English Language Teachers' Professional Competencies enhanced through Online Gamified Learning using Classcraft

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We live in the digital century with a rapid pace of technological innovation fascinated globally with Internet being the dominating call. It has resulted in integrating technologies using online learning which has evolved in recent years. Online learning has become popular because of its potential in providing more flexible access to content and instruction at any time, and any place. In tandem with the growth of online learning in teacher training and teacher education, the focus of this research is therefore, to highlight a fully online learning mode using an online gamified learning platform (Classcraft) to enhance teachers’ proficiency. The research question addresses to design and develop an online gamified learning for English language teachers. English language teachers need a certain level of proficiency in the language to serve as models for our students and provide them with valuable language input that can help them learn. Thus, the framework conceptualises the issue of proficiency being at the forefront for English language teachers, the Roadmap and professional competencies. According to The Roadmap 2015–2025, the current requirement of a minimum CEFR Level C1 for English language teachers in Malaysia is aimed at ensuring that teachers are able to teach effectively in the language classroom. For this reason, there is a need for all English language teachers to initiate their own learning. The method employed is design and development research design. The findings have portrayed online gamified learning has enhanced teachers’ competencies using Classcraft.  

Keywords: Classcraft, Online Gamified Learning, Professional Competencies

1. Introduction/Context

The development of technology and the proliferation of digital information have resulted in various paradigm shifts in education and its’ system. Nations are moving toward the use of digital learning technology in order to prepare their students for success in the twenty-first century (Ally, 2019). According to Kaarakainen et al. (2017), digitalization has been expanding into education for a long time now, and the notion of having a variety of different routes and digital kits has moved a lot in which the pattern is moving higher in the most recent couple of years (Forsberg, 2018). Online learning is one of the most widely used educational systems. Lee and Lee (2008) remarked it as an active learning process accomplished through experience, maturity and interaction with others. The branding of gamification is being engulfed by an increase in efficacy and effectiveness with various aspects.

Prior to the rapid growth of gamification, online learning has opened educational opportunities to learners from many walks of life regardless of age, gender, socio-economic background, employment status, originating from developed or developing countries (Basaza and Milman, 2010). The development has achieved a change in perspective on language learning as it gives various freedom to take part in language learning across existence which is in line with the trend of technological novelties accomplished extensively across the globe. Eshtehardi (2014) stated that it is mounting speedily in almost all fields reflecting great flexibility in education.

The Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 strives to transformational education by requiring teachers to achieve the CEFR C1 level, as well as pedagogical competency and English language proficiency. Norman stated that learning works best when there is a flow and interaction between both learners and their environment, resulting in cognitively genuine rather than physically authentic learning (Norman et al., 2012). As a result, all English language instructors must take the initiative in their own learning (Roadmap, 2015-2025).
Using Classcraft as a gamified platform, this project intends to design and develop an online gamified learning environment for teachers to improve their competency level across the country. It also attempts to make the greatest use of available resources in order to assist teachers in teaching in an engaging manner while adhering to national policy. The online gamification platform goes above and above in terms of generating both challenging and fun learning tasks (Lynch, 2017).

This study employed Classcraft, a completely online digitalised instructional gamified platform viable for all, to improve the competency of English Language teachers. Online gamified learning was used not only as a foreground, but also as instruction for teaching and learning (Major, 2015). Furthermore, Classcraft was implemented as a teaching and learning tool because, according to Boettcher and Conrad's research, there is a desire for an online programme that has risen over the last decades and fulfills the demands of today's instructors (Boettcher and Conrad, 2016). As a result, policymakers and relevant authorities should embrace the notion of employing an online gamified learning platform for professional development courses.

2. Literature review

2.1 Online Gamified Learning

The online gamified learning platform includes a comprehensive collection of tools for measuring learners' participation in course activities. Getting a fast peek at how the learners are progressing provides the e-moderator with much-needed information in a matter of seconds. The online gamified learning platform may provide information regarding student access, grades, and discussion board involvement in real time. Monitoring student involvement and actions inside such a platform, according to Boettcher and Conrad, is simple and helpful (Boettcher and Conrad, 2016). Online gamified learning not only maintains student participation in class, but it may also provide an alternate approach of fostering active involvement and interest in anything other than a course's academic requirements. It should be used in conjunction with other well-researched strategies of engagement. This is because gamification allows us to not only establish a paradigm that encourages learners to try new things without being afraid of failing, but also to engage learners in joyful experiences with the purpose of learning. Another key benefit is the cost of production and the possibility to make learning information more appealing or enjoyable by including game elements (Al-Azawi, Al Faliti, and Al-Blushi, 2016) without incurring single penny being accessible to all. Some of the most popular online learning tools and platforms, such as Duolingo and Classcraft, have integrated gamification into their essential services for years now.

Classcraft is a free web platform that enables teachers to create quizzes that may be used for a certain length of time to aid students in class and test them individually or in groups, depending on their learning style. It was founded in 2015, according to its official website: "Launched in 2015, Classcraft is an award-winning, teacher-friendly gamification tool that is currently used in over 50,000 classrooms in seventy-five countries in eleven languages" (EdTech Innovation Showcase, 2020). Classcraft is one of the gamification solutions that adds an adventure game layer to the current course architecture. Players in this adventure game learn by creating their own character, joining a team, and finally earning experience points and prizes based on the instructional activities (Al-Azawi, Al Faliti, and Al-Blushi, 2016). Every player in Classcraft is characterized by an avatar. The principles of this game are basic and easy, to the point where a learner who plays it can earn "Experience Points (XP)" by displaying positive behaviour in class. This will allow him/her to advance and get valuable experience. However, if a student "violates" the class restrictions, he or she will lose "Health Points (HP)"—the game's life force—and will finally perish in the tasks. For example, if a learner receives XP points, the additional talents gained will benefit both the learner and his or her team (https://help.classcraft.com). In contrast, if the student loses HP points, he and his/her team will lose the combat, and hence the game. To win, students may need to work as a group. In ClassCraft, learners can take on roles such as Mages, Warriors, or Healers in order to participate in the game (Haris & Sugito, 2015). When a learner joins a team, he or she can take on the role of a Warrior, Mage, or Healer, as each team includes at least one of these characters; this allows them to help each other succeed in the game because the learners are participating in the class activities created in the Classcraft platform (https://help.classcraft.com). When students join into their game, they may customise their character and powers (Sanchez, 2016). Furthermore, Classcraft provides the game administrator—or Gamemaster—with a global and individual picture of the game's progress. In other words, the instructor or game master might view the progress of a single student, a specific team, or the entire class (Rivera-Trigueros & Sánchez-Pérez, 2020). Learners gain experience points and powers for excellent work and teamwork. Hence, Classcraft is indeed an open source designed for effective learning. Character creation, levels, missions, goal setting, and layered reward structures are among the elements used in Classcraft (Clarke et al., 2018).
Thus, Classcraft’s benefits may be explained by its association with this trend: it motivates learners by offering the prospect of actual risks and rewards, educates them to work as a team, and makes learning entertaining by adding an ecosystem of badges (Milyakina, 2020). Forsberg emphasised that it might make learning more enjoyable for the student by providing more and various stimuli to their learning process (Forsberg, 2015). In reality, teachers are increasingly utilising gamified software and reaping the benefits of doing so. Following that, learners will be given the freedom to improve their own learning in accordance with the Roadmap (Roadmap, 2015-2025).

2.2 Teachers’ Competencies

Competencies are defined as "the body of knowledge, skill, and experience necessary for the future, as proven through actions" (Apriliyanti, 2018). According to the Malaysian Teacher Standards model published in 2009, the three key characteristics of teachers’ competency are skills, knowledge, and values. Knowledge is connected with cognitive domain information, whereas skills are associated with the ability to accomplish physical activities (Malaysian Teacher Standards, 2009). Values are associated with qualitative traits such as personal characteristics, attributes, features, and great task or activity performance. Professional competence in teachers indicates that they are professional and have the personal attributes required for effective teaching. Teachers that are professionally competent operate at a high level of teacher communication and use a variety of teaching approaches, consistently achieving great results in student training and education. It was discovered that professional competence transforms teachers into persons who employ novel teaching approaches and materials, and most significantly, they adapt themselves to alter the educational environment. Teachers’ professional growth leads to socioeconomic advancement, which leads to societal spiritual development. Teachers’ professional competence may thus be developed in a variety of ways, one of which is through the use of educational technology (Malaysian Teacher Standards, 2009). As a result, in order to grow teachers professionally, there is a need to inspire and select what is ideal for them. As a result, the focus of this paper is on demonstrating an online gamified platform for teachers and their professional growth in competency, which promotes the development of creative uniqueness, susceptibility to the emergence of educational innovations, and the ability to deal with the current educational environment.

3. Research question

The research question of this paper is as follows:
1. How to design an online gamified learning for English language teachers?
2. How to develop an online gamified learning to enhance English language teachers professional competencies?

4. Conceptual framework

Three key components entail the conceptual framework. They are the requirement mentioned in the Roadmap (2015-2025) in accordance with Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), professional competence stated in the MEB and the learning and gamification theories. The first aspect concurs with the national policy (Roadmap, 2015-2025) which has clearly mentioned that English Language teachers are certainly to be at minimum C1 level by the year 2025. The conceptualised framework proposed inter-connectivity in gearing towards online gamified learning as the ultimate salvation for B2 teachers to obtain minimum C1 level in accordance with the Roadmap involving the theories to assist the outcome of producing a professionally competent teacher. Hence, this coincides with the learning and gamification theories noted as the second aspect of the framework. Vygotsky’s social constructivism theory states that learning takes place among learners since knowledge is co-constructed so that learners learn from each other. In addition, Mayer’s multimedia learning theory compels the elements of gamification to be the core substance in ensuring the desired prospect of the study. The principles of designing and developing the gamified platform aid in fulfilling the first aspect, which uses the self-determination theory (SDT) and motivation in projecting a well-blended outcome as this theory clearly helps teachers to act as motivating agents who assist learners to complete their specified activities and targets. Enhancing teacher quality refers to a systematic conception of what is excellence in the teaching profession entails: producing competent students in all aspects. As a result of this, the conceptual framework of this study is accountable for
meeting professional standards to address the competency requirements dictated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint.

5. Methods
This research leverages on Richey and Klein's (Richey and Klein, 2013) Design and Development Research (DDR) design to achieve its goals. DDR is a one-of-a-kind, thorough, and methodical research strategy for creating products and technologies. According to Ritchey, while adopting the Type 1 design study, the construction will be in line with Model ISD (Instructional Design) as an ADDIE model, which includes (i) analysis, (ii) design, (iii) development, (iv) implementation, and (v) assessment. However, in this study, focal details during the design and development phases only will be disclosed here.

Participants were 100 English language teachers at the CEFR level B2 from Malaysia's southern, central, and northern areas. The experts' involvement in determining the acceptability of the content was focused at obtaining experts' content knowledge in the construction of the module's nucleus. The online gamified learning module was created using Classcraft as the platform.

The Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) was utilised in the design phase to acquire expert opinions as a process to discover the experts' consensus on the module's design. The questionnaires were distributed to the 12 experts as part of the FDM. The experts' choice of a Likert scale was translated to a fuzzy scale using fuzzy numbering. The questionnaires were delivered to the experts in this study in order to assess their consensus on the 5-point fuzzy scale. Following that, the data from the 12 experts was analysed using fuzzy analysis in Microsoft Excel's preformatted Excel software to calculate the instrument's value, which would determine the development of the online gamified learning in Classcraft. The development stage was the next stage of the phase.

6. Findings
The experts then finalised the material, and the questionnaire was created using the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM). All of the recommended elements were well received by a panel of specialists from diverse fields. As a result, the agreed-upon elements were complied according to their appropriateness and employed dynamically as well as flexibly throughout the module's building in the following phase. The agreed-upon components were incorporated in the creation of online gamified learning to improve English Language teachers' professional abilities throughout this phase. The module was created in Classcraft, an online gamified platform.

All of the agreed-upon aspects that were offered by experts to design the module were utilized in the development of this module. The module was built in five units with quests to complete based on the agreed-upon elements. In Classcraft, tasks are referred to as "quests," and each level has numerous quests related to the agreed-upon focus/skills. The purpose of this module is to help teachers improve their reading skills, as this is the most...
difficult component to score well in according to the results of the Malaysian University Entrance Test (MUET) (ELTC Report, 2018). All agreed-upon gamification elements were also implemented in the module's development. The specifics of the agreed-upon elements are included in Table 2 below, as specified by the panel of experts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Agreed Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic multimedia elements</strong></td>
<td>Font size: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2D animation concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrated video</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Levels</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance graph</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gamification element</strong></td>
<td>Quest, levels, performance graph, avatars, reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement and rewards</strong></td>
<td>Points, Certificates</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td>Discussion and Quiz</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Platform implementation</strong></td>
<td>Online (Classcraft)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.** Agreed-upon elements of gamification.

Based on the experts' consensus during the design phase, appropriate elements were used in the development phase to create the Online Gamified Learning module. The flowchart chronicles the module's activity, making it an integral aspect of the study. It is shown to help the reader understand the game concept and to provide a quick summary of the Classcraft developed. The visualisation depicts the game's play sequence, as seen in Figure 2.

![Flowchart of game](image)

**Figure 2.** Flowchart of game

Figure 3 displays the online gamified learning in Classcraft, where the quests are scaffolded over five islands. The players would have to go from one island to another in the guise of a chosen avatar, accomplishing the tasks and activities assigned at each level.
All of the assignments were created with reading comprehension skill in mind, and the players’ knowledge and abilities are assessed as they move from one level to the next. The activities would be the last quest before moving on to the next island. Online gamified synonyms, online crossword puzzles, online inferencing, gamified prediction of an outcome in Plotagon, and an online quiz are among the developed activities. The final stage was designed and developed to examine their progress as well as the knowledge they had learned and absorbed throughout the levels. The participants completed an online evaluation consisting of 40 questions, and the results are in compliance with the CEFR to demonstrate the module’s outcome. In the final assessment, all of the participants achieved the minimal C1 level. More specifically, 73 percent scored a C1 in the evaluation. Interestingly, 27 percent of the participants received the highest possible mark, C2. All the participants were given an e-certificate to recognise and validate their accomplishment.

7. Discussion
The gamification of online learning has made a big contribution to the simplification of the traditional techniques of learning (https://help.classcraft.com). Teachers regard the work at hand as less critical, and its accomplishment as more gratifying, when using online gamified learning (Pesek et al., 2020). The agreed-upon suggestions were considered based on the needs of and appropriateness to the target group that will use the online gamified learning using Classcraft to enhance the teachers’ professional competencies. This consideration is in line with the recommendations of scholars, which was taken into account in the appropriate elements for targeted gamers (Hamari et al. 2018).

The online gamified learning module designed and developed on Classcraft eventually helped the teachers to uplift their competency from B2 to a minimum of C1, where 73 percent scored a C1 in the evaluation, and 27 percent of them achieved the highest score possible, C2. This findings signifies teachers’ achievement with regards to English language and professional competencies by mastering the knowledge and skills mentioned previously. This is in line with Freeman and colleagues (2015), where they stated that a teacher’s “command of English” is commonly defined as improving overall English proficiency, linguistic capability for increased classroom instruction, and then student learning. This indicates that instructors’ language proficiency in the classroom is evaluated both interactively and contextually. Scrutinising the crux of gamified learning indicates that it is not entirely unexpected; it has been used successfully in the commercial and education realms (Boyinbode, 2018). With the advancement of technology improvements throughout the world, online gamified learning has grown in popularity, resulting in a paradigm change in language learning. Learners are offered several opportunities to participate actively in their learning opportunity (Dewie, Norman & Yunus, 2020). This is without a doubt congruent with the experts’ recommended and agreed-upon aspects. Learning is described as “working toward mastery of new understandings” through engagement and participation in new learning activities, as well as the execution of new tasks and functions (Norman et al., 2015).

8. Limitations and recommendations
Although the research provides some intriguing insights on online gamified learning, certain limitations should be noted. The main highlight would be the little literature accessible in connection to the study’s combination, with papers only available in isolation for gamification and language studies—more specifically, English
language—separately (Kapp, 2012). Besides from that, the study was limited to small of teachers. Future research should presumably address these issues and conduct more research on gamification for Malaysian English language teachers under more stringent conditions and with a larger sample size in order to provide scholars with robust findings that can also be generalised to other learning situations (Dehghanzadeh, Fardanesh, Hatami, Talaee & Noroozi, 2019). On the other hand, there have been few research on the common affordances and barriers seen in online gamified learning situations. In general, online gamified learning environments provide learners with a range of affordances that may be used in conjunction with ICT technologies (Dehghanzadeh, Fardanesh, Hatami, Talaee & Noroozi, 2019).

9. Conclusions
This study has given value to the literature in various areas, including English language, professional competences, gamification, and instructional technology. It has clearly presented a vivid and organised fundamental route in creating and developing an online gamified learning platform not only to boost teachers' abilities but also to enable teachers to experiment the innovation with their students. To summarise, there is still a need for further research into the full impact of gamification on engagement and motivation (Dehghanzadeh, Fardanesh, Hatami, Talaee & Noroozi, 2019) between the dogmatists in support of full gamification of the curriculum and the educational system and the opponents who believe online gamified learning is a distraction from the learning objectives.

10. References


