

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF GAMIFICATION IN FOSTERING READING ENTHUSIASM AND PROMOTING LITERACY

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Abstract

Reading is a foundational skill critical to both academic success and cognitive growth; yet we rarely stop to consider the role of reading for pleasure in shaping this developmental journey. When young learners associate reading with enjoyment through engaging activities, opportunities for choice and autonomy, and supportive learning environments, they are significantly more likely to engage in sustained, self-directed literacy practices. This voluntary engagement not only enhances vocabulary acquisition and strengthens comprehension skills but also promotes creative thinking, boosts emotional intelligence, and fosters a lifelong passion for learning. Therefore, understanding how to effectively spark and sustain a love of reading is vital.

With this in mind, I decided to investigate how gamification could enhance reading enthusiasm and promote literacy within my Year 2 class at The Arbor School, Dubai. To assess its effectiveness, I employed a combination of online and offline activities to evaluate the impact of gamification on student engagement, reading habits and academic progress in reading proficiency.

Literature Review

"Reading is often viewed as an individual activity, but when students engage in dialogic practices about their reading, they can enhance their understanding of the text, as well as their engagement and enjoyment. Talking about texts can stimulate social experiences, empathy and perspective-taking" (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020).

A reader needs to be within the reciprocal sphere of motivation and engagement; one influences the other; whichever comes first is no less important than the other as they are in one loop or a cyclical grandiose of reading exaltation (Afflerbach, 2022).

"Children are not passive observers of stories; they actively engage with material manifestations of story worlds, whether this manifestation happens on paper or on screen (or another surface)" (Kucirkova & Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2021).

Li and Chu (2020) the study published in the British Journal of Educational Technology explored the impact of gamification pedagogy on children's reading using a mixed-methods approach. The study aimed to understand how gamification influenced academic performance, reading-related attitudes and behaviors, and the long-term sustainability of these effects.

Methods

I chose to use action research for my study due to its adaptive and responsive nature, particularly suited to exploring the impact of gamification on reading engagement and literacy development. This approach provided me with the opportunity to observe student interactions and engagement in real time, implement gamified strategies, and make ongoing adjustments to my teaching based on immediate feedback and measurable progress. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection, I was able to get a clearer and deeper understanding of the diverse factors influencing classroom learning. Additionally, actively involving students in the process promoted a sense of autonomy and ownership, which is vital in nurturing intrinsic motivation to read.

The key research questions guiding my inquiry were:

1. How does gamification influence student engagement and motivation for reading?
2. What impact does gamification have on students' reading habits both in and out of class?
3. What effect, if any, does increased reading motivation have on reading comprehension and overall literacy skills?

Methodology

I adopted a two-cycle action research approach within my Year 2 classroom. This structure allowed me to trial both digital and offline strategies, observe their effects, and adapt my approach in response to student engagement and outcomes.

During the first cycle, I introduced a digital reading platform featuring gamified elements such as interactive games, quizzes, badges, virtual rewards, and progress tracking tools. Each student received a personal login, allowing them to access the platform both at school and at home. They engaged with age-appropriate texts, completed related tasks, and earned digital incentives for their progress. Over several weeks, I monitored their engagement through platform data and collected feedback through informal interviews and in-class discussions.

In the second cycle, I implemented an offline, classroom-based gamified system called the Reading Race Track. Students chose books from the school library or home, read them independently, and discussed them with me and their peers. After answering simple questions about the book, they moved their character forward on the racetrack. This visual tracker sparked excitement and motivation, as students watched their progress and aimed for the finish line. A small reward awaited them at the end, fostering healthy competition and peer interaction and reinforcing comprehension skills and reading stamina.

Participants

The sample comprised 23 mixed-ability Year 2 students (aged 6–7) from a British curriculum school in Dubai. The cohort included 12 boys and 11 girls, representing a range of diverse cultural and national backgrounds. The study involved the entire class to evaluate the impact of the intervention across a broad spectrum of learners.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved a combination of observational techniques, analysis of data from an online reading platform, and offline reading monitored via the Reading Race Track. Additionally, ongoing assessments of students' academic progress, measured through standardized tests, offered key insights during the intervention period.

Results

The research demonstrates that gamification significantly enhanced student engagement and motivation for reading, as evidenced by sustained participation and a substantial increase in online reading minutes from 371 to 3,132 over four weeks. Progress on the Reading Race Track also reflects this rise, with students advancing through multiple steps each week, showing clear growth in their reading activities. This heightened engagement corresponded with noticeable improvements in independent reading habits. Moreover, 82% of students showed progress in New Group Reading Test (NGRT) stanine scores, with an average gain of +1.55 points. Significant advancements were also observed in decoding, fluency, and comprehension, highlighting the effectiveness of gamified reading interventions.

Figure 1
Student Engagement with Online Reading Platform

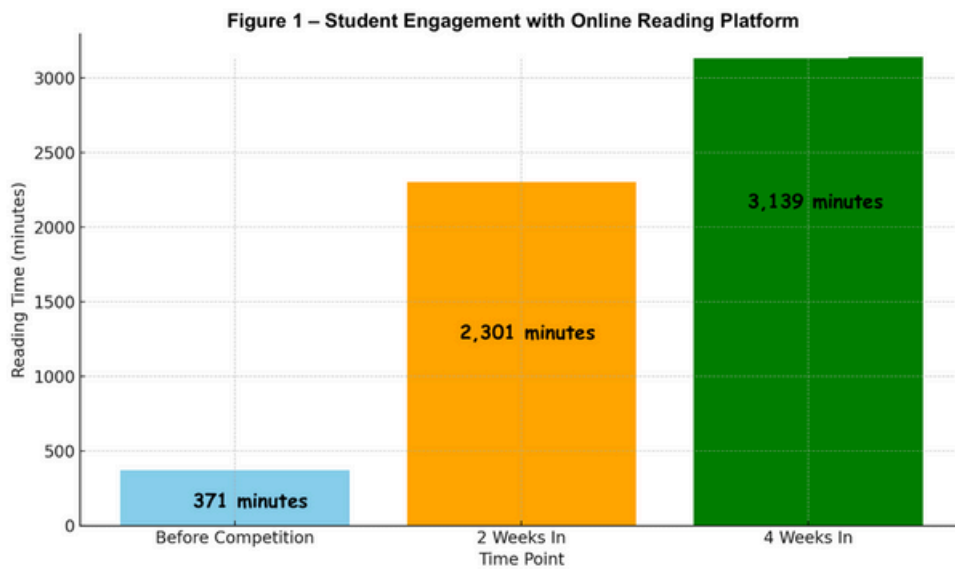


Figure 2
Student Engagement with Reading Race Track (Offline)

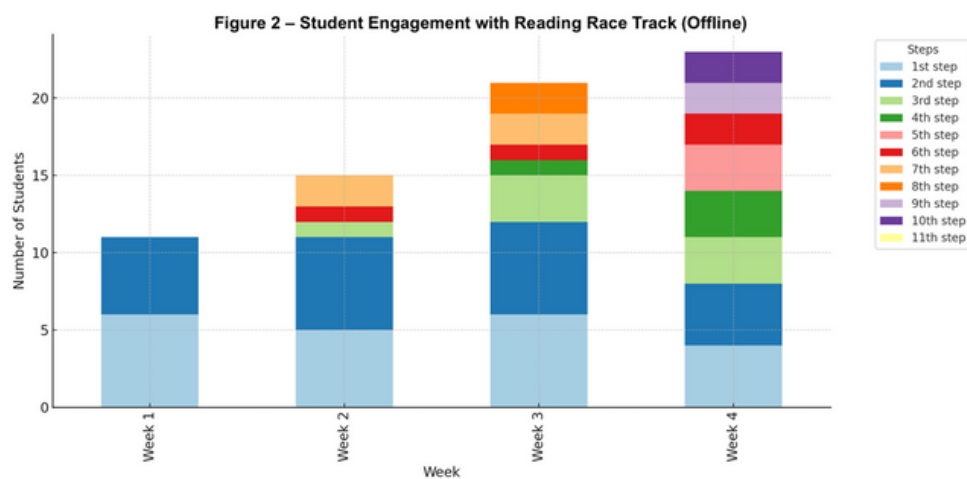
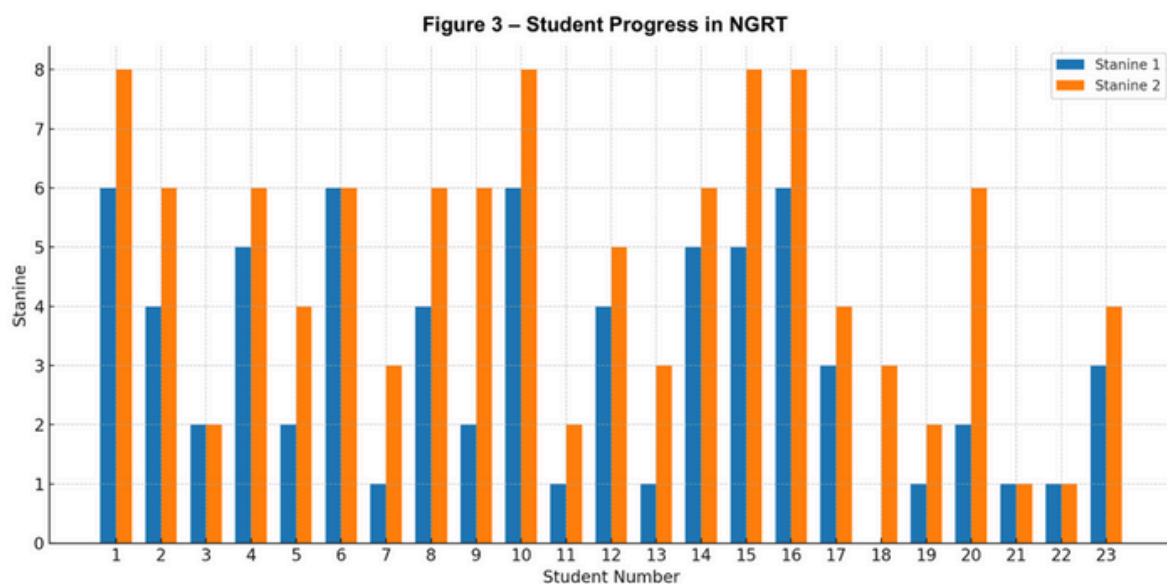


Figure 3
Student Progress in NGRT



Student and Parent Feedback

"I love the reading challenges because I get to choose books I enjoy. It makes me happy and helps me get better at reading tricky words." – Student

"The Reading Race Track is fun! I can bring in new books from home, and sometimes my friends haven't seen them before, so I get to tell them about it." – Student

"I love the reading challenges; it helps me learn and get better at reading." – Student

"My child is really excited about reading books lately. The reading challenge has been a great motivator—she's eager to keep climbing the reading chart! We're so pleased to see her reading improving." – Parent

"When my daughter finished the first round of the reading challenge, I asked if she was done. She smiled and said, 'Ms Ashmi said we never stop reading – now we're starting round two!' I really appreciate how this challenge encourages a love of reading and continuous learning." – Parent

Reflections and Conclusion

Embedding gamified elements into daily classroom routines proved effective in sustaining student motivation. By adjusting challenges based on student progress, tasks remained engaging and appropriately challenging, preventing disengagement and promoting consistent effort.

The research highlighted a clear shift toward motivation-driven learning. When students experienced enjoyment and autonomy, their engagement deepened. Providing choice and recognising effort not only boosted academic interest but also improved classroom behaviour and collaboration.

Expanding gamification across multiple curriculum areas shows great potential. Whether in literacy, maths, or science, gamified strategies can make learning more dynamic and meaningful. When used thoughtfully, they transform the classroom into a space where students are active participants in their learning journey.

In summary, gamification supports both emotional and academic growth, making learning enjoyable, purposeful, and enduring.

References

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