

EXPLORING EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF KAHOOT! AS A GAMIFIED ASSESSMENT METHOD

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ABSTRACT

The integration of technology into the learning of EFL necessitates the transformation from the anxiety-causing traditional testing method into a much more engaging testing method. This research investigates the attitude of the seventh-grade students of SMP Unggulan Hamzanwadi regarding the gamification process of the Kahoot! tool as an assessment tool, filling the existing void for junior high school students specifically. This research, as an exploratory case study, employed the collection of data through total sampling for 15 participants, conducted in October 2025. For the validation and support for the research, the study employed three instruments for data collection, specifically questionnaires, observation, and interviews. This study determined that 94.7 percent of the students were entertained during the assessment, and 89.3 percent were motivated by the immediate feedback. In exploring the study, the participant students experienced the transformation from test anxiety to positive stress, which is referred to as "heart gymnastics." Of course, there was an interesting finding regarding the pragmatics of the situation, which was that the participant students enjoyed the tool because it eliminated the physically draining aspect of the assessment. In spite of the major and significant challenges, such as the prevalence of technological problems (81.3 percent) and the lack of ease during the allotted timeframe (80 percent), the participants were motivated.

Keywords: Gamification, Kahoot!, EFL Assessment, Student Perception.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the key elements altering the global educational landscape in the twenty-first century is the incorporation of technology into the educational system. Teachers need to use more adaptable teaching methods to accommodate the digital natives learning style because of the quickly developing information and communication technologies (ICT). Instead of being an add on, technology has been a crucial part of creating successful learning environments from the start of the post pandemic period. During this time, the use of educational innovations increased, and the traditional classroom environment was eventually superseded by the networked classroom (Onyema et al., 2020). According to this tendency, educational institutions must use instructional technology that encourages student participation and lessens the rigidity of academic learning.

It is clear that evaluating pupils may be difficult, particularly when teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Firdaus et al. (2022) claim that students are more likely to worry about

learning a foreign language since the old method of evaluating them focuses more emphasis on the final grade than the process of learning the language. This problem will be addressed in the suggested research.

A more modern approach to addressing students' boredom and worry is to include gaming aspects into the evaluation process. Gamification is the use of ideas or elements from game design outside of games to encourage or involve players (Deterding et al., 2011). Smirdele et al. (2020) list a number of other benefits of educational gamification, such as improved learning outcomes and the development of certain skills. Students' views of exams have changed from ones of terrifying assignments to ones of exciting challenges as a result of the addition of engaging, competitive, and reward-oriented learning components.

Kahoot! is among the best gamified language learning options accessible. Teachers may design engaging tests with visual cues and music using the Kahoot! student response game system. Kahoot! enhances learning via positive social interactions and healthy competition, claim Wang and Tahir (2020). The platform allows for exams in a comfortable setting without sacrificing in depth comprehension.

More specifically, there are special educational advantages to use Kahoot! during exams. Kahoot! evaluations were well received by students in EFL settings, who reported feeling less stressed and more involved (Nurhadianti and Pratolo, 2020). The fundamental idea behind tests being performed in support of assessment for learning is reflected in the feature that gives students quick access to erroneous answers. The findings of Fuster-Guilló et al. (2019) about the positive academic motivation that game-learning scenarios provide are in line with this. In addition to providing data on cognitive assessments, Kahoot! also encourages students' intrinsic incentives.

Even though Kahoot! has been shown to be beneficial, there is still a research gap that has to be addressed. The effectiveness of Kahoot! has been widely observed in prior studies, including those conducted by Zhang & Yu (2021) and Bicen & Kocakoyun (2018), where Kahoot! functions more as a general platform or vocabulary-building tool in educational contexts. Fewer studies have been done on how Indonesian junior high school students use Kahoot! perspectives during formal examinations. Additionally, little research has been done on the underlying psychological dynamics of kids who are exposed to uniform learning settings and gamified assessments.

By providing this knowledge inside the framework of SMP Unggulan Hamzanwadi, our research aims to bridge this gap. The educational system at this school was created with a progressive values curriculum that heavily relies on technology. The survey, which focused on seventh-grade students, was carried out in October 2025. There are no other students in the whole level at this point. Without the research carried out during this session, this would not have provided information on school applications.

This research is urgent because it aims to ascertain if children in junior high schools going through early adolescent transitions might benefit from the positive views of gamification in higher education. Factors like motivation and social pressures influenced by Kahoot! leaderboard function are especially significant at this point in life. The children's opinions on Kahoot!'s enjoyable features, technological aspects, and educational principles would provide insightful information. In light of this, the main objective of this research study is to thoroughly investigate the opinions of seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Unggulan Hamzanwadi about Kahoot! as a gamified assessment tool.

“How do students perceive the effectiveness of Kahoot! in improving student motivation, engagement levels, and comfort levels during the assessment process?” is the research question that the study aims to address. Given the present digital era, there may be several opportunities in the future to test English language competency in particular and to make assessments more adaptable in general due to the significance of this research study.

METHOD

A case study research approach was used in the study. This specific decision aimed to meet the nuances of pupils' perceptions in the natural environment. The study rationale supporting this approach made use of the ability to map students' individual reactions and psychological processes while using Kahoot! to evaluate pupils. On October 16, 2025, data was gathered at SMP Unggulan Hamzanwadi. In order to acquire data from the whole student population, the participants were selected from among the 15 seventh-grade students in this single class throughout the entire educational institution for this academic year (a single class method). Due to the special demands of the participants, this study used comprehensive sampling, which means that the whole designated population was used.

This research used methodological triangulation, combining questionnaires, observations, and interviews to enhance data validity. A 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting “strongly disagree” and 5 denoting “strongly agree,” was used in the first tool, a closed-ended questionnaire. Enjoyment & Motivation, Engagement, Learning Value, and Challenges were the four key characteristics that this tool measured with its twelve components.

An observation checklist was used as a second tool to supplement the survey data, recording physical behaviors and the classroom environment during the evaluation. This included noting non-verbal clues such facial expressions during timed periods and responses to technological difficulties. Semi-structured interviews were used as the third tool to help explain the reasoning behind the survey replies of the students, with a focus on their subjective experiences with time constraint and score comparison.

Direct observation in the Kahoot! based exam was the first step in the data collection procedure. This was followed by the questionnaire being given out in class and individual interviews. A dual-approach method was used for the data analysis. To get at general impressions of students, quantitative data collected in the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics expressed as percentages. Simultaneously, the interactive themes in data analysis proposed by Miles et al. (2014) were applied to the analysis of data collected from direct observations and individual interviews. Data presentation, data condensation, and conclusion drafting are all steps in this process. This research synthesizes the findings from the three data collection techniques to provide a composite evaluation of the efficacy of gamification in English language assessment.

FINDINGS

This section provides an explanation of the empirical results that were derived from the triangulation of three research instruments: interviews, observations, and questionnaires. Students' perceptions of the employment of Kahoot! as an evaluation tool in the classroom will be examined in relation to the research question. This part would be broken up into three subsections to make the findings of the research simpler to comprehend and analyze: Positive

opinions on emotive and cognitive components, opinions about technical limitations and difficulties, and opinions based on observations or interviews.

1. Positive Views of Learning, Enjoyment, and Engagement

Overall, the quantitative analysis of the 15 responders (N=15) shows a tendency toward improvement. Based mostly on student impressions of fun, incentives, and educational value, Table 1 shows the range of total results.

Table 1. Distribution of Student Perceptions Regarding Enjoyment, Engagement, and Learning

No	Code	Statement	Total Score	Percentage (%)	Category
1	Q1	I derive enjoyment from undertaking English assessments administered through Kahoot!	71	94.7%	Very High
2	Q3	I am motivated to perform at my optimum level during the assessment process.	67	89.3%	Very High
3	Q8	I can readily identify my errors immediately after answering (Feedback).	67	89.3%	Very High
4	Q7	The utilization of Kahoot! facilitates a better understanding of the material learned.	66	88.0%	Very High
5	Q4	I demonstrate increased active participation in class when Kahoot! is employed.	65	86.7%	Very High
6	Q5	I experience a higher degree of confidence compared to taking traditional written (paper-based) tests.	64	85.3%	Very High
7	Q6	I am able to maintain better focus on the questions displayed on the screen.	63	84.0%	High
8	Q2	Kahoot! renders the testing process more enjoyable and significantly less stressful.	62	82.7%	High
9	Q9	Kahoot! represents an equitable method for evaluating my English proficiency.	61	81.3%	High

Source: Primary Data Analysis (2025)

Table 1 above shows that the indicator under Enjoyment (Q1) had the highest proportion, at 94.7%. This suggests that all participants were almost unanimous in their acceptance of this method of evaluation. The two elements that came in second behind the theme of pleasure were inspiration (item Q3) and feedback transparency (item Q8), both of which scored 89.3%. Furthermore, compared to the conventional paper techniques, the results obtained under item Q4 showed 86.7% and item Q5 showed 85.3%, clearly suggesting higher levels of active involvement and confidence among students.

2. Perceptions of Obstacles and Limitations

However, the questionnaire's findings also brought to light the difficulties that the students had in this setting, namely with regard to time and technological limitations. Table 2 summarizes this information.

Table 2. Student Perceptions Regarding Challenges in Using Kahoot!

No	Code	Statement	Total Score	Percentage (%)	Category
1	Q11	Technical issues (internet connection/device) often disrupt me during the quiz.	61	81.3%	High
2	Q10	I find it difficult to keep up with the speed of the question timer.	60	80.0%	High
3	Q12	I feel anxious when comparing my score with classmates.	53	70.7%	Moderate
		Source: Primary Data Analysis (2025)			

Source: Primary Data Analysis (2025)

According to Table 2's findings, with an overall agreement level of 81.3%, technical hurdles (Q11) were the most often encountered obstacles in the study. Additionally, the majority of students (80.0%) said it was very difficult to complete questions (Q10) due to the little time provided. However, in terms of psychological pressure, students' anxiety brought on by social competitiveness (Q12) is in the moderate range (70.7%). Compared to technological interruptions, this may not be as important.

3. Qualitative Methods Results: Insights

The qualitative information obtained from observations and interviews gives the previously mentioned numbers more context and depth. Three main themes might be used to describe the results:

A. Emotional and Physical Reactions (The "Heart-Pumping" Effect)

The noticeable shift in class morale was mirrored in observations made in the classroom. The pupils had been rather excited as they set up their gadgets before to the exam starting. The exam had been quite stressful, and students had physically responded by applauding when they gave the right answer or softly hitting desks when they gave the wrong one.

These findings corroborated the observations. The pupils used "senam jantung" or "heart gymnastics" as metaphorical expressions. "Happy, it's thrilling and makes my heart race." It resembles gymnastics for the heart. The third student "Mixed feelings, happy because I can hold a phone, but also tense because the time is too fast." (Student Number Twelve)

B. Pragmatic Reason: Eliminating "Writing Fatigue"

Based on "physically being exhausted," students contrasted Kahoot! with written examinations in the interviews (Q2), which revealed the participants' comfort level as a pragmatic factor. "We use Kahoot because there's no writing; hands do not get tired." Learner 1. "Kahoot, it's more fun, and not tiring to write."

C. Overcoming Technological Obstacles

Overcoming technological obstacles with perseverance students' complaints about extended "loading times" or lost signals during tests provided evidence for the noticeable existence of technical issues in Table 2 (Q11). Quotes on "lag" and "signals" as major obstacles make this clear.

Nevertheless, it was noted that in spite of the technological difficulties, the pupils showed no indications of quitting. However, they persisted in trying to get access once again and responding to inquiries with consistent enthusiasm until the procedure was completed. Based on easiness and enthusiasm, one student even said that they preferred this procedure to the written one.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to determine how seventh-grade EFL students feel about using Kahoot! as far as the evaluation process's approach is concerned. In the 94.7th percentile of students' manifestations, the primary data shows an overwhelming favorable response to this process of being welcomed with satisfaction. This helps to confirm the validity of the gamification idea, which holds that incorporating games into other facets of life can significantly increase motivation, engagement, and emotional resonance. According to the previous research cited in this study, Bicen & Kocakoyun (2018) and Wang & Tahir (2020) claimed that Kahoot! allowed for the incorporation of this idea, which, in the context of SMP Unggulan Hamzanwadi, transforms the perspective of language study from being dull to being highly engaging in terms of making the "frightening exam" entertaining.

An intriguing psychological phenomena about the shift of anxious sensations from negative stress to positive stress or eustress is revealed by the critical analysis of the interview data. The students used metaphors such as "heart gymnastics," "senam jantung," "mixed feelings," and "campur aduk" to convey this pressure. Unlike other written exams, which typically cause students to feel frozen with anxiety, this kind of pressure acts as an adrenaline trigger. This aligns with the findings of Fuster-Guilló et al. (2019), who contend that competitive game mechanics may raise students' emotional arousal levels, which have been linked to improved academic performance. The Kahoot "tension" Consequently, it serves as both a catalyst and a motivator, encouraging children to respond more quickly and passionately to intellectual stimuli.

One of the intriguing and unique findings from this research is the practical approach to overcome physical exhaustion. Based on the interviews, it seems that kids found Kahoot! more engaging since it eliminated the weariness that comes with writing by hand. Quotes such as "hands do not hurt" tend to support the notion that the physical difficulties encountered during the traditional assessment procedure may serve as discriminators, especially for lower secondary pupils. From the standpoint of cognitive load theory, Kahoot! eliminates unnecessary cognitive load or physically demanding activities, allowing the student's cognitive system to fully focus on the testing procedure.

Furthermore, 89.3% of students expressed satisfaction with the quick feedback function, demonstrating the importance of Kahoot! in the Assessment for Learning (AfL) process. This is in contrast to traditional testing procedures, when the "learning moment" would fade since the results or feedback would be delayed. However, with Kahoot!, after answering every question, one may instantly evaluate their own responses. According to Nurhadianti and Pratolo (2020), this supports the idea that openness in gamified environments enables students to identify knowledge deficiencies immediately. Additionally, this speeds up the process of improving English language comprehension.

On the other hand, this study also offers contradictory data on the connection between technological limitations and pleasure. The findings showed that 81.3% of students had technological difficulties, such as erratic internet connectivity. In theory, there should be a negative correlation between high technical interruptions and satisfaction. However, the found constancy in pleasure levels at 94.7% suggests that the positive effects of technological malfunctions might be outweighed by the power of the gamified aspects (such as music, images, or competition). This result is quite different from those obtained by Ismail and Mohammad (2017), who believe that major demotivators are technological issues. If the process or activity seems interesting and culturally relevant, the “Gen Z” pupils in this research study seemed to be more tolerant of technological malfunctions.

Additionally evident is the element of social comparison and rivalry. Although concern over score comparisons affects 70.7% of students, this kind of anxiety is classified as competitive anxiety. The leaderboard’s presence increases pupils’ social validation. According to Zhang and Yu’s (2021) findings, students reacted favorably to seeing their names rise in the ranks and applauded when this occurred. This demonstrates that pupils may be motivated by competition from external sources in this uniform classroom environment. According to Zhang and Yu (2021), the usage of leaderboards allows students to actively engage in class because of their social desire for achievement-based social validation.

Since this material has practical uses in English language training, velocity and correctness must fundamentally be balanced. Despite their enjoyment of the time-sensitive assignment, 80% of students struggled to keep up with the questions. Teachers should give greater thought to how long each question should take, taking into account the difficulty of the English texts that are read in class, so that the exam measures more than just response speed. Additional findings indicate that before Kahoot! can be utilized in classrooms, there must be adequate internet access.

The notion that gamification is not only a fad but a valid teaching tool in the digital era is theoretically supported by this research. Because of the present motivating concepts, the revelation that ergonomic comfort (no writing) or “heart gymnastics” sentiments are crucial variables in the student’s decision is the innovative aspect of this study. Despite the fact that there is still much room for development in terms of infrastructure, this indicates that Kahoot! has successfully changed the student evaluation process from being tedious and passive to being dynamic and competitive.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the seventh-grade ESL students at SMP Unggulan Hamzanwadi responded very well to the usage of Kahoot! as a game-enabled evaluation tool. The inclusion of game-enablement in the process of student learning assessment led to students’ cognitive reorganization of the process, making it entertaining and motivating instead of dull and unpleasant, as this study demonstrates with hard data.

Three major findings might be used to summarize the main concept or subject of this study: Students’ “eustress,” or positive pressure, is triggered by Kahoot!, which raises their level of attentiveness and adrenaline. Because it doesn’t need pupils to write by hand, Kahoot! offers convenience. Students’ motivation outweighs the annoyance brought on by technological hiccups throughout the procedure.

The study advances the field’s theoretical understanding of gamification in the following ways: by highlighting the fact that students’ preference for gamified educational platforms at

the middle school level is influenced by ergonomic comfort, or the lack of writing fatigue. Aside from theoretical contributions, this study demonstrates the efficacy of gamification as an Assessment for Learning strategy that may boost students' confidence and involvement in English classes.

Despite the aforementioned favorable results, this study acknowledges limitations related to the small sample size (N=15) and the single-class case study in particular; as a result, generalizations of the research findings would be dubious. Furthermore, the observed frequency of technical issues and difficulties with time management are crucial facts that must not be disregarded.

Based on the findings, this study suggests that before conducting the assessment process, educational practitioners should determine the stability of the internet connection infrastructure. They should also adjust the timing of questions according to the difficulty of the passages read to avoid creating unhelpful anxiety. In order to determine the relationship between students' real gains in academic success and their improved views of gamified apps, future research studies should try to expand the population or use a combination of research approaches.

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