Boosting Student Engagement and Competencies: A Gamified Teaching Model for Junior High School English Classes

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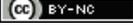School of Foreign Languages, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, Hubei, 434023, P. R. China.

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ABSTRACT

In China, English is considered a second language, and its study spans the entire primary and secondary school stages as well as higher education. Especially at the secondary school level, English is one of the three major core subjects and is also one of the assessment criteria for the high school entrance exam and college entrance exam. For Chinese students, junior high school English marks a transition from concrete to abstract learning and from fragmented to systematic learning. Therefore, junior high school English instruction plays a pivotal role in the entire foreign language learning process. The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education 2022 introduces a new focus in English instruction, placing greater emphasis on cultivating four core competencies in students: learning ability, language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and cultural awareness. Against the backdrop of education reform focused on core literacy development, junior high English teachers face the challenge of low student engagement in the classroom. Gamified teaching models are viewed as a potential solution; however, their application in junior high English instruction lacks systematic research and is subject to practical misconceptions. This study uses a case study approach to analyze a semester-long, competency-based classroom practice in seventh grade at the Jingzhou Experimental Middle School (Lingjun Campus). The findings indicate that the gamified teaching model effectively enhances students' interest in learning, engagement in the classroom, and awareness of cross-cultural communication. It facilitates a shift from passive reception to active inquiry, cultivating critical thinking and metacognitive strategies. The study provides a practical framework for implementing gamified teaching models in secondary English education and offers insights for teacher training and instructional design.

Keywords: Gamified Teaching Model, Core Competencies, English Language Teaching (ELT), Junior High School

Introduction

According to English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education 2022, the middle English teaching should aim at core literacy of English course from four aspects: language knowledge, learning ability, thinking quality and cultural awareness.[1] For this reason, it is important that improve students' artistic appreciation in English and develop intercultural communication awareness in middle school English lessons, especially for junior high school students who are in the period of formation of worldview, outlook on life and values. Under the background of cultural diversity, English is not only a basic tool for language learning, but also a carrier and bridge for cultural exchange. For English learners, the improvement of cultural literacy and the expansion of international horizon is a necessary part of English subject. Therefore, it has an important task to intergrade cultural literacy into English learning, so that taking a deep step to enhance students' cultural awareness between Chinese cultures and western cultures.

Although the new curriculum standard was published, however, the traditional teaching model based on test-based education is still the mainstream of classroom teaching of English subjects at present. Comparing with the gamified teaching model, the imparting teaching mode is exam-oriented, with instruction consisting primarily of a one-way, teacher-centered transmission of knowledge. This approach lacks meaningful interaction between teachers and students, resulting in lacking of interactivity and interest so as to reducing students' interest in English

learning and weakening the motivation to learning English language. However, extant gamified teaching models predominantly focus on elementary school English classrooms, with limited research on their application in junior high school English instruction. A paucity of systematic investigation and the presence of practical misconceptions are hallmarks of this field. A limited number of studies have examined the implementation of gamified teaching models in junior high classrooms. However, challenges persist, including pseudo-gamification, inadequate game design, and activities that diverge from the curriculum. In order to explore a teaching model that effectively cultivates students' interests in English learning and enhances their English cultural literacy, this paper will elaborate on the current problems of the using of gamified teaching model in English courses and put forward a mode of gamified teaching from teaching content and teaching component.

1. The theory of the Gamified Teaching Model

The gamified teaching model is a teaching activity system guided by specific educational theories, centered on achieving established teaching objectives. It draws on game concepts such as question-setting, challenge, and autonomy, and integrates game entities, game elements (e.g., tasks, feedback), as well as game design logics and mechanisms, with educational games (including video games and student activity-based games) serving as a key foundation. By aligning with learners' characteristics and specific teaching content, it formulates appropriate teaching strategies, embedding teaching objectives within engaging and interesting teaching activities. Its purpose is to create a relaxed and appealing learning atmosphere, stimulate learners' deep intrinsic motivation and sense of active participation, and ultimately help learners acquire knowledge, enhance skills, and cultivate sentiments in the process of "learning through entertainment and entertaining through learning". Additionally, it features a stable, systematic, and theorized structural framework and operational procedures for teaching activities.

From the perspective of the conceptual development context, the ideological prototype of this model can be traced back to the 1980s (for instance, Bowman put forward the idea of combining video games with teaching). After the concept of "gamification" was explicitly defined in 2003 (formally proposed by Nick Pelling, originally meaning "transforming non-game things into games"), the model gradually became systematic. Subsequently, through scholars' exploration of the application of game thinking and elements in teaching contexts (such as the six-step gamified teaching design process proposed by Maja Pivec), it eventually evolved into a type of teaching model that possesses both theoretical support and practical operability.

Existing research indicates that gamified instruction can enhance student motivation (Wang, 2024), but most studies focus on higher education (Coelho et al., 2025), with limited systematic practice research targeting the cultivation of core literacy in junior high school English. Additionally, some practices exhibit "pseudo-gamification" (Li, 2024), equating simple interactions with gamified teaching. Addressing this gap, this study explores a gamified teaching model tailored to junior high school English core competencies.

2. Problems of the Gamified Teaching Model in Junior High School English learning

2.1 The ambiguity and arbitrariness of the gamified teaching model

As a recreational cognitive activity with the functions of knowledge transmission or ability cultivation, games are often used by middle school teachers in actual classroom teaching. However, due to their characteristics of voluntariness and uncertainty, teachers and researchers have inconsistent definitions of the "gamified teaching model", which presents characteristics of ambiguity and arbitrariness. In the practical application of the "gamified teaching model" model, these characteristics are reflected in two aspects: First, ambiguity in the subject. Gamified teaching model requires taking students as the main body, teachers as the guide, and adopting a student-centered approach to design appropriate teaching procedures. However, there often occurs a situation where teachers participate excessively, leaving students only able to passively choose to accept rather than truly conduct independent and effective thinking. Second, arbitrariness in the implementation process. In actual application, teachers often arbitrarily equate "using educational games" with "gamified teaching model" and label simple classroom interactions as "gamified", which causes the characteristic of "gamified teaching model" to be weakened or even completely discarded.

2.2 Limitations of the traditional classroom in junior high school

Traditional classrooms often divide English teaching into three parts: vocabulary comprehension, grammar learning, and comprehensive exercises. Under this model, teachers, as the main body of knowledge output, undoubtedly become the center of the classroom. Students can only passively receive knowledge, and their thinking is hardly exercised, or even becomes rigid. From the teachers' perspective, in the practice of the fixed teaching model centered on textbooks, they will find that students often face the problem of "separation of learning and application" caused by rote memorization. In the context of the current "New Curriculum Reform", it is difficult for the inefficient learning mode, which merely relies on a large number of mechanical exercises confined to written work, to achieve the desired effect. In addition, in traditional classrooms, knowledge review often adopts the mode of teachers asking questions and students answering. This mode tends to target students with academic performance or learning ability at the upper-middle level of the class, while neglecting underachievers. It is difficult to take into account the hierarchical differences among different students. Only by enabling every student to truly participate in the classroom can the effective conduct of the classroom be ensured.

2.3 Students' lack of motivation for English learning in junior high school

The mechanical cycle of "practice-correction-repractice" in traditional English classrooms overemphasizes exam-oriented content, completely ignoring English's communicative function as a language. The lack of oral situational communication leads to students' deficiency in gaining confidence and a sense of accomplishment, making them "afraid to speak" and even "unwilling to speak." Rote one-way instruction in class causes students to participate superficially without in-depth engagement, easily resulting in an overly one-sided perception of English as a linguistic tool—viewing it as a subject "learned for scores" and "studied for exams." The single classroom evaluation system ultimately leads to the loss of a sense of meaning in learning and further

increases learning pressure. Especially for underachieving students, this exacerbates their negative psychological states such as obsessive-compulsive symptoms, interpersonal tension and sensitivity, anxiety, depression, and emotional imbalance, thereby further aggravating the lack of motivation for English learning.

2.4 Improper application of the gamified teaching model in classes

The normalized application of the gamified teaching model generally requires three key points: being student-centered, textbook-based, and effect-oriented.

Students are the main body of teaching, and we should adhere to the teaching philosophy centered on students. The implementation of classroom teaching and gamified activities should be student-centered to create a teaching atmosphere and build a learning environment. In the preparatory stage, teachers should collect and integrate as many resources and materials as possible to ensure that the final gamified classroom aligns with students' learning conditions and is relevant to their daily lives—only then can students be motivated to participate actively and voluntarily. In the classroom, teachers should treat every student fairly. Through sufficient encouragement, positive guidance, and timely assistance, they can help every student engage in the class, enabling students to truly become the masters of the classroom.

Classroom design should proceed from the training objectives of the textbook. Game content must be closely integrated with the knowledge points in the textbook, and under no circumstances should it be divorced from the textbook. Designing games solely to enhance classroom atmosphere is inappropriate, as it prioritizes 'gamification' over the core goal of 'teaching', leading to a misalignment with instructional objectives—focusing only on "gamified teaching model" while neglecting the ultimate goal of "teaching." This would run counter to the original objectives of teaching design.

The ultimate goal and pursuit of implementing the gamified teaching model is good teaching effectiveness. Therefore, the most important issue to focus on is the disconnection between classroom teaching and students' learning and thinking. To avoid the situation where the classroom atmosphere is positive but students gain little substantive learning from the activities, teachers need to conduct quality tracking and effectiveness evaluation in both classroom design and actual teaching. Through methods such as observation, in-class quizzes, homework, and self-assessment, they can test students' mastery of the teaching content. This will help further optimize the gamified teaching model, and develop a model that truly suits the students in the class and aligns with the class's specific learning situation.

3. The research design and implementation of the study under gamified teaching model

3.1 Participants

This study focused on seventh-grade students of Jingzhou Experimental Middle School (Lingjun Campus). Using a stratified sampling method based on their English scores from the final quality assessment in elementary school, 30 seventh-grade students from different English proficiency levels were selected to form an English literacy classroom. These students served as the

experimental and control groups. The study analyzed changes in the four dimensions of core literacy among these students through longitudinal comparison after implementing a gamified teaching model.

Jingzhou Experimental Middle School (Lingjun Campus), located in the suburbs of Jingzhou City in Hubei Province, is a nine-year compulsory education institution comprising both an elementary school and a junior high school. Students' overall comprehensive competencies are slightly below those in top-tier urban districts but slightly above those in remote townships. Their overall English proficiency falls within the mid-range level. The school represents the "regional median" in terms of location, staffing, and academic baseline. It is an example of an ordinary urban public institution in a mid-level prefectural city in central China.

3.2 Research purpose

This study aims to explore effective ways to integrate gamified teaching models into competences classes, thereby promoting their application in junior high school English classrooms. The study employed quantitative analysis methods involving the collection of raw data from experimental subjects, the implementation of gamified teaching practices, and the evaluation of teaching outcomes. Changes in the experimental subjects were observed throughout the semester, and pre- and post-test data were gathered from all 30 students. Conclusions were drawn by comparing whether and to what extent changes occurred in the experimental data.

3.3 Research methods

3.3.1 Participatory observation

In participatory observation, a qualitative research method, the researcher immerses themselves deeply in the teaching environment. The researcher assumes the dual roles of participant and observer, systematically recording and analyzing classroom interactions, language practices, and teaching dynamics. As an "insider," the researcher directly engages in teaching activities, building trust through classroom interactions and collaborative tasks while maintaining professional sensitivity to document observational data. In this study, the researcher participated in classroom teaching as an instructor, asking students questions based on classes, guiding students through activities and helping them complete tasks while providing assistances when needed. While students engaged in activities, the researcher recorded the frequency and effectiveness of student interactions and the overall classroom dynamics. After each session, the researcher analyzed and compared the effectiveness of individual and collective activities, determining the extent to which student participation and engagement improved.

3.3.2 Questionnaire survey

In this study, participants' attitudes and perceptions toward the application of gamified teaching models in literacy classrooms were collected through questionnaires by researchers. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to evaluate 30 students' satisfaction with classroom instruction, familiarity with course content, mastery of learning strategies, and improvement in competencies. It also used single-choice and multiple-choice questions to evaluate students' acceptance of teaching models and their preferences for instructional content and methods. After collecting the questionnaires, the researchers performed descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. They determined students' attitudes and perceptions toward the application of gamified teaching models by calculating the mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution of the 30 valid questionnaires. Furthermore, t-tests were conducted on the questionnaires to reveal the effectiveness of, and feedback on, the implementation of gamified teaching models.

3.4 The implementation of gamified teaching model in competency-based classroom

3.4.1 The teaching contents of competency-based classroom

Aligned with the literature competency requirements for middle school students stipulated in the new curriculum standards, this competency-based classroom focused on extracurricular cultural knowledge, encompassing multiple dimensions including material culture, institutional culture, and psychological culture. It expanded students' knowledge of English cultures through three core themes: Human and Society, Human and Nature and Human and Self.

In human and Society, utilizing Chinese and Western cuisines as exemplars, this module introduced students to traditional Chinese dietary practices and regionally distinct Western foods. It facilitated an understanding of the commonalities and differences between Chinese and Western cuisines concerning ingredients, cooking techniques, and preparation methods. The content covered characteristic dishes from various Western nations and China. Representative Western dishes included British Beef Wellington, German Käsespätzle (cheese noodles), French Foie Gras, and American fast food, while Chinese examples featured Beijing Roast Duck, Dongpo Pork, and Dumplings. Through the observation and comparison of these representative foods, students learned corresponding English terminology and were guided to discern the distinct dietary cultures across nations, laying the groundwork for fostering cross-cultural communicative awareness.

In human and Nature, this module employed unique animals from different countries as case studies to examine animal habitats and natural survival principles. It covered representative animals from six nations: the Giant Panda (China), Koala (Australia), Spanish Fighting Bull (Spain), and Polar Bear (Russia). By showcasing the survival strategies and environments of these emblematic species, the module aided students in comprehending diverse national geographies and natural resources. This approach aimed to cultivate students' awareness of physical geography, environmental protection, respect for biodiversity, and the development of sound ecological perspectives and values.

In human and Self, centered on campus culture, this module introduced students to distinctive Chinese and Western schools and representative higher education institutions. It facilitated an understanding of Western campus culture while prompting deeper self-exploration concerning personal strengths and interests. Content focused on China's Weifang Future Experimental School and American campus cultural festivals, emphasizing comparative aspects such as school attire, campus activities, and classroom teaching models. This enabled students to gain preliminary insights into variations in educational models and systems across countries, guiding them to appreciate the diversity and complexity inherent in cultural practices.

3.4.2 The teaching component of gamified teaching model in competency-based classroom

The gamified teaching model encompasses three distinct phases: pre-class learning games, in-class games, and post-class games. Pre-class games primarily aim to stimulate student interest and introduce the lesson theme, exemplified by activities such as warm-up songs and tongue twister games. In-class games emphasize the comprehension and application of knowledge, utilizing methods like role-playing and scenario reenactment.[2] Post-class games focus on the review and consolidation of acquired knowledge through activities such as simplified scenario simulations and storytelling. This project deeply integrated this model into year-long competency-based classroom teaching for seventh-grade students. Based on eight practical teaching sessions utilizing gamified teaching model, a structured instructional workflow was established: Warm-up Activities-Core Instructional Phase-Consolidation Practice.

The also warm-up games called pre-class games, these interactive sessions, lasting 5-10 minutes, involved the teacher designing theme-relevant games aligned with the lesson content to facilitate student engagement. Taking the lesson on unique national animals as an example, project members implemented two warm-up games centered on animal vocabulary: "Animal Name Quick Response" and "National Treasure Trivia". In "Animal Name Quick Response", multimedia visuals displaying various animals prompted students to rapidly identify and state the corresponding English names. In

this game, students' average response time to animal vocabulary decreased from 5 seconds to 2 seconds after 4 weeks of practice, indicating improved vocabulary mastery. "National Treasure Trivia" initiated student reflection and knowledge activation by posing the question, "How many national treasures from different countries can you name?" These activities served to heighten student interest in the lesson topic, stimulate conjecture and critical thinking regarding the subject matter, and encourage self-directed inquiry and knowledge-seeking, thereby fostering greater proactive engagement.

The core instructional phase was predominantly teacher-led, with games serving a supplementary role, spanning 20-25 minutes. During this phase, the instructor delivered key content related to the lesson theme, encompassing fundamental thematic vocabulary, practical communication sentence patterns, and associated cultural values. This explanation was interspersed with strategically incorporated in-class games designed to deepen students' comprehension of both linguistic elements and cultural concepts. Taking the class on western mainstream music culture as an example, the core knowledge objectives for this lesson focused on the characteristics and developmental background of Western mainstream music genres. Specific content covered the origins, musical features, attire characteristics, representative works, and cultural significance of prominent genres including Jazz, Punk, Country, Classical, and Popular music. To reinforce understanding during the knowledge delivery, two targeted in-class games were integrated: Lyric-Based Song Identification: Students were presented with iconic song lyrics and required to identify the song title and determine its corresponding musical genre. Image-Based Music Genre Identification: Students analyzed images depicting various musical styles (e.g., associated attire, instruments, performance settings) and identified the represented mainstream music genre, articulating its English name. These activities served to immediately apply and review the concepts being taught. The incorporation of such games enhanced lesson engagement and vividness, fostering an active classroom atmosphere. This approach effectively stimulated students' intrinsic motivation to acquire English knowledge and sustained their learning interest.

The Consolidation Practice phase prioritized student-centered game-based application, with teacher summarization serving a supplementary role. This 10-15minute segment involved students engaging in post-class games—such as role-playing and scenario reenactment—that utilized knowledge acquired during the lesson. Crucially, the design of these activities emphasized authentic context simulations, thereby facilitating the natural acquisition of linguistic and cultural knowledge while students completed game-based tasks. Taking Chinese and Western cuisine lesson as an example, this lesson incorporated two consolidation games: "Menu Designer" and "Culinary Ambassador". Menu designer simulated an authentic restaurant dining scenario. Students assumed roles as either a restaurant server or a dining guest. The student acting as the server was required to inquire about the guest's preferences and subsequently create a personalized fusion menu combining Chinese and Western dishes. The student acting as the guest needed to articulate their dietary preferences in detail and provide feedback on the completed menu. Culinary Ambassador simulated an authentic tourist-guide interaction. Students assumed roles as either a local tour guide or a visiting tourist. The student acting as the guide was tasked with recommending local specialties surrounding the tourist area and designing a culinary itinerary (a "food tasting roadmap") for the tourist. The student acting as the tourist needed to provide their dietary preferences to assist the guide in finalizing the itinerary.

4. Results and analysis of the study

Scholars can strengthen the validity and dependability of their results by using triangulation, which is an effective strategy. Triangulation aids in the thorough and detailed knowledge of complicated events by validating trends and spotting inconsistencies. Creswell and Creswell (2017) suggested that the researchers might create a more solid basis for their arguments by correlating trends across various data sets or using theoretical arguments.

4.1 Gamified teaching model has effectively enhanced students′interest and motivation in learning English

The survey results revealed that, on average, students scored 3.53 on the English learning interest scale prior to participating in gamified literacy classes. Only 43.4% of students demonstrated relatively high interest in English learning. These results suggest that most students have low interest in English studies and highlight a significant interest gap among some learners in traditional classroom settings. After participating in the classes, however, the average score on the scale increased to 3.58, showing a noticeable improvement in interest. The data shows that only 1.89% of students felt that the gamified teaching model had "almost no effect" on their interest in learning English. Meanwhile, 49.06% of students reported a "significant" or "very significant" increase in interest, indicating that nearly half experienced a marked activation of interest through the gamified teaching model. Additionally, 30 participants in the competency-based classroom provided preference evaluations for classroom segments. Sixty-point-seven-one percent of students preferred the "game segments," while 64.29% favored the "interactive segments." Further analysis of the reasons for these preferences revealed: 73.58% cited these segments' provision of oral expression opportunities, and 41.51% recognized the engaging, interactive formats delivered by gamified teaching. These data demonstrate that classroom designs based on gamified teaching effectively reduce apprehension toward English learning by providing "low-pressure interaction + oral practice," thereby fostering a positive feedback loop of "interest stimulation - active participation." Therefore, it is easy to conclude that the gamified teaching model aligns with the cognitive characteristics of junior high school students. These students prefer experiential learning and are drawn to engaging activities. The model significantly stimulates their interest in learning English and their intrinsic motivation. The core of the gamified teaching approach is "integrating knowledge into fun tasks," and survey data corroborates this component's role in boosting students' interest in learning.

4.2 The gamified teaching model has improved students' willingness to actively learn English

The Gamified teaching model, by "strengthening students' subject status and constructing active participation scenarios", effectively transforms junior high school students' "passive acceptance" state in English learning.

First of all, students' willingness to study—especially to speak—has significantly increased. "Reluctance to speak" stands as a core manifestation of insufficient learning initiative among junior high school students in English acquisition: in traditional classrooms, students avoid oral expression due to "weak foundational skills and fear of errors". The gamified teaching model effectively overcomes this barrier. Relevant data reveals that after participating in the gamified literacy classes, 67.92% of students reported that "their initiative in learning English has improved". Combined with learning initiative self-assessments (scored 1-10), all students who felt their initiative had improved chose a score of 5 or above, with the average score rising to 7.25— clear evidence of enhanced active learning willingness.

Further, feedback on "reasons for avoiding oral communication" shows 67.44% of students cite "weak foundational skills" and 60.47% mention "poor pronunciation or fear of mistakes". This confirms that gamified sessions such as "vocabulary rapid-response games" and "role-playing tasks" directly address these pain points by reducing anxiety about oral expression errors. Additional survey results indicate 80% of students identify "group activity-based delivery" as the

core distinction between competency-oriented classrooms and traditional settings; group interactions provide "peer-supported speaking opportunities", which further alleviates the pressure of individual expression.

Second, to deepen understanding of why initiative improved, researchers analyzed the survey data and found the gamified teaching model strengthens active willingness through "immediate feedback and task-based achievement". For example, in "vocabulary games", students gain "clearance recognition" via rapid responses, reducing the monotony of "mechanical vocabulary memorization" in traditional classrooms. Feedback on classroom value shows 67.57% of students believe competency-oriented classrooms "enhance English learning confidence"—a critical driver of "active participation". When students experience the achievement of "mastering content and expressing ideas" in games, they transition from "passively awaiting instructions" to "proactively seeking challenges", forming a positive cycle: "interest activation → active participation → achievement acquisition → increased initiative".

Therefore, this model aligns with junior high school students' cognitive needs for immediate feedback and sense of achievement. By integrating "skill practice into interactive tasks" and resolving core anxieties about oral expression, it fundamentally stimulates intrinsic learning initiative.

4.3 The integration of gamified teaching models with competency-based classrooms boosts students' core competencies across four dimensions.

The 2022 Edition of the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards clearly defines four core competency goals: "learning ability, language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and cultural awareness". The integration of game-based teaching and competency-oriented classrooms, through "situational task design + interactive practice", achieves the comprehensive improvement of these four competencies, with specific data supporting each dimension:

First, language proficiency—whose core lies in "the flexible application of knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar"—is effectively enhanced. Gamified literacy classrooms promote the transformation of knowledge into ability through task-driven approaches. Relevant survey data shows 72.97% of students believe competency classrooms "expand their vocabulary". This improvement stems from game-based designs: in activities like "Animal Name Quick Response" and "Menu Designer Game", students must actively memorize and use vocabulary such as "panda/koala" and "beef wellington/dumpling" to complete tasks, replacing the "mechanical rote memorization" of traditional classrooms and boosting vocabulary "application-memory efficiency". Additionally, 73.58% of students recognize the classroom "provides ample opportunities for oral expression". Gamified sessions directly address this traditional weakness through "role-playing (e.g., 'tour guide-tourist')" and "group discussions", driving the shift from "reluctance to speak" to "active expression". These data confirm that students' language proficiency is proactively enhanced through such classrooms.

Second, cultural awareness is strengthened by centering scenarios on "comparisons of Chinese and Western cultures" and integrating cultural content into games. Pre-intervention surveys revealed only 7.55% of students had a "very good understanding" of Chinese and Western cultures,

with 56.6% reporting a "relatively good understanding". Post-participation feedback on cultural learning shows a marked shift: 45.28% of students perceived a "relatively large improvement" in cultural understanding, 18.87% noted a "very large improvement", and merely 1.89% saw almost no improvement—proving the model effectively facilitates cross-cultural knowledge acquisition. Further, 56.6% of students cited "enriching understanding of Chinese and Western cultures" as a key reason for liking competency classrooms, indicating cultural awareness improvement is not "passive indoctrination" but actively constructed through game-based practice.

Third, learning ability is elevated, with a transformation from "passive acceptance" to "independent cooperation". Gamified competency classrooms reinforce this ability via "student-led interactive tasks". Eighty percent of students identify "group activity-based delivery" as the core difference between competency classrooms and traditional ones. In feedback on ability development, 75.47% of respondents (40 people) stated the classroom "trains learning abilities such as group cooperation and independent thinking". For instance, in the "group-designed food route" task, students must divide roles, research information, discuss plans, and present results—directly enhancing collaborative and communication skills. This also strengthens autonomous learning awareness, shifting students from "passively following the teacher" to "proactively planning learning" and gradually fostering autonomous learning strategies.

Finally, critical thinking skills have advanced, moving from "one-dimensional cognition" to "critical thinking". Survey data indicates 41.51% of students reported that gamified sessions in competency-based classrooms effectively enhanced their critical thinking quality, particularly their ability to view things dialectically. This figure represents a significant increase compared to the approximately 15% of students who would proactively question knowledge or analyze issues from multiple perspectives in traditional classrooms. In gamified activities like "debate games" and "cultural decision-making tasks", 60% of students could voluntarily put forward diverse viewpoints—doubling the pre-intervention proportion of 25%. To gain insight into the core logic behind this improvement, research found that unlike traditional classrooms focused on "right/wrong judgment", gamified tasks (e.g., "debates on campus cultural differences") have no single correct outcome. This compels students to collect evidence from both supporting and opposing angles, moving them beyond passive knowledge acceptance and fostering dialectical thinking awareness. Moreover, the process of problem-solving and logical reasoning is strengthened: students are required to independently select information from various materials rather than relying on teacher-provided content. This entire process facilitates the deep transfer of students' thinking ability.

In summary, the game-based teaching model aligns with the requirements of the 2022 Curriculum Standards. By embedding competency development into interactive and situational game tasks, it systematically advances all four core competencies, demonstrating its practical value in compulsory education English teaching.

5. Conclusion and limitations of the study

5.1 The practical results of the gamified teaching model

The practical results of the gamified teaching model are mainly summarized from two aspects: the transformation of students' English learning motivation and their learning ability. In the practice of the gamified teaching model in literacy classroom, the participation of more than 30 activity participants is as follows:

In the classroom, the researchers mainly compared the situation before and after the practice of the gamified teaching model. First, in terms of student participation: the first one or two classes the researchers chose to teach mainly depends on lectures all the class to impart knowledge, according to the pre-research questionnaire conducted in this study, we found that more than 80% students would get distracted in the middle or later of the course. But when teacher made the ice-break game or other games during the class, we saw that students with extroverted traits actively volunteered to participate in games, while even introverted or easily distracted students demonstrated improved attention to the course, even if a small number of relatively introverted students and distracted students do not participate in the game actively, their concentration on the course was improved. Second, in terms of effects: the one-sided knowledge transmission from teacher requires repeated reinforcement in the later stage to deepen students' memories, if do not, they may forget them in a quick speed. But under the practice of the gamified teaching model, the high-frequency interaction of knowledge emerging in the games at that times can enhance students' cognition and memory ability. It is mainly manifested in that students' response speed to the word phrases involved in the game activities mentioned by the teachers in the latter half of the class become relatively faster, and students' learning interest and concentration are improved.

Based on the result of the observation in the research, we can find that students' learning motivation and interest under the gamified teaching model have been improved, which further proves that the feasibility and positive effects of the practice of the gamified teaching model. By designing knowledge such as words and phrases into the game activities, teacher can effectively guide student to participate in the game and learn knowledges through games. While effectively helping students memorize the context of the textbook and learning new knowledge, it also cultivates students' confidence and learning interest. However, there is also a drawback that students' learning interest and concentration in the game activity reach a peak, but as game activity ends and time passes during the class, students' interest and concentration gradually decline. This also require teacher to continuously optimize and improve the quality of game activities and also the joint of context before and after the game activities. At the same time, positive feedback should be given to the students during the game activity to stimulate their learning intensity and learning motivation, so that prolongs the time of concentration and interest.

5.2 The role transformation of both teacher and students in the gamified teaching model

Under the New English Curriculum standards for Chinese Junior Middle Schools, it mainly emphasizes that teaching should be carried out with students as the main body, teaching roles should shift from being "educator-centered" to "learner-centered". Students are objective existences with subjective initiative, full of vitality and full of their own thinking. Teaching should make students learning by themselves positively and willingly. The gamified teaching model, grounded in children's developmental psychology, is uniquely suited to this rule. At that stage, many junior high school students generally have characteristics such as limited attention spans, a

propensity for play and heightened distractibility. By connecting less engaging content with activities which students fond to can stimulate students' learning motivation, guiding them to participate in the activity forwardly, fending off weariness while they absorb knowledge.

When it comes to teachers, their roles are evolving from that of a "solo performer" to an" accompanying collaborator". In the teaching process, teachers take on a more guiding function. They need to craft game-based activities linked to teaching tasks and steer students to conduct these activities in an orderly way. Simultaneously, they should offer positive feedback and constructive adjustments regarding students' performances to foster a favorable teaching environment.

Moreover, teachers can integrate real - world scenarios and problem -oriented situations into game designs. They can encourage students to apply knowledge within these contexts, facilitating better practical application of what is been learned. Throughout the entire game process, teachers should act as guiders and observers, refraining from excessive interference in students' creative behaviors. By observing how students perform and taking into account their individual differences and learning capacities, teachers can devise game activities of varying difficulty levels. This enables students across all ability spectrums to partake in game - based instruction and unlocks their developmental potential.

5.3 Limitations of application of gamified teaching model

This study, despite verifying the positive effects of the gamified teaching model in junior high school English classroom, but still has notable limitations, which needs to be addressed and acknowledged in future studies.

The first limitation is about practical implementations. On one hand, there is a disconnection between the ideal theory and the practice of gamified teaching model. It is mainly manifested in the fact that teachers have inconsistent and vague definitions of the "gamified teaching model" model, which leads to the phenomenon of "pseudo-gamified teaching model" in practice. It indicates that teacher often arbitrarily equate "using educational games" with "gamified teaching model" and label simple classroom interactions as the gamified teaching model teaching. It results in the convergence and the homogenization of gamified teaching model. On the other hand, the transformation of roles between teachers and students is not sufficient. Constrained by traditional exam-oriented teaching thinking, many teachers still dominate students' gamified activities excessively, ignoring the key point that teaching should be carried out with students as the main body chronically, which makes students passive learners rather than active thinkers. For students, there are also obvious individual difference in adaption: regarding this gamified teaching model, some students perceive game-based activities as a waste of class time, while others argue that teacher-centered lectures facilitate more efficient knowledge acquisition. In addition, some students have the phenomenon of "pure play without learning" or "muddling through", which greatly reduces the effect of gamified teaching model teaching and also makes the gap between students wider and wider. So, for both teachers and students, it is a great challenge both in the role transformation and in the shift of learning methods. These problems emerging in the research

process will affect the research results. they are also key points that need to be considered and solved for the subsequent improvement of the gamified teaching model.

The second limitation is about limitation in external promotion and adaptability. The study was conducted in a specific school with a certain teaching resources, student quality and relatively limited sample size, it didn't explore the model's adaptability in other teaching-level regions such as resource-constrained regions. For example, schools in remote areas may lack hardware support or teachers with gamified activities design capabilities, making it hard to replicate the model. In addition, the study only focuses on seventh-grade students, and its applicability to other grades (e.g. eighth and nineth grades students, which face higher exam pressure) or other English teaching modules remain unknown. Finally, our research is only conducted for 30 samples in the same school, the data thus obtained is limited and this small and geographically concentrated samples cannot fully reflect the characteristics of students from different types of schools in different regions, leading to insufficient representativeness of the results.

All in all, these factors limit the generalization of the research conclusions to a broader educational context, and we still need future research to prove the superiority of gamified teaching model.

5.4 Enlightenment of gamified teaching model

In summary, the research explores the practice of the gamified teaching model. In this research, we found that the use of gamified teaching model can relatively increase students learning motivation and learning interest and can be an effective pedagogical tool that is widely applied in future teaching. Educators should enhance their general, systematic and structural understanding of gamified teaching model, so as to better and fully utilize these teaching methods, and make the teaching approaches effectively serve students.

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