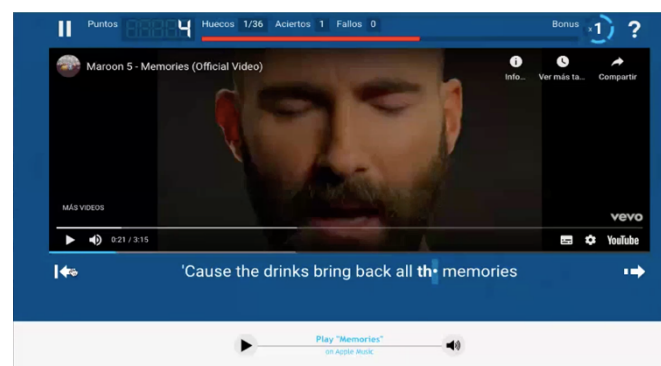


Figure 3: Interactive Tool "Lyrics Training"

H5P

Within the LMS, we have another gamified interactive resource, H5P, with a variety of interactive activities includes "Interactive multimedia with guest speakers, case study scenarios, interactive technical demonstrations, 360° virtual lab tours (both videos and still images, that include hotspots, roll-over information, animated. gifs, quizzes). Besides, it includes interactive diagrams with clickable hotspots and drag & drop activities; templated note-taking study guides; and check student's knowledge quizzes." (Wilkie, Zakaria, McDonald, & Borland, 2018). This allowed students to record sentences for repetition and correction, with feedback on the respective sounds and intonation in the language. These activities were developed according to the content planning in the speaking and vocabulary section. It has become an appropriate toolkit that can be applied both in class or pre/post class to facilitate blended active learning to upskill students.

Genially

This free version platform contains several templates of multiple uses; the most used with the study group was the so-called gamification, with embedded codes were placed in the institutional LMS and used as study material and support for classes in the general review of class topics, where it allowed students to practice their lexicon and reinforce their knowledge synchronously and asynchronously. (González & Gómez)

Socrative

This mobile application used in synchronous time contains questionnaires created by the teacher and works with specific codes and space race (timed questionnaires) that allow the student to register and be evaluated in EFL acquisition. It was used as an interactive gamified tool in sessions supporting the student lexicon as a formative assessment of the knowledge taught in class by giving high scores to the student who gets the answers correct and provides immediate feedback. Finally, the teacher can review these results in their repository of answers and monitor their performance to take different pedagogical and linguistic decisions.

Therefore, in this study, the incidence of the gamified tools for developing the grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse competencies mention significant relation in their application. Additionally, Reference Level Descriptions can give beneficial guidance on the linguistic features which students may get successfully on the A1 level according to CEFR. Considering descriptors for oral tasks helps the teacher decide what realistic expectations are at this level in different elements that involve the students' speaking skills.

Evaluation Areas

The linguistic skill corresponds to the Speaking or, in other words, the productive oral skill; the evaluated aspects were: Accuracy, Fluency, Interaction, and Pronunciation through a rubric. The CEFR scales describe levels in terms of what students can do and how well they can do it. At this level, a student can perform a task successfully but still make acceptable mistakes in their repertoire.

According to (Day & Krzanowski, 2011), level A1 students can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and fundamental phrases aimed at satisfying a concrete type's needs;

they can introduce themselves and others. They can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where they live, people they know, and things they have. They can also interact clearly, but communication depends on repetition at a slower speech rate, rephrasing, and repair.

Furthermore, students can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, articulate less familiar words, and repair communication in their fluency. Besides, a minimal repertoire of learned words and phrases can be understood with some effort by EFL speakers. While in their accuracy level, they manage basic grammatical structures, vocabulary, and familiar words related to A1 topics. (Division, 2001).

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation consists of oral exams applied in each unit (3) and one as a summative evaluation with two sections: The first one, introduce yourself, 1-minute length where students mention their personal information. The second part was an interview with five questions related to the learned topics in the bi-monthly period with 3 minutes length where the student can keep the conversation, making their questions. And finally, 1-minute feedback and analysis.

Study Development

Throughout an academic period, four oral aspects were evaluated with two oral examinations, one for onsite (remote learning) and another for blended learning modality, using the same rubric as instruments in all groups to measure their performance.

Table 2: Experiment Group Distribution for Results Comparison

Evaluated areas	MLS + Traditional Resources	MLS + Gamified Resources
Interaction	Group 1 - Remote Modality	Group 2 - Remote Modality
Fluency	Group 3 - Blended Modality	Group 4 - Blended Modality
Pronunciation		
Accuracy		

Note: There were 4 aspects evaluated in 4 groups

During the academic period of the study, different educational support tools were developed and applied; the following table shows the areas of language skills acquisition and the resources used in each group in the different units.

Table 3: Teaching - Learning Selected Tools by Oral Development Areas

Areas	Traditional applied activities	Gamified Learning Tools Applied
Area 1 Interaction	Pair activities recording Dialogues Role plays	Teams calling recording KAHOOT online

Area 2 Fluency	Speaking one minute Face to face teacher Oral presentations	H5p
Area 3 Pronunciation	Oral repetition Online dictionary for pronunciation Phonetics practice	Lyrics training online app
Area 4 Accuracy	Running dictation Teacher-students correction Meaning negotiation	Kahoot online Genially Socrative Wordwall Educaplay

Results

For the data analysis, the academic records collected by the teacher are used, which contain the grades of the students in each language area acquisition applied in the four groups that were part of the study. For this process, the students needed to have known, verified, and accepted the grades; there were isolated cases in which the students requested regrades of specific contributions, which were verified via committee, and were formally addressed and resolved. Therefore, the results presented below represent a unilateral view of the teacher and the student's acceptance and recognition.

The following table shows the average grades obtained in the areas of language acquisition, considering the groups and modality. It can be seen that in the remote learning modality, the group that had access to gamified resources increased its average by 21.6%, while in the blended modality, the increase was 2.8%.

Table 4: Comparative results by modality

GROUPS	REMOTE LEARNING		BLENDING	
	Group 1.	Group 2.	Group 3.	Group 4.
Language Development Area	Traditional Resources	Gamified Tools	Traditional Resources	Gamified Tools
Interaction	6,5	8,3	6,9	6,9
Fluency	6,4	8,4	6,7	6,8
Pronunciation	6,6	8,3	7,0	7,2
Accuracy	6,7	8,3	6,8	7,3
Average	6,5	8,3	6,9	7,1

The following graph shows the performance of students in each group and each of the acquisition areas of oral language skills. Groups 2 and 4 are those in which gamified resources were applied, especially in group 2, in the remote learning modality, a significant

increase can be seen in the four areas of speaking, this increase has even presented consistent results throughout the period, it can be seen that the performance of students has grown steadily and equitably.

In group 4, in which gamified resources were applied in the blended modality, there is evidence of growth, especially in areas related to Pronunciation and Accuracy; however, the areas of Interaction and Fluency have not shown any variation.

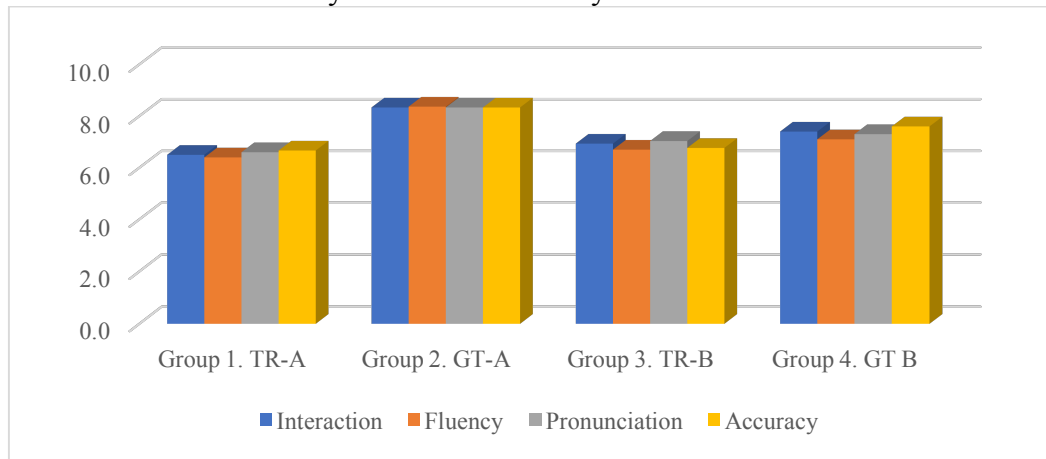


Figure 4: Oral Learning Development by Groups

Figures 4 and 5 show the results of the study by modality. In remote learning modality, it is evident that the gamified resources generated a significant improvement in the four areas; however, in the blended mode, it was not possible to replicate these results, but in any case, an upward trend can be seen, although the average is lower than in the remote learning model.

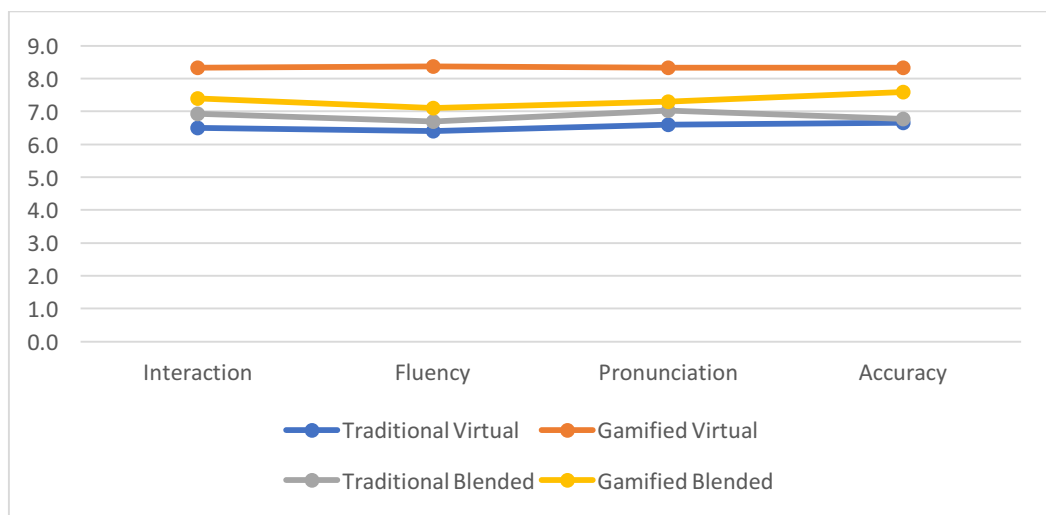


Figure 5: Language Area Developed by Modality

The courses that used gamified resources have a growing tendency to acquire language skills, both in remote and blended learning modalities. The aspects that seem to have more significant development with gamified resources are Pronunciation and Accuracy. The gamified activities achieved their objective of retention in oral communicative practice.

The aspect that seems to have less development with gamified resources is Fluency, it is necessary to continue reducing the affective filter in the students so that the pauses are not so frequent. Generally, this level is characterized by its simple Fluency in this skill.

Table 5 shows a retrospective analysis of how the study was carried out concerning two previous periods, the last one in face-to-face mode and the first in virtual modality. The course that used gamified resources in the virtual modality managed to raise the average to face-to-face modality levels. In the remote learning modality group, there was a significant improvement in Speaking using gamified resources. In the remote learning modality, there is a better distribution of averages among the evaluated areas. It seems that learning is at the same level. It is evident that in the blended modality, gamified resources could generate a slight improvement in areas such as Speaking and Reading.

Table 5: Retrospective Analysis

GROUP DESCRIPTION	On Site – Remote Learning			Blended		
	Before pandemic	First period pandemic	Second period pandemic	Before pandemic	First period pandemic	Second period Pandemic
	Regular group	Regular group	Gamified group	Regular group	Regular group	Gamified group
Speaking	7,52	5,9	8,3	7,84	7,2	6,9
Writing	8,1	7,6	8,4	7,45	7,4	6,8
Reading	8,3	7,4	8,3	7,5	8	7,2
Listening	8,25	7,3	8,3	7,3	7,2	7,3
Average	8,04	7,05	8,3	7,52	7,45	7,1

A remote learning course that used gamified resources improved its performance by 14% compared to a blended learning course. In the remote modality, there were measured four areas: interaction, fluency, pronunciation, and accuracy. As on site as online these were the main areas to develop speaking skills. After applying gamified tools, it is evident its improvement. Gamified tools in the remote modality showed that speaking can be significantly better to develop interaction, fluency, pronunciation, and accuracy.

Conclusions

Several activities are used face-to-face, such as activities in pairs, dialogues, oral repetition, dictation in progress, and teacher correction. These activities guide the teaching-learning process to use these resources in a communicative context, without memorizing, since learning a language allows communicating ideas, and although the repetition of phrases can be included, the important thing is the new production and attempts to strengthen this competence. (Iglesias Rodríguez, Olmos Migueláñez, Torrecilla Sánchez, & Mena Marcos, 2014)

Concerning the various gamified tools available to us, it was found that lyrics training, Kahoot, Educaplay, Wordwall, Genially, Socrative are instruments that can be incorporated to improve the assimilation of EFL in the oral skill. For the remote modality, since it is necessary to strengthen the communicative competence through structure information to understand what we hear or read, according to the hypothesis of comprehension, exposed by (Krashen, 2017)

That is to say that the ludic activities combined with the remote modality have allowed generating substantial learning environments because the learner connects with other people to participate in different online educational games, where the learner combines the time to dissipate his mind with a structured information environment. Therefore, the experience described here suggests that by mediating learning with these tools, it is possible in a substantial way to impact favorably and contribute to the challenges represented by today's society (García-Marulanda, 2018).

The analysis of the results indicates that during the face-to-face modality and applying the traditional activities described in previous pages, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Listening skills maintained an average of 8.04. Once the pandemic began, these decreased by 12%. Besides, regarding the components of the oral skills collected, it could be seen that interaction, fluency, pronunciation, and accuracy had an average of 6.5 during the face-to-face period as opposed to an average of 8.3 with the application of gamified tools in the remote modality.

That is, students after this intervention were able to understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). They can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment, and matters in areas of immediate need. (Cambridge, 2011)

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Contact email: lquezada2@indoamerica.edu.ec
Danielripalda@uti.edu.ec
consuelodebrunnette@hotmail.com