

## INVESTIGATING ESP STUDENTS' RESPONSES ON THE LECTURER-APPLIED GAMIFICATION STRATEGIES

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### Abstract

This study was geared by previous research that covered the effectiveness of the application of gamification concepts in English for Specific Purposes classes in university level. Gamification has been considered relevant in growing and maintaining students' learning motivation, as most research focused on how lecturers applied the concepts of gamification and the results of the processes on students. This research will scrutinize how students respond to the lecturer's application of the gamification elements in class. This study uses a questionnaire on how students perceive the use of gamification elements in class and how it helps them improve their self-confidence. The results of this research show that students were aware of the gamification strategies applied in class activities and they responded positively to the application of gamification elements in their ESP classes. Most of them agreed that gamification helped motivate them to relax and be more engaged in class activities as it improved their self-confidence in using English.

**Keywords:** students' self-confidence, gamification, ESP, learning motivation.

## INTRODUCTION

The goal of English for Specific Purpose Class in the Industrial Engineering Department at Universitas Atma Jaya is to ensure students to be able to communicate about and present topics on industrial engineering. This class applies Kolb's experiential learning that enables students to experience using English and learn in four cycles: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Therefore, the classes are conducted fully in English to make students experience the language, firsthand.

However, speaking English in class is not always easy due to low self-esteem besides poor language mastery. There are several factors influencing students' low self-esteem such as anxiety, shyness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of vocabulary (Nety, Wahyuni and Murheni 2020), (Nadila, Hengki and Ratna 2020), (Maji, Samanhudi and Mokoagouw 2022), (Jaya, Petrus and Pita 2022), (Alviansyah, Hidayat and Mulyati 2024), and (Kulsum, et al. 2025). Besides, Nadila (2020) added that lack of preparation also worsens their self-confidence. Nety (2020), further, suggested English teachers need to reduce students' anxiety, and improve students' vocabulary to boost students' self-confidence and form group discussions in class.

Siregars (Siregar and Siregar 2020) identified that the motivation to study English is in the moderate category. This is in line with a study that showed most students possessed medium level of self-confidence in speaking English (Muqorrobin, Bindarti and Sundari 2022). Intrinsic motivation is considered to have stronger influence on students' performance, but teachers also play an essential role to motivate students in studying English (Amelia, Nugraha and Yulianto 2024). A study by Huy Cuong Nguyen (2019) shows that there is an influence of parent's

ability in speaking English to the students' motivation in learning the language. Furthermore, Nguyen also stated that instrumental motivation is stronger than integrative motivation.

Amelia et al (2024) and Takahashi (2018) stated that extrinsic motivation is essential in the learning process as it helps students to autonomously decide to change their behaviors in achieving their learning objectives. Hardcastle et al (2015) stated that it is tricky to change the behaviors of the unmotivated. To do so, it is important to offer environmental strategies to help these unmotivated learners.

Some previous studies discussed how to motivate students to build their confidence. Ardhana and Sadikin (2025) implemented roleplay to enhance students' self-confidence to speak English, Listyani and Kristie (2018) recognized four activities, i.e. role-play, small group discussion, storytelling, and songs that helped encourage students' self-confidence in speaking English, and Maisaroh et al (2024) applied group discussion and vocabulary exercises that allow passive students learned from the active ones. On the other hand, Wahyuningsih and Ni'mah (2023) used Youtube.com to provide media to improve students' motivation and self-confidence in English public speaking.

Svitlana (2018), Anisa et al (2020), Adrefiza (2022), Wulantari et al (2023), and Kizi (2025) have proven that the application of gamification elements in class help improve students' motivation, engagement, collaboration and active learning in class by creating a more relaxed, fun and competitive classroom environment. However, John (2024) also presented that although gamification elements help teachers improve students' language performances, they also bring some challenges. Those studies on the application of gamification used the teachers' perspective. It will be necessary to study whether students that experience gamification also perceive it as positive. Therefore, this research studies the effects of gamification in English class by using the students' perspective.

There are three questions that this study tried to answer:

1. Can students identify the elements of gamification applied in class?
2. Do students find the gamification elements helpful in motivating them to actively participate more in class?
3. Are there any significant shifts in how students perceive their ability to communicate in English?

## METHOD

In collecting data for this study, an online questionnaire with multiple-choice items is applied via Google Forms. The Google Form is used since it is practical and easy to convert it to Excel file for analysis need.

The questionnaire was distributed to six English for Specific Purpose classes in the Industrial Engineering Department in Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta in the second semester of 2024-2025 Academic Year. There are 190 students from the fourth and sixth semester joining the classes, and there are 159 responses collected.

The data from the Google form were converted into Microsoft Excel file and then analyzed. The results of the analysis are classified into three categories: students' backgrounds that lead to the problem identification, how students perceive the application of the gamification elements in class and the comparison of students' feelings about their performance at the beginning of the semester and towards the end of the semester. The data analysis and discussion are presented in the findings and discussion section.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The ESP classes apply the same structure composed of in-class and out-of-class activities. Before class, students are supposed to prepare by reading/listening to the materials given, working on the vocabulary and finding additional data which helps understand the materials better. In class, students ask or answer some questions related to the topic given, discuss them in small groups and present the results of the discussion in class. After class, students working in groups are expected to prepare a presentation related to the topic discussed in class. Each group works on a small part of the topic so they will bring various coverages. They arrange the presentation slides and distribute tasks among group members both for the preparation and presentation. In the following class, some groups present the results of their work to class, followed by a question-and-answer session. Students who do not present may ask questions, help answer questions or comment on the materials and presentation.

During class activities, lecturer acts as a facilitator, making sure that the presentations and discussions work smoothly. Besides, to create a comfortable environment for English learning in class, some elements of gamification are applied in the ESP classes, such as points, leaderboard, color cards, double points, pop-up quizzes, and competitive environment.

The first element of gamification applied in the ESP classes is giving point. Students will receive points whenever they perform: one point for asking a question, two points for answering a question, or 3-5 points for presenting in front of the class. Students collect points in the form of coupons, and the class captain helps the lecturer in recapping the points at the end of class. All students are encouraged to participate in class activities to collect more points in every single meeting.

The second gamification element is the use of a leaderboard in the form of color-cards. Based on the points collected, students are categorized into four groups: red for poor achievers, yellow for average achievers, green for good achievers, and blue for the top achievers. Beside functioning as a leaderboard, the color-card also helps students and lecturer identify which students still need help and who are already safe. Based on the color cards, help can be offered to students with lower points.

Double points are offered as a surprise element in the application of gamification. When classes are dull or questions are too hard for students, the willingness to answer the questions is rewarded with double points. Double points are quite popular among students who want to increase their points, especially for the low achievers. On some occasions students who are already in green or blue zones tried to help their friends in red and yellow zones to answer questions so they can move to the safe zone which is green.

The next element of gamification is pop-up quizzes. At the beginning of class or when students are tired and low motivated, the lecturer can bring quizzes in class as another element of surprise. Trivial questions in the form of riddles can enliven the class. Random questions about the class materials can also be presented with the help of Kahoot!, spinning wheel, lucky dips, etc. This surprise element is supposed to shift students' focus back into class activities.

The last element of gamification used in this class is competitive environment. Although this environment is not deliberately created by the lecturer. However, some students can feel the competition in the classroom: when some students get a lot of points and bring jealousy to the low achievers. This situation pushes them to try to catch up. Some other students think that they compete with themselves to be braver to speak up and get higher points.

Figure 1 below shows that, at the beginning of the semester, most students (64%) consider their ability to communicate in English as fair, followed by bad (17%), good (14%), very bad (8%). Only 1% consider their ability as very good. These data show that many students are not confident about their ability to communicate in English. In this situation, lecturers need to motivate students to build their self confidence in using the language since

the ESP class is geared up to enable students to discuss and present topics related to Industrial Engineering.

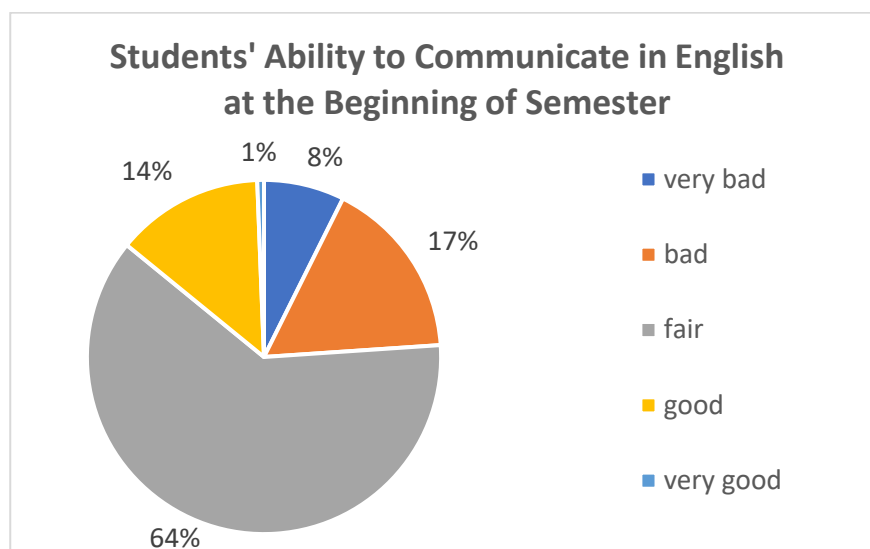


Figure 1. Students' Ability to Communicate in English at the Beginning of the Semester

Figure 2 below depicts how students perceive their strengths and weaknesses in speaking English. Most students consider linguistic mastery like grammar (66%), vocabulary (52%) and pronunciation (36%) as their biggest weaknesses. Other strong weaknesses that do not belong linguistic mastery are fluency (56%), self-confidence (44%) and class preparation (18%). When asked about their strengths, students tend to be less confident. 39% respondents think their strength in on class preparation and 38% on pronunciation while less than 25% respondents think their strengths are on vocabulary (23%), fluency (17%), self-confidence (16%) and the lowest is grammar (13%). There is a tendency for students to see their English mastery as low and this situation might lead them to be reluctant to participate in class activities since they are afraid to make mistakes and show their weaknesses.

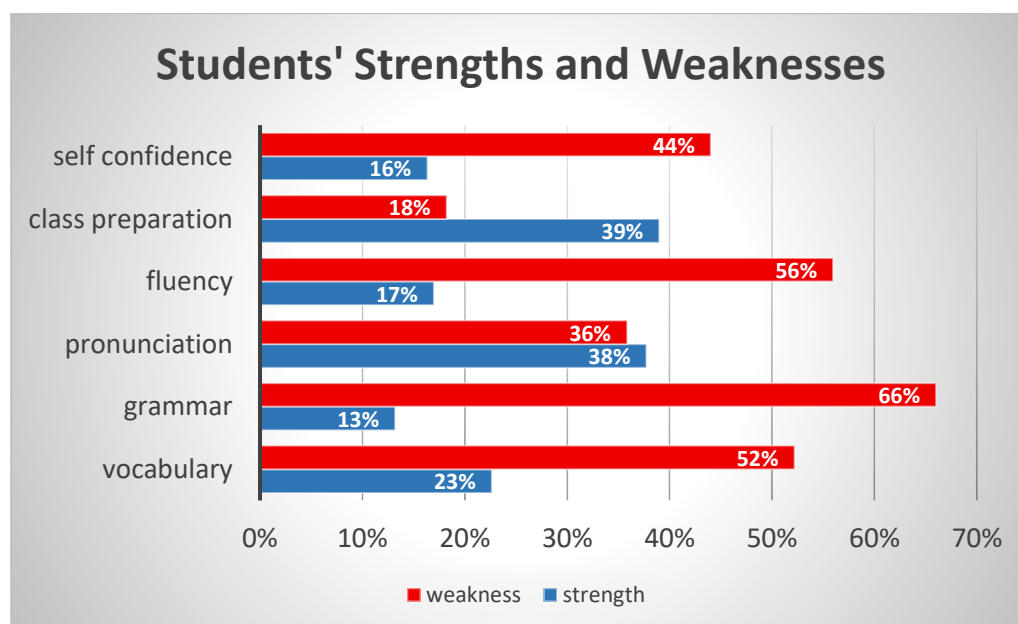


Figure 2. Students' Strengths and Weaknesses when Speaking English

The class situation above shows that it is necessary to boost students' self-confidence to improve their ability to speak the language. The implementation of gamification is expected to

improve students' self-confidence that, later, build their motivation to be involved in class activities that will improve their English-speaking mastery.

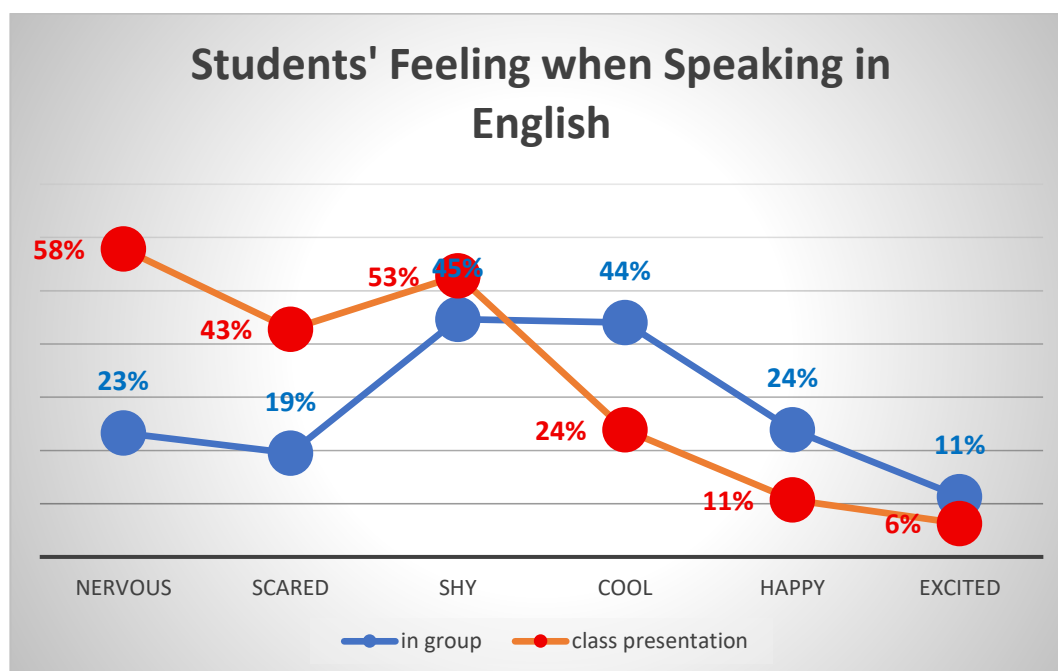


Figure 3. Students' Feelings when Speaking English in Class

When asked to speak in groups, students tend to feel less nervous (23%), less scared (19%) and less shy (45%) compared to presenting a topic in front of the class that makes them feel nervous (58%), scared (43%) and shy (53%). However, this situation shifted when they were asked to present in front of the class. Class presentations tend to make students feel less cool (24%), less happy (11%) and less excited (6%) compared to when they discuss in groups feeling cool (44%), happy (24%) and excited (11%). This shows that students feel more relaxed when they speak in small groups as it is less intimidating than when speaking in front of the class.

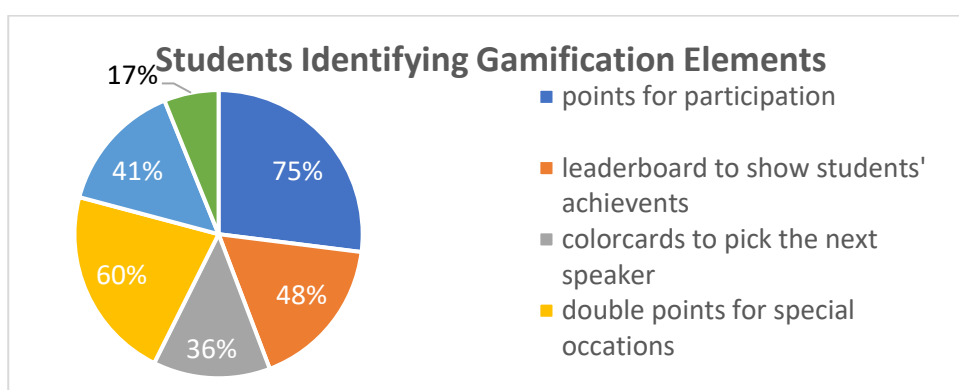


Figure 4. Gamification Elements that Students Can Identify

The ESP lecturer applied some gamification elements, such as points for participation, leaderboard, color cards, double points, pop-up quizzes and a competitive environment. 75% of respondents could identify points for participation in the form of point coupons as an element of gamification. Students collect 1 point for answering questions, 2 for answering and 3-5 for class presentation. 60% of respondents identify double points at special occasions. When students are tired and unmotivated, the lecturer encourages students to speak up by offering them double points. 48% of respondents realize gamification element from the use of cards of

four different colors: red, yellow, green and blue to show whether they are in safe or dangerous zones. 41% of respondents identify the gamification element from the first opportunity to speak up given to the red and yellow card holders as it helps low achievers to get their turns to speak up before those braver students holding green and blue cards. 17% respondents can identify the element of gamification from the competitive environment when they raised their hands to speak up to collect class participation points.

When students realize that they are joining a game by collecting points, the competitive environment is formed in class. Some students compare their points with their close friends and challenge each other to collect the highest points. Some students quietly set a target to secretly compete with someone in class or challenge themselves to collect more points. The competitive environment encourages students to set a target to be more active in class and get more points.

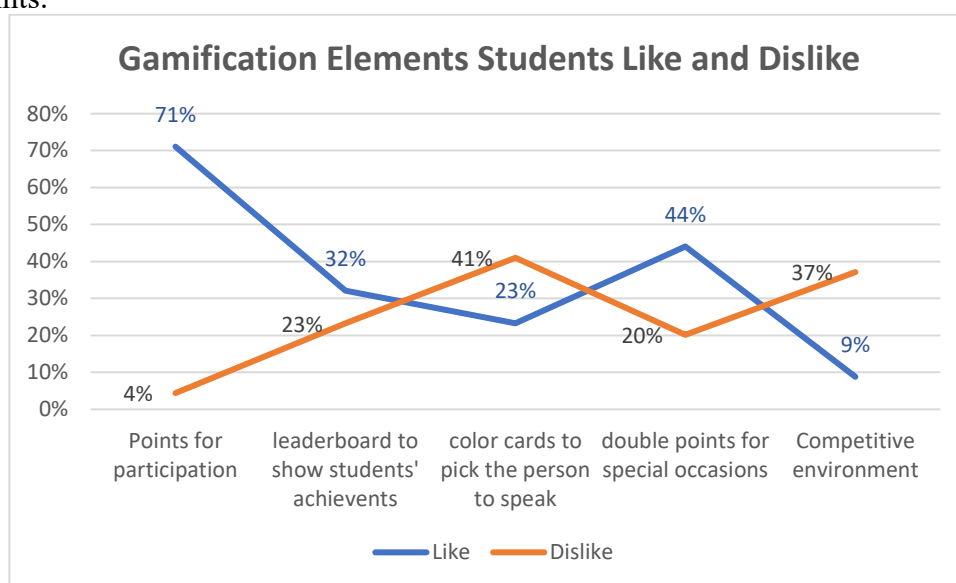


Figure 5. Gamification Elements Students Like and Dislike

Figure 5 shows the gamification elements that students like and dislike: blue lines for the liked and red for the disliked. Three favorite elements are 71% for participation points, 44% for double points at special occasions and 32% for the use of leaderboard. The points for participation helped students to be brave in taking risks to speak up even though they still made mistakes in pronunciation or grammar. Double points helped students try harder as rarely happens. Shy and low motivated students pushed themselves harder to take this opportunity. 32% of respondents liked the leaderboard composed of red, yellow, green and blue cards. Each color helps students identify whether they are in the safe or dangerous zones determined by their class participation points collected. This color also helps students to know who to help as the one with red or yellow cards got the priority to speak up first.

On the other hand, the three least favorite elements are 41% for giving the first chance to speak for the lowest achievers, 37% for competitive environment and 23% for leaderboard that shows students' achievements. The first chance given to the lowest achievers to speak up first, which is meant to help them, is seen as intimidating for shy students. The same reasons apply to the competitive environment and the leader board.

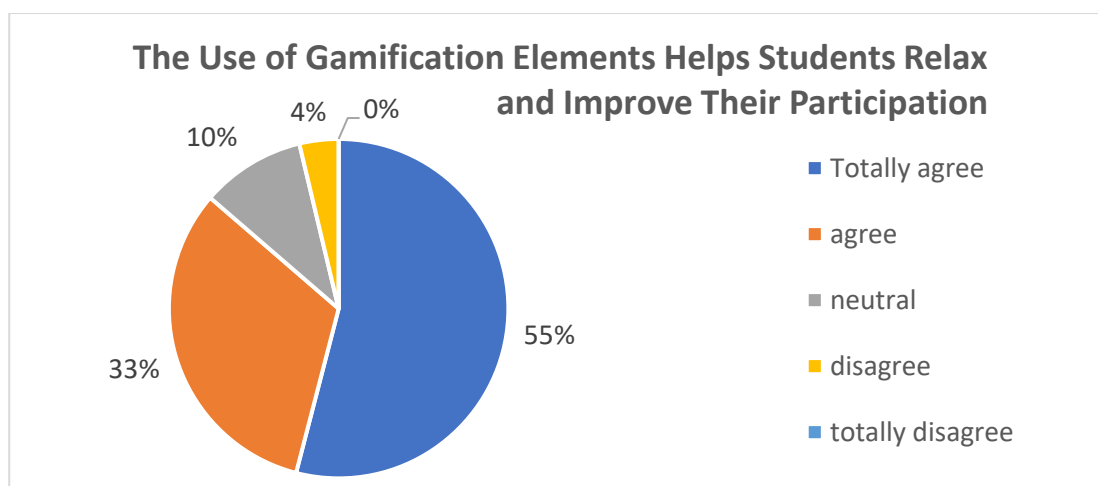


Figure 6 Gamification helps students relax and improve participation

In answering the question on whether the use of gamification elements helps to make them relax and improve their class participation, 55% respondents totally agree, 33% agree, 10% is indifferent, 4% disagree. This shows that 88% of students consider gamification helpful in reducing their anxiety in class. They can focus on collecting points so that they can participate more in class rather than feeling afraid of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes since their friends can still understand their imperfect questions or answers.

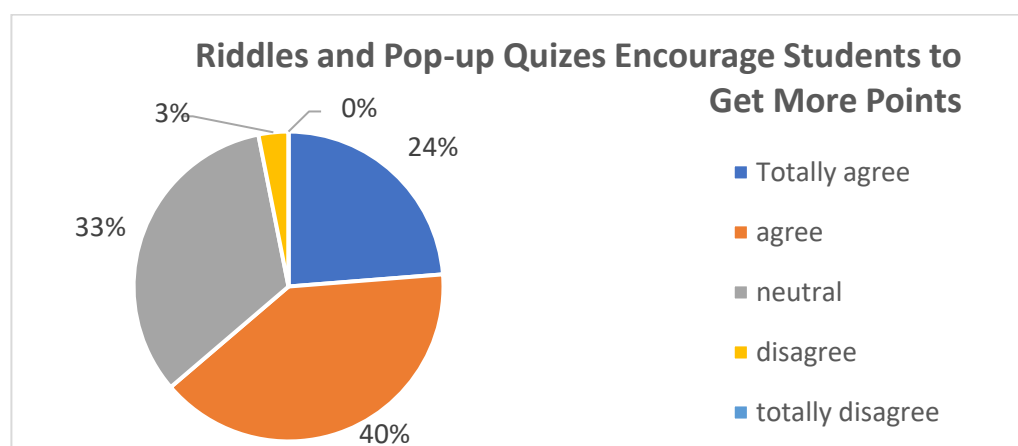


Figure 7. Riddles and Pop-up Quizzes Encourage Students to Get More Points

When class seemed dull and students looked tired, the lecturer applied some fun activities in the form of riddles, pop-up quizzes and some fun class tasks by using Kahoot!, spin wheel, or lucky dip to enliven the class. Questions were taken from the reading materials or trivial riddles related to the topic. Sometimes students can also contribute some questions to make class more fun. In response to these activities, 73% think positively: 33% totally agree and 40% agree that those activities help encourage them to get more points. 24% are indifferent and 3% disagree that riddles, pop-up quizzes and fun tasks are helpful while no one totally disagrees.

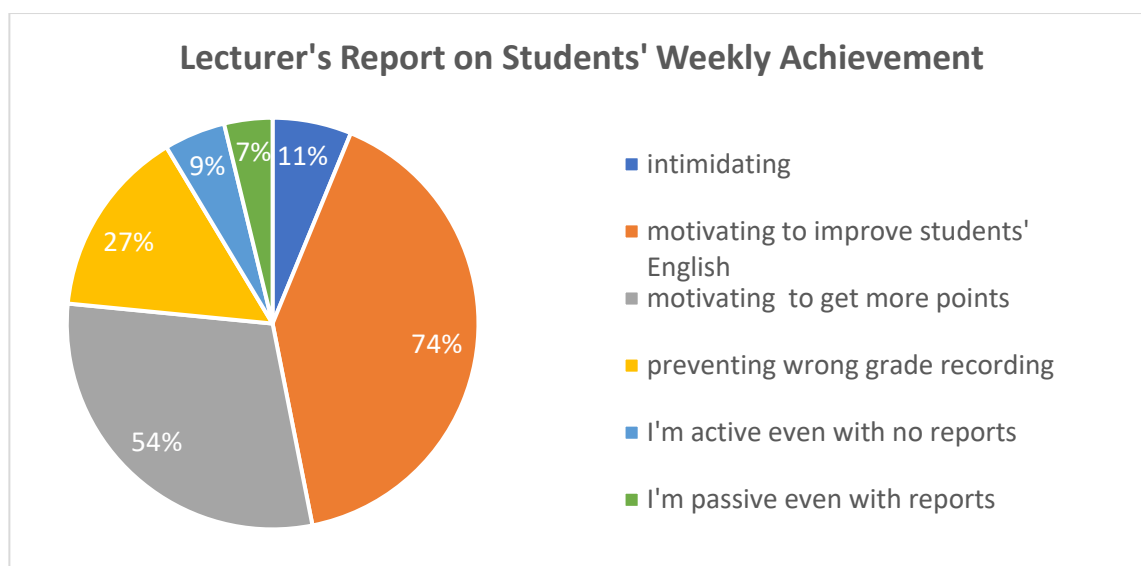


Figure 8. Students Review on Lecturer's Report on Their Weekly Performance

At the beginning of every meeting, the lecturer reports the students' performance in the previous weeks. Students can see the points they have collected for the class participation, homework and test results. 74% of respondents think that the lecturer's report motivates them to improve their performance and 54% believe that it motivates them to be more active to earn more points. 27% of students use it to check the correctness of the grading record. On the other hand, 11% of respondents think it is intimidating. 16% are indifferent because 9% think that they are active and 7% are still passive with or without the report. In short, more students see the lecturer's weekly report as a positive influence for them.

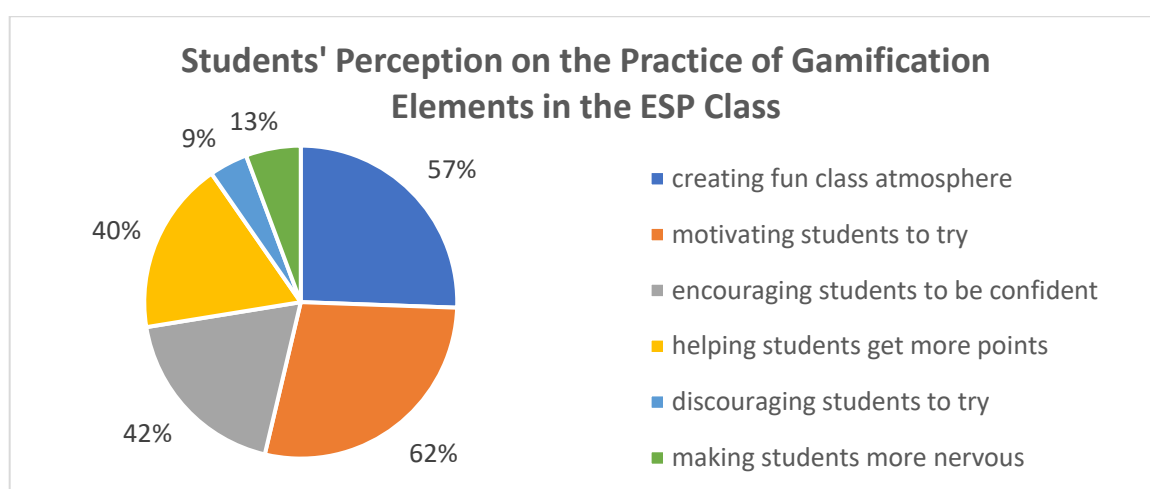


Figure 9. Students' Perception on the Practice of Gamification in the ESP Class

Figure 9 depicts the students' perception on the practice of gamification elements in the ESP class. 62% of respondents feel that the elements of gamification applied in class motivate them to try more and even harder. 57% respondents feel that the class become more fun and less stressful with the application of gamification. 42% believe that gamification elements help them relax and encourage them to try to speak up. 40% of respondents see gamification helps them collect more points. However, some respondents still think negatively about the application of gamification, 13% stated it makes them more nervous while 9% feel it is discouraging.



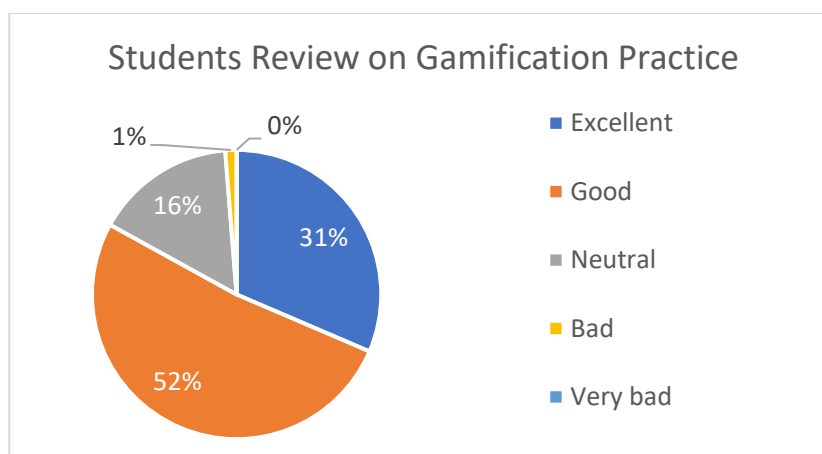


Figure 10. Students' Review of Gamification Practice

Figure 10 shows the students' review of the gamification practices in their ESP Classes. 52% of students believed that the application of gamification in class is good and 31% feel it is excellent. 16% of respondents are indifferent and 1% consider it bad. No one thinks that the practice of gamification is very bad. This shows that most students (83%) consider that the practice of gamification is good and very good.

To prove whether gamification is an effective tool to motivate students to actively participate in class, it is necessary to compare their performance at the beginning of the semester to their performance towards the end of the semester. Below is the discussion on the comparison.

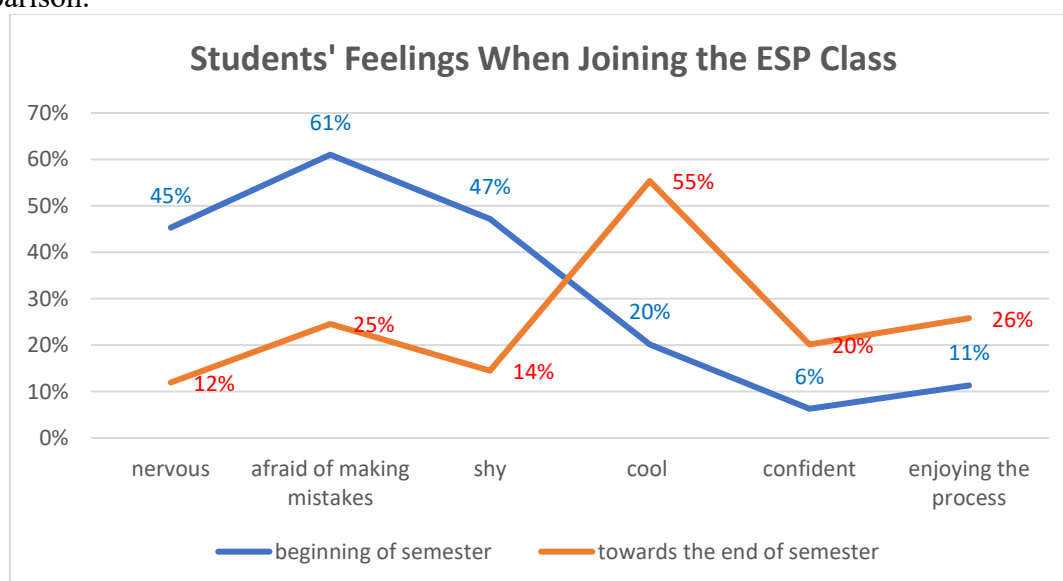


Figure 11. Students' Feelings when Joining the ESP Class

Figure 11 contrasts the students' feelings when they joined the class at the beginning of the semester and towards the end of the semester. At the beginning of the semester the number of students with negative feelings is higher: 45% feel nervous that dropped to 12% towards the end of the semester, 61% feel scared that decreased to 25 towards the end of the semester and 47% feel shy that dropped to 14% towards the end of the semester. Towards the end of the semester, students with positive feelings are more dominant: 55% feel cool rising from 20%, 20% feel confident raising from 6% and 26% enjoy the process from 11% at the beginning of the semester.

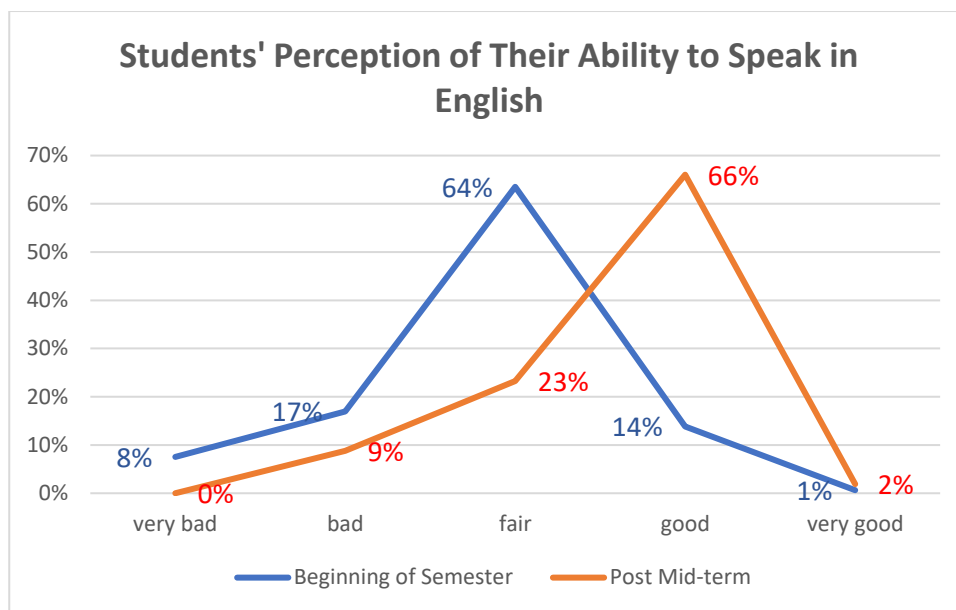


Figure 12. Students' Perception on Their English-Speaking Ability

Figure 12 shows the comparison of students perceiving their ability to speak in English between the beginning of the semester and towards the end of the semester. At the beginning of the semester, more students see themselves as having bad (17%) or very bad (8%). Towards the end of the semester the numbers dropped to 9% bad and 0% very bad. 64% of respondents see their ability to communicate as fair and this number dropped to 23% towards the end of the semester. On the other hand, students who perceive their ability to communicate in English as good raised from 14% to 66% while those who think their English-speaking ability as very good raising from 0 to 2%.

Figure 13 below shows the shift of students' perception about their English mastery. Students' English mastery and confidence increased three folds towards the end of the semester (5% to 16%) and those who think that their English is good and that they are brave despite of making mistakes rose three folds from (7% to 23%). On the other hand, students who think their English is good but lack self-confidence reduced from 43% to 30% and those who think their English is bad plummeted from 23% at the beginning of the semester to 7% towards the end of the semester. The significant shifts proved that the application of gamification elements helped students become more confident about their English mastery towards the end of the semester.

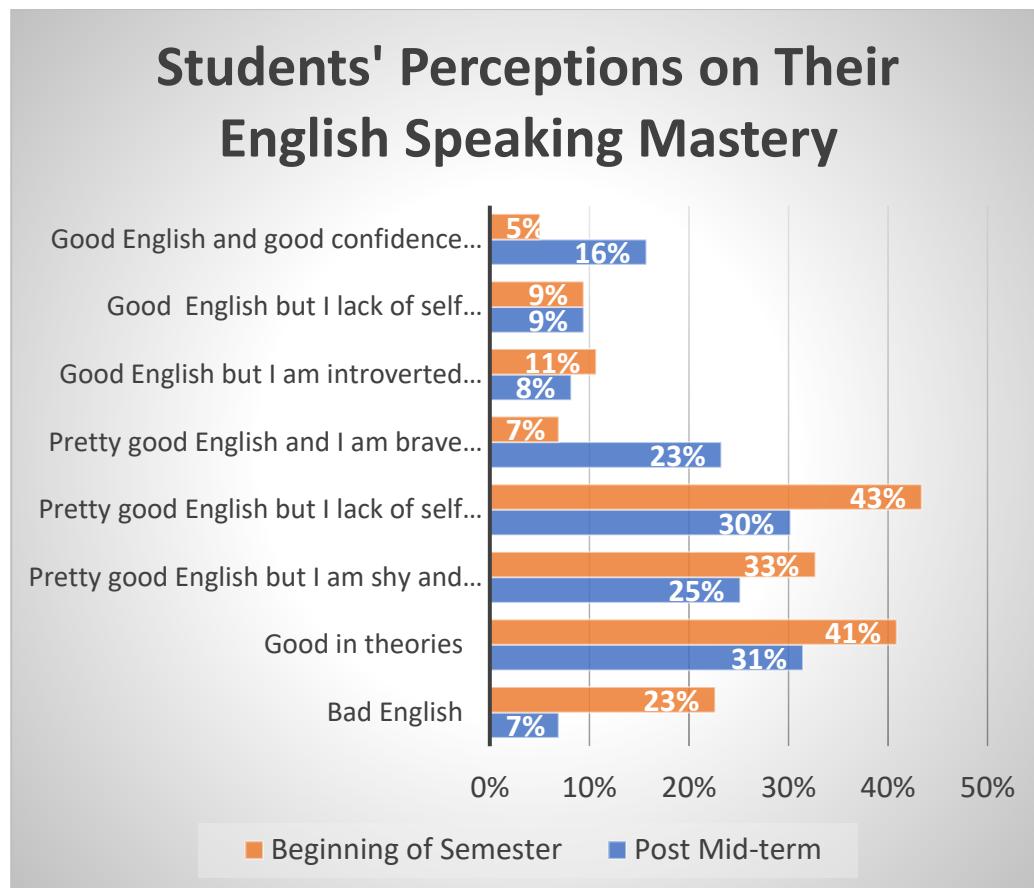


Figure 13. Students' Perception of Their English Mastery

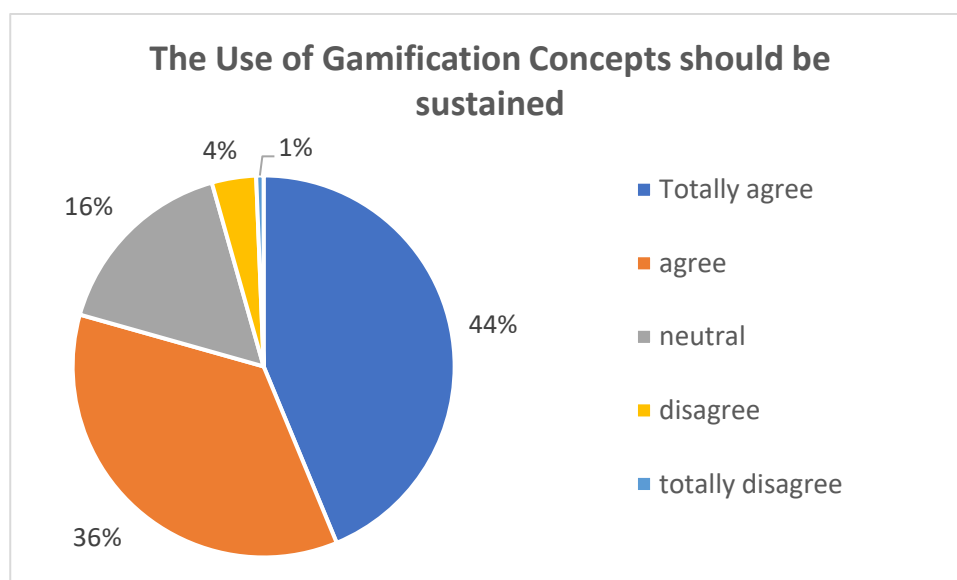


Figure 14. Should the Practice of Gamification be Maintained?

Figure 14 shows that 44% totally agree and 36% agree with the statement that the application of gamification concepts in class should be maintained. 16% of respondents are indifferent since they just need to learn and get their grade from any class activities, while 5% disagree and no one totally disagrees with the lecturer to maintain the application of gamification elements in ESP Class. The majority of students think that the application of gamification in the ESP class should be sustained.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion in the previous parts, it can be concluded that:

1. Students could identify the elements of gamification applied in class.
  - a. 75% from the points of class participation,
  - b. 48% for the use of color cards to substitute leader board,
  - c. 41% from the color cards to show their turns to speak, and
  - d. 17% from the competitive atmosphere that they felt in class.
- e. Students found gamification element helped them improve their mastery of English and confidence significantly.
  - a. English mastery and confidence increased three folds towards the end of the semester (5% to 16%)
  - b. Students thought that their English was good and that they were brave despite of making mistakes rose three folds from (7% to 23%).
  - c. Students thought their English was good but lack self-confidence reduced from 43% to 30%.
  - d. Students thought their English was bad plummeted from 23% to 7% towards the end of the semester.
- e. There are significant shifts in how students perceived their English communicative ability from the beginning of the semester compared to their ability towards the end of the semester
  - (a) students who saw themselves as having bad bad English dropped from 17% to 9% and (8%) and very bad of 8% to 0%.
  - (b) 64% respondents who saw their ability to communicate as fair dropped to 23%.
  - (c) students perceiving their ability to communicate in English as good raised almost three folds from 14% to 66% while those who thought their English-speaking ability as very good raising from 0 to 2%.

The positive shift in students' self-perception highlights how gamification can reduce anxiety, encourage risk-taking, and create a psychologically safe space for public speaking in ESP settings. Simple tools like points, leaderboards, and surprise rewards can make participation feel less intimidating and more engaging.

Gamification offers a flexible, low-cost strategy for ESP educators to boost motivation and foster learner autonomy. When thoughtfully applied, it supports both language development and learner identity formation.

These results open doors for further exploration: How can gamification be combined with digital tools or peer collaboration? What's its long-term impact on retention and real-world language use? Future studies can deepen our understanding of its role in sustainable, learner-centered ESP pedagogy.

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