

EFL Teachers' Perspectives on the Integration of Gamification and Art Therapy in ESP Contexts

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Abstract

This study investigates EFL teachers' attitudes toward the use of gamification and art therapy-inspired approaches in language teaching. The study used a qualitative approach, with asynchronous semi-structured interviews conducted online with 26 EFL teachers at the International University of Tourism and Hospitality in Turkistan, Kazakhstan. The data were analysed thematically using the MAXQDA program. The findings show that teachers believe gamification and art therapy-inspired practices are effective ways to increase student motivation, communicative inventiveness, and emotional involvement. Gamification was defined as the use of game elements such as challenges, points, and collaborative tasks to enhance classroom involvement, but art therapy-inspired activities were seen as encouraging creative expression and lowering language anxiety. Teachers also noted that these techniques create student-centered learning settings and realistic communication practices applicable to professional contexts. Participants did, however, identify a number of problems, including insufficient professional training, time limits, and inflexible curriculum structures. The study suggests that combining gamification and creative pedagogies can help to create more engaging and emotionally supportive language learning environments, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) settings. It also emphasises the need for teacher training and institutional support in the successful adoption of innovative pedagogical approaches.

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Introduction

In recent years, gamification and art-based pedagogies, including art therapy-inspired practices, have gained increasing attention as effective approaches for enhancing engagement and meaningful learning in EFL classrooms. The term "gamification" signifies the use of game design elements in non-game settings and it has been widely accepted in language teaching as a means to increase student motivation, participation and sustained engagement (Zhang & Hasim, 2023). By incorporating elements such as points, challenges, feedback and competition, gamification transforms traditional learning tasks into more interactive experiences that encourage sustained student participation. Studies have provided evidence that the environments created through gamification can significantly improve vocabulary learning, grammar usage and learners' motivation, especially when they are aligned with the educational goals (Alenazi, 2025). Nevertheless, researchers caution that gamification does not automatically lead to successful learning outcomes; its effectiveness depends on careful instructional design, alignment with learners' needs and the avoidance of superficial reward-based engagement.

Previous research highlights that contextual, cultural and individual factors have been pointed out in recent research as being the cause of different responses of learners to gamified instruction. For example, Dorgham and Obiad (2025) indicated that although gamification brings about participation and grammar performance to a considerable extent, its effectiveness still depends on a well-planned and coherent teaching method. In the same vein, Portero and Rodríguez (2022) showed that pre-service teachers viewed digital breakout games as very engaging and having a good value for teaching, especially in grammar instruction. Their strong intention to have gamification in their future teaching was one of the reasons they cited for its ability to promote collaboration, creativity and student engagement. Thus, teachers' pedagogical beliefs and instructional decisions play a crucial role in determining how gamification is implemented in classroom practice.

Art-based techniques, along with gamification, have also been recognized as important for supporting emotional engagement and minimizing language anxiety. Arts integration has been shown to create psychologically supportive learning environments in which learners are encouraged to take risks, express themselves and communicate more authentically. Timuçin (2016) mentioned that the use of drama and music in EFL instruction facilitated listening comprehension and lowered students' affective barriers, thereby making the emotional aspect of language acquisition more obvious. In the same way, art-based teaching methods provide emotional support, which is a basic necessity for students who are either anxious or lack confidence when it comes to using foreign languages. Art therapy-inspired approaches emphasize emotional regulation, self-expression and learners' psychological well-being. They broaden the viewpoint of the traditional therapy settings and thus, have been more and

more used in schools. Not only do children and teachers become aware of their feelings, but also their motivation and reflective capacity get developed through the studies like those conducted by the researchers Nieścioruk (2025) and Khayitova (2025), which prove the creativity of expression to be a big factor in self-awareness. These techniques work wonders in EFL classes where the teachers are often faced with emotionally resistant students and thus, the students do not participate and take the risk of communicating in English.

The integration of gamification with art therapy-inspired practices is a signal of a wider transition to learner-centred and holistic education. These kinds of learner-centred instructional approaches can enhance learner engagement, communicative participation and creativity in language classroom (Schander et al., 2013; Seitova & Khalmatova, 2025). Literature points out that teaching becomes more significant and durable when emotional, cognitive and social aspects are tackled at the same time. To illustrate, Yusupova et al. (2025) proved that the mix of gamification and art therapy-inspired activities has developed students' communicative competence and creativity in the area of tourism-related language learning. Furthermore, Maruyama et al. (2025) indicated that game-based augmented reality environments have developed teamwork and participation among young EFL learners, even in resource-poor situations. The studies confirm that the use of new pedagogies can integrate cognitive learning with the affective engagement of students. This is especially important in tourism education, where foreign language learning is closely tied to professional communication. As Rizakhojayeva et al. (2017) point out, future tourism specialists need foreign language skills to communicate successfully in professional and intercultural situations.

Their study also shows the importance of combining traditional teaching with innovative strategies that encourage critical thinking and communication. The disparity in the application of gamification and art therapy-inspired practices is primarily influenced by the teachers' beliefs, training and the expectations set by the institutions. Teachers, although very important for the methods' success, their perspectives not only determine the choices of teaching but also the interactions in the classroom and the learners' outcomes. Studies show that the teachers' attitudes towards gamification and creative pedagogy can significantly influence the adoption and continuance of these methods (Hong et al., 2025; Shang, 2025). It is very important to know the teachers' attitudes if we want to create educational models that are both sustainable and contextually adaptable. By examining teachers' conceptualizations, classroom practices and perceived challenges, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how gamification and art therapy-inspired practices are interpreted and implemented in ESP language education contexts.

Literature Review

Gamification has become one of the most widely investigated instructional approaches in English language education because of its potential to enhance learner engagement, motivation, and active participation. Rather than simply incorporating games into instruction, gamification refers to the application of game design principles and mechanics in non-game educational contexts to create more meaningful learning experiences. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that effective gamification extends beyond points, badges, or leaderboards and instead relies on purposeful instructional design that integrates meaningful challenges, feedback, collaboration, and problem-solving into the learning process (Hellberg, 2023). Within EFL and ESP contexts, these features have been associated with greater learner engagement, increased classroom participation, and improved opportunities for authentic language use.

Empirical evidence from diverse educational settings generally supports the pedagogical value of gamification. Studies conducted in Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and other EFL contexts consistently report that teachers perceive gamification as an effective means of increasing learner motivation, participation, and interaction (Asiri, 2019; Pham et al., 2025; Umamah, 2022). Similarly, research has shown that gamified learning environments can facilitate vocabulary development, grammar learning, writing performance, and communicative interaction when instructional activities are carefully aligned with learning objectives (Cancino & Ibarra, 2023; Luo, 2024; Alenazi, 2025). Despite these positive findings, researchers also emphasize that successful implementation depends less on game mechanics themselves than on teachers' pedagogical decisions regarding task design, classroom management, and learner support.

At the same time, the literature indicates that teachers' views can substantially influence how effectively they incorporate gamification into language teaching. Teachers are generally more receptive to gamified approaches when they consider them useful, manageable in practice, and consistent with their established teaching methods (Luo, 2024). Nevertheless, adopting gamification is not without practical difficulties. Previous research has highlighted constraints such as limited classroom time, inadequate technological resources, and a lack of appropriate professional development opportunities (Al-Harbi & Madini, 2024; Umamah, 2022). Thus, successful use of gamification appears to rely on more than access to digital tools; it also requires teachers to have the necessary pedagogical knowledge and skills, along with sufficient institutional support.

Taken together, previous studies generally suggest that gamification can have a positive influence on learner motivation, although its use in educational settings is not without difficulties. Much of the existing research has focused on outcomes such as student engagement and academic performance. However, less is known about how

teachers themselves understand and apply gamification in their teaching, particularly when it is combined with other creative practices in ESP contexts. Exploring teachers' pedagogical choices and classroom experiences may therefore offer a useful avenue for further research.

Recent studies add a more nuanced perspective to the growing literature on gamification in language education. Liu (2026), for instance, reviewed research on gamified language learning for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The findings point to possible benefits for engagement, vocabulary development, and some aspects of reading, but they also show that greater engagement does not necessarily lead to better learning outcomes. Other recent studies have examined gamification in quite different language-learning settings. Darmawansah et al. (2026) explored a gamified analytical-thinking approach with young learners of Arabic, focusing on performance, motivation, engagement, and gender-based perceptions. Shobeiry and Namaziandost (2026), meanwhile, investigated AI-mediated gamified flipped learning among adult English learners, with particular attention to vocabulary learning and motivation in a mobile-assisted environment. This variety of contexts suggests that current research is moving beyond a single model of gamification and considering how it works with different learners, languages, and technologies. A similar point emerges from Zourmpakis (2026), whose review of adaptive gamification and game-based learning found generally positive learning and motivational outcomes, although the results varied according to factors such as prior knowledge and the ways in which learning activities were adapted. Teachers' experiences add another dimension to this discussion. In Scifo's (2026) qualitative study, teachers associated gamification with engagement, lower performance anxiety, and multimodal language development, but they also described social-emotional, behavioral, and institutional difficulties that affected classroom implementation. Overall, these recent studies suggest that the value of gamification cannot be separated from the learners, teaching context, and pedagogical decisions involved in its use.

In addition to gamification, arts-based teaching practices have gained increasing attention for their potential to support learners' emotional involvement, creativity, and confidence in communication. Whereas more conventional approaches to language teaching may place considerable emphasis on linguistic accuracy, arts-based activities provide learners with different ways of developing and communicating meaning. Storytelling, drama, music, drawing, and other forms of visual expression, for example, can create opportunities for learners to use language alongside imaginative and multimodal forms of communication. Such activities provide opportunities for learners to experiment with language in supportive environments where creativity and self-expression are valued alongside linguistic development.

Previous research consistently suggests that arts-based pedagogies contribute to both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning. For example, Schander et al. (2013) demonstrated that art-based activities increased learners' motivation and communicative competence by creating emotionally engaging classroom environments. Similarly, Timuçin (2016) found that integrating drama and music into EFL instruction reduced learners' anxiety while improving listening comprehension and classroom participation. More recent studies have extended these findings by showing that art therapy-inspired educational practices promote emotional awareness, reflective thinking, and creative expression among language learners and teacher trainees (Khayitova, 2025; Nieścioruk, 2025). Collectively, these studies suggest that arts-based approaches facilitate language learning not only by developing linguistic competence but also by creating psychologically supportive environments that encourage learners to communicate with greater confidence.

Recent scholarship has also begun to explore the relationship between gamification and broader creative pedagogies. Although these approaches have often been investigated separately, they share several pedagogical characteristics, including learner-centredness, active participation, collaboration, and experiential learning. Research has shown that the use of game elements alongside creative activities can contribute to the development of communicative creativity and problem-solving skills while encouraging learners to participate more actively in the learning process (Yusupova et al., 2025; Kholodniak, 2025). Related evidence is provided by Maruyama et al. (2025), whose study found that game-based augmented reality activities created opportunities for collaboration and meaningful interaction among young EFL learners, including those studying in educational contexts with limited resources. Rizakhojayeva (2026) provides recent evidence for combining art-based activities and gamification in ESP tourism education. The study found that this integrated approach supported students' linguistic creativity and communicative flexibility, while simulations and digital quests increased engagement and confidence in professional communication. These findings suggest that art- and game-based practices can complement each other in preparing tourism students for real-world communication.

Consequently, this research points to considerable potential for combining gamification with arts-based practices, rather than treating them as unrelated or alternative pedagogical choices. At the same time, introducing innovative practices into everyday teaching is not without difficulty. Previous research has drawn attention to a number of practical constraints, including inadequate teacher training, restricted classroom time, limited access to technology, and curricula that leave teachers little room to experiment with creative forms of instruction (Cancino & Ibarra, 2023; Umamah, 2022). The way gamification is designed also requires particular consideration. When learners' attention is directed mainly towards rewards, points, or competition, the activity may do little to support intrinsic motivation or deeper

engagement with learning. Effective gamification therefore involves more than simply adding game features to existing tasks. Its cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions need to be considered in relation to the intended learning objectives and the wider classroom context.

Although interest in gamification and arts-based pedagogy within language education has increased, the literature still leaves several areas insufficiently explored. Much of the existing research considers gamification and practices informed by art therapy independently, despite the fact that they can draw on compatible pedagogical principles and may overlap in classroom activities. The literature has also tended to prioritise measurable learner outcomes, particularly motivation, achievement, and engagement. As a result, less is known about how teachers themselves understand these approaches, why they choose particular activities, and how they adapt them to the realities of their classrooms. This imbalance is particularly evident in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research. Tourism education is still relatively unexplored, despite the fact that students in this industry are expected to develop communicative flexibility, professional interaction skills, and intercultural competence.

To address these gaps, the current study looks at EFL teachers' attitudes on incorporating gamification and art therapy-inspired methods into tourism-related ESP courses. Teachers' pedagogical thinking and experiences with applying these approaches within the special needs of ESP instruction are highlighted. It specifically looks at how teachers conceptualize these techniques, how they apply them in the classroom, how they evaluate their impact on students' communicative and emotional development, and what problems and professional demands they face during implementation. By concentrating on instructors' experiences, the study helps to provide a more comprehensive understanding of new pedagogical techniques in ESP language instruction. The research questions guiding the project are as follows:

RQ1: How do EFL teachers perceive and comprehend gamification and art therapy-inspired techniques in foreign language teaching?

RQ2: How do EFL teachers describe their experiences with gamification and art therapy-inspired approaches that promote linguistic and communicative creativity?

RQ3: How do EFL teachers assess the emotional, motivational, and professional impact of gamification and art therapy-inspired techniques on their students and their own teaching roles?

RQ4: What challenges, institutional constraints and professional development needs do EFL teachers identify in implementing gamification and art therapy-inspired practices in language teaching?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore EFL teachers' perspectives on the use of gamification and art therapy-inspired practices in foreign language teaching, particularly within ESP contexts related to tourism education. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to investigate teachers' interpretations, professional experiences and pedagogical reasoning rather than to measure learning outcomes quantitatively. Qualitative research provides an appropriate means of exploring how individuals make sense of their professional experiences and how they understand educational innovations in relation to the institutional environments in which they work.

Data were gathered through asynchronous, semi-structured written interviews conducted online using Google Forms. Participants were able to answer the open-ended questions in their own time, which allowed them to consider their responses carefully and describe their experiences in greater detail. Using an asynchronous format also helped overcome practical difficulties associated with arranging interview times. Despite being conducted in writing rather than through face-to-face or synchronous interaction, the interviews retained the main features of a semi-structured approach. A set of guiding questions provided consistency across participants, while the open-ended format gave respondents sufficient scope to expand on issues they considered relevant and to express their experiences and perspectives in their own words.

Context and Participants

The research was carried out at the International University of Tourism and Hospitality, located in Turkistan, Kazakhstan. The institution provides higher education primarily in tourism, hospitality, and other service-oriented fields. It was considered an appropriate setting for the study because English for Specific Purposes (ESP) forms an important part of the university curriculum and is intended to develop students' ability to communicate effectively in professional contexts within the international tourism and hospitality sectors. Within this educational context, English language instruction emphasizes communicative competence, intercultural communication, and workplace interaction, making it an appropriate setting for investigating teachers' perspectives on gamification and art therapy-inspired practices.

The participants comprised 26 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers employed at the International University of Tourism and Hospitality. All participants were actively involved in teaching ESP courses related to tourism, hospitality, or other service-oriented professions. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, which is widely employed in qualitative research to identify information-rich participants with relevant professional experience. The inclusion criteria required

participants to (a) teach English at the university level, (b) have experience teaching ESP courses within tourism or related disciplines, and (c) possess experience with, or familiarity with, innovative instructional approaches such as gamification, role-play, or arts-based teaching activities.

Participants' teaching experience ranged from five to twenty-two years, providing diverse professional perspectives on the implementation of creative pedagogical approaches. The sample provided sufficiently rich and varied accounts to address the study's research questions, consistent with the qualitative emphasis on depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization. Consistent with qualitative research principles, the emphasis was placed on obtaining rich, in-depth accounts rather than statistical generalization. To protect participants' anonymity, each teacher was assigned a numerical identifier (e.g., Respondent 1, Respondent 2) during analysis and reporting. No personally identifiable information is disclosed in this study. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of the International University of Tourism and Hospitality, and all participants provided informed consent before participating in the research.

Instruments

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on an extensive review of the literature on gamification, art therapy-inspired practices, teacher beliefs, creativity, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pedagogy. The interview questions were designed to address the four research questions of the study while eliciting participants' perspectives on their conceptual understanding, classroom practices, perceived benefits, implementation challenges, and professional development needs.

To establish the content validity of the instrument, the preliminary interview protocol was evaluated by two experts in English language teaching and qualitative research. They assessed the clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, and alignment of the interview questions with the research objectives. Based on their feedback, several questions were refined to improve wording, eliminate ambiguity, and ensure that the instrument elicited rich and reflective responses. The final interview protocol consisted of 25 open-ended questions organized into thematic sections corresponding to the major dimensions of the study.

Data were collected through a semi-structured online written interview questionnaire consisting of 25 open-ended questions administered via Google Forms. The instrument was designed to encourage participants to provide detailed reflections on their classroom experiences, instructional practices, perceptions of gamification and art therapy-inspired practices, and professional development needs. The questions were organized into several thematic sections addressing: teachers' professional backgrounds; conceptual understanding of gamification and art therapy-inspired

practices; examples of classroom practices; perceived effects on student creativity and communication; emotional and motivational aspects of learning; changes in teachers' professional roles; challenges and institutional constraints; professional development needs and future perspectives. The open-ended format encouraged participants to provide detailed descriptions of their classroom practices, reflections on teaching experiences and examples of specific activities used in their courses. Collecting responses in written form also allowed participants to reflect carefully on their answers, which contributed to richer and more considered responses. Participation in the study was voluntary. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and agreed to the use of their responses for academic analysis. Before the data collection, the interview protocol was finalized after we added the experts' recommendations, making sure the questions fit the target population and could actually draw out rich qualitative data. The questionnaire stayed available for two weeks, so participants had enough time to respond in a detailed, reflective way to the open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying patterns and recurring themes within textual data. The responses were first imported into MAXQDA 24, qualitative data analysis software that supports systematic coding and organization of qualitative datasets. The analysis proceeded through several stages. First, the researchers conducted multiple readings of the dataset in order to become familiar with the content and to identify preliminary patterns. In the second stage, an initial coding framework was developed based on the research questions and the structure of the interview instrument. Four main categories were established to reflect the central themes of the study: conceptual views, creative practices, affective impact and implementation context.

Within each category, subcodes were developed inductively to capture specific ideas and experiences expressed by participants. These subcodes represented recurring concepts such as motivational dynamics, creative expression, classroom interaction, emotional support, institutional constraints and professional development needs. To enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the analysis, a second researcher independently coded a portion of the dataset (approximately 20% of the responses). The coding results were compared and discussed in order to resolve discrepancies and refine the coding scheme. The intercoder agreement reached 85% agreement, which indicates high coding reliability. In addition to thematic identification, the analysis included the examination of the frequency and distribution of coded segments across categories in order to identify prominent patterns in teachers' perspectives. Visual coding models and hierarchical category structures were generated in MAXQDA to illustrate relationships between themes and subthemes.

The credibility of the analysis was supported by several methodological procedures. The use of open-ended written interviews gave participants sufficient space to describe their views in their own terms and, consequently, generated rich qualitative data. In addition, the data were coded independently by the researchers before differences in interpretation were discussed and resolved. This process helped limit the influence of individual researcher subjectivity. Participants' quotations were also incorporated into the presentation of the findings, allowing the analysis to remain closely connected to their reported experiences and perspectives. Taken together, these measures strengthened the transparency and systematic nature of the analysis of teachers' views on gamification and practices inspired by art therapy in foreign language education.

Results

Conceptual Views on Gamification and Art Therapy-Inspired Practices

The first research question examined how EFL teachers conceptualize gamification and art therapy-inspired practices in foreign language teaching. The thematic analysis revealed five interconnected themes: game elements, learning motivation, creative expression, emotional support and complementary use. Together, these themes imply that teachers do not perceive gamification and art therapy-inspired activities as isolated instructional techniques. Instead, they view them as interrelated pedagogical strategies that simultaneously support learner engagement, creativity and emotional well-being.

Figure 1

Hierarchic Model of Teachers' Conceptual Views

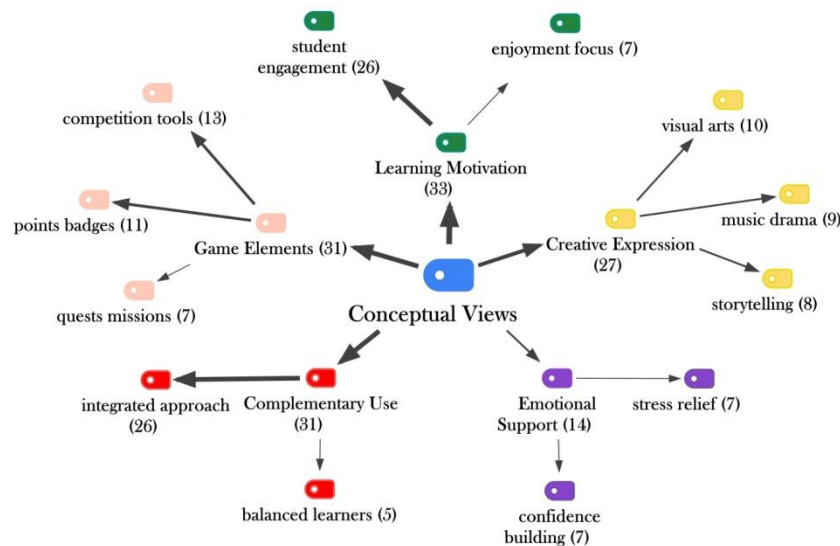


Figure 1 presents a hierarchical coding model generated in MAXQDA, illustrating the relationships between the main category Teachers' Conceptual Views and its associated subthemes. The model visualizes how teachers conceptualize gamification and art therapy-inspired practices as interconnected approaches that address motivational, creative and affective dimensions of language learning.

The theme game elements emerged frequently in teachers' descriptions of gamification. Participants referred to features such as competition tools, points and badges and quests or missions as key components of gamified learning environments. Teachers generally described gamification as the integration of recognizable game mechanics into educational activities in order to make learning more engaging and interactive. For example, Respondent 1 explained that *"gamification means introducing elements of play, like competition, rewards and storytelling into lessons,"* noting that leaderboards and digital badges encouraged students to participate more actively. Likewise, Respondent 7 described gamification as creating *"quests, challenges and levels that encourage students to take part and solve problems together."* These responses indicate that teachers view game elements not merely as technological tools but as organizational structures that shape classroom interaction and participation. In this sense, gamification functions as a pedagogical framework that encourages learners to engage with language tasks through structured challenges and collaborative problem-solving.

Another common topic was learning motivation, which teachers linked to improved engagement and enjoyment in language learning activities. Participants regularly stated that gamified environments inspire students to interact more actively in English and participate in class activities. Respondent 15 stated, *"Students who rarely speak in traditional lessons become leaders in games or creative projects."* Similarly, Respondent 21 found that gamified exercises foster a dynamic learning environment in which students *"collaborate, negotiate, and even argue in English about strategies."* These findings indicate that teachers see gamification largely as a motivating catalyst that promotes active language usage, rather than a technological breakthrough. Gamified activities appear to increase student involvement and collaborative communication by changing normal classroom chores into interactive challenges.

The theme creative expression reflects teachers' understanding of art therapy-inspired practices as opportunities for students to express themselves through multiple forms of communication. Teachers referred to visual arts, music, drama and storytelling as examples of activities that support imaginative language use. Respondent 18 explained that *"art therapy is using creative expression, drawing, music and drama help students process emotions and build confidence."* Another teacher noted that storytelling tasks encourage learners to experiment with language: *"creative tasks push students to invent stories, use humor and try expressions they wouldn't normally use in a traditional lesson"* (Respondent 14). These patterns indicate that art-based activities provide learners with alternative communicative channels, enabling them to explore language through creative and multimodal expression. Such activities may therefore support linguistic creativity by encouraging learners to experiment with vocabulary, narrative forms and expressive language.

Teachers also emphasized the role of creative pedagogies in providing emotional support for language learners. Participants reported that both gamified and art therapy-inspired activities can reduce anxiety and create a supportive learning atmosphere. Respondent 19 noted that *"these methods have lower anxiety, especially for speaking tasks. Students feel safe to try, even if they make mistakes"*. Comparably, Respondent 3 explained that when students focus on creativity rather than linguistic perfection, they feel more comfortable expressing themselves in English. These comments imply that art therapy and gamified activities may contribute to the development of psychologically safe learning environments, where learners feel encouraged to take risks and participate in communication. In this sense, creative pedagogical practices appear to support not only linguistic development but also students' confidence and emotional engagement in the language learning process. Finally, the theme complementary use highlights teachers' perception that gamification and art therapy-inspired practices can be effectively combined in classroom practice. Participants emphasized that the two approaches address different yet interconnected aspects of language learning. As Respondent 11 explained, *"gamification energizes students, while art therapy helps those who feel anxious or blocked. Together they allow every student to find their voice."* Another teacher observed that the two approaches often overlap naturally in classroom activities: *"a game might involve drawing or storytelling, so both methods work together rather than separately"* (Respondent 26). These insights suggest that teachers do not perceive gamification and art therapy-inspired practices as competing instructional models. Instead, they view them as mutually reinforcing strategies that combine motivation, creativity and emotional support.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that teachers view gamification and art therapy-inspired practices as complementary pedagogical tools that promote engagement, creativity and emotional support in language learning. While gamification is associated with structured game elements that stimulate motivation, art therapy-inspired activities are linked to creative expression and confidence building in communication.

Creative Practices in the Classroom

The second research question examined how EFL teachers describe their experiences of using gamification and art therapy-inspired practices to facilitate linguistic and communicative creativity in the classroom. The analysis of interview responses revealed five interconnected themes: active participation, creative projects, expressive language, role play and peer collaboration. These themes illustrate how teachers integrate gamified and art therapy-inspired activities into their instructional practices in order to create interactive learning environments that support communication and creativity.

Figure 2
Hierarchic Model of Creative Practices

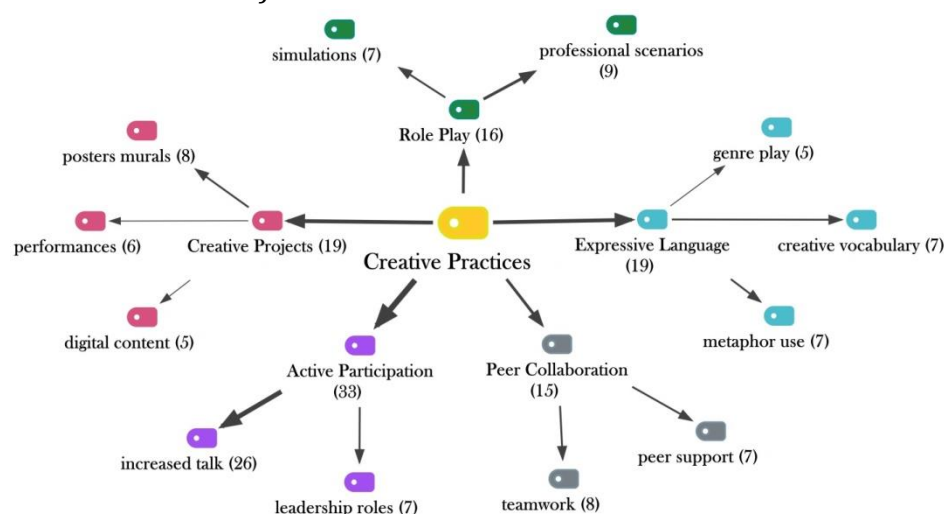


Figure 2 presents a hierarchical coding model generated in MAXQDA that illustrates the structure of creative practices identified in the data. The model shows how various classroom activities, including role-play simulations, collaborative projects, expressive language tasks and peer interaction, are interconnected within the broader theme of creative pedagogical practices. One important practice identified in the data is the use of role-play activities, particularly simulations of professional scenarios relevant to tourism and hospitality contexts. Teachers frequently described organizing classroom activities in which students assume roles such as tour guides, hotel staff, or travel consultants in order to practice English in realistic communication situations. For instance, Respondent 3 explained that “*students act as tour guides or hotel staff and practice giving directions, explaining cultural traditions, or responding to guest complaints.*” Similarly, Respondent 10 emphasized that simulations allow learners to imagine authentic professional situations and respond spontaneously in English. The teachers’ views suggest that role-play provides students with opportunities to apply classroom learning to communicative situations that reflect real-life contexts. Through simulated interactions, learners are able to use English for specific purposes and practice responding to situations similar to those they may experience in their future professional lives.

Creative projects also emerged as a significant theme in the teachers’ responses. These activities included poster presentations, short performances, and the production of digital content. According to the participants, such tasks gave students opportunities to use English while also incorporating visual, artistic, or performative elements into their work. Respondent 4, for instance, described a project in which students prepared posters introducing local tourist attractions and then presented their work in English. Respondent 25 referred to short skits based on travel-related situations, where students used humor and improvisation as part of their interaction. Digital formats

were also used by some teachers. Respondent 12 reported asking students to produce travel vlogs or promotional videos about their city, enabling them to practice English while deciding how to present information in an engaging way. Taken together, these activities show that creative projects can extend language learning beyond conventional verbal or written tasks. They provide students with opportunities to combine English with visual, performative, and digital forms of expression and to communicate their ideas through a range of modes.

The theme expressive language highlights how creative activities influence students' linguistic production. Teachers observed that when learners participate in storytelling or creative projects, they often experiment with language in ways that go beyond textbook structures. Participants reported that students frequently use humor, metaphorical expressions and imaginative vocabulary during such tasks. As Respondent 11 noted, "*students start inventing slogans and using metaphors when they work on creative projects.*" Similarly, Respondent 9 explained that storytelling activities encourage learners to explore different narrative forms and expressive styles. These observations emphasize that creative tasks can expand learners' communicative repertoire by encouraging experimentation with vocabulary, tone and narrative structure. In this way, creative pedagogies appear to support not only language practice but also the development of linguistic creativity and expressive communication.

Among the themes identified in this category, active participation emerged as one of the most prominent aspects of creative classroom practices. Teachers consistently reported that gamified and creative activities increase student interaction during language lessons. Several participants noted that students who tend to remain passive in traditional lessons become more engaged during interactive tasks. Respondent 17 explained that "*students who are usually quiet become very active during games or creative projects.*" Teachers also observed that collaborative tasks often encourage students to assume leadership roles within their groups. As Respondent 8 noted, some students organize teamwork, while others present ideas or coordinate presentations. The data suggest that creative and game-based activities can contribute to a more balanced distribution of classroom participation by creating opportunities for a wider range of students to become actively involved in communicative tasks.

Another important theme emerging from the findings is peer collaboration, which reflects the social aspect of creative language learning. Teachers described collaborative projects as opportunities for students to assist one another during language activities while also developing stronger relationships with their classmates. Respondent 7, for example, noted that students frequently exchange vocabulary, ideas and suggestions when completing creative tasks together. Respondent 6 similarly pointed out that working as part of a group can reduce the pressure associated with

speaking independently, since students tend to feel more at ease when communicating alongside supportive peers. This suggests that collaborative creative activities do more than provide opportunities for language practice; they can also create a classroom environment in which learners negotiate meaning, share responsibility and learn through interaction with one another.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that teachers draw on various creative and interactive practices, such as role-play simulations, storytelling activities and collaborative projects, to increase students' involvement in communicative learning. In addition to providing meaningful opportunities to use the target language, these practices appear to promote creativity, peer interaction and greater confidence in communication.

Affective Impact of Creative Approaches

The third research question focused on teachers' views of the emotional, motivational, and professional effects of using gamification and practices informed by art therapy in EFL classrooms. Four recurring themes emerged from the teachers' responses: lower levels of anxiety, greater student motivation, a shift towards a facilitator role, and opportunities for professional development. The findings suggest that teachers see these creative and game-based practices as serving a broader purpose than simply supporting instruction. In particular, they appear to contribute to students' emotional involvement in learning while also encouraging teachers to reconsider their roles and develop their professional identities.

Figure 3

Hierarchic Model of Affective Impact

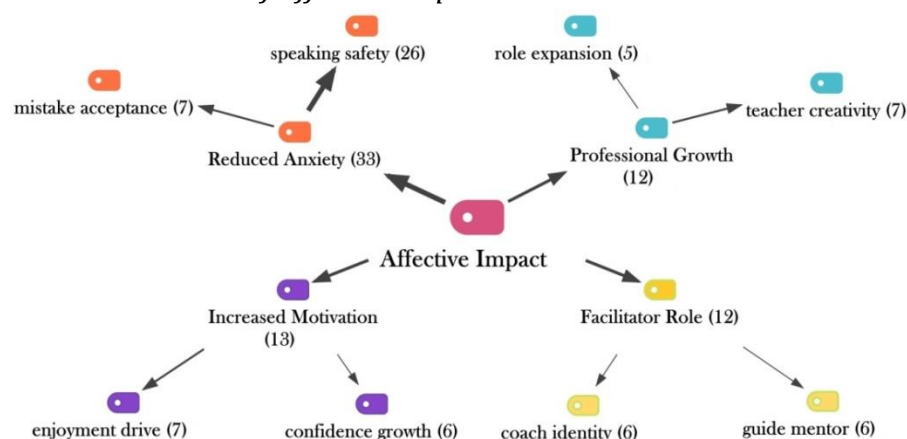


Figure 3 shows the hierarchical coding framework developed in MAXQDA to map the connections between themes relating to the affective dimensions of creative pedagogical practices. The framework indicates that teachers associated gamification and activities informed by art therapy with several outcomes, including lower levels of anxiety, greater learner motivation, and shifts in their own roles as educators. Taken

together, these themes suggest that such practices may have implications not only for learners' emotional experiences but also for teachers' professional practice.

Among the themes identified in the data, reduced anxiety was particularly prominent, especially in teachers' accounts of speaking activities in the foreign language classroom. Teachers frequently reported that creative and gamified tasks help create a psychologically supportive learning environment in which students feel more comfortable experimenting with language. As Respondent 19 explained, *"these methods are effective, especially for oral tasks. Students say they feel safe to try and are less worried about mistakes."* Similarly, Respondent 6 observed that when creative collaboration becomes the focus of classroom tasks, students tend to concentrate less on grammatical accuracy and more on communication. These findings suggest that creative educational techniques can help to promote psychological safety in the classroom by encouraging students to take chances and participate more confidently in communicative activities.

Another pattern emerging from the data was greater motivation, which participants associated with students' enjoyment, involvement, and sense of accomplishment. Teachers frequently found that children were more enthusiastic when language-learning programs included creative or game-based elements. Respondent 5, for example, indicated that "students feel more motivated because the tasks are interesting and meaningful". Respondent 8 made a similar observation, stating that successfully completing gamified exercises or creative projects typically helped students gain confidence. Taken together, these responses indicate that motivation in creative learning situations goes beyond external incentives like competition and awards. Students may also get motivated by the gratification of finishing a task, enjoying the learning process, and actively participating in activities they consider meaningful.

Creative pedagogical techniques were also linked to changes in how teachers perceived their role in the classroom. This was reflected in the topic of the facilitator role, with participants indicating a shift away from teacher-led instruction and toward a more supporting type of classroom leadership. Several teachers reported that creative and gamified activities gave students more opportunities to explore ideas, communicate with peers, and collaborate, while the teacher provided supervision as needed. Respondent 1 clearly defined this change: *"When I use gamified or creative activities, I become more of a coach, guiding students rather than simply giving information."* Respondent 4 also saw the teacher as a mentor whose role is to encourage communication and collaboration rather than to regulate each stage of the class. Such responses suggest a more learner-centred view of teaching. The teacher is still in charge of designing the learning environment with this approach, but students have more space to participate, interact, and play an active role in the learning process.

The theme of professional growth arose from participants' observations on how innovative teaching approaches influenced their own professional development as educators. Teachers claimed that planning creative and gamified lessons frequently forced them to break away from typical instructional routines, explore new tactics, and reevaluate how they prepared learning activities. Respondent 9 stated that *"using creative approaches pushes teachers to be more imaginative when designing lessons."* Respondent 12 also stated that the inclusion of gamified and artistic activities prompted teachers to reassess traditional teaching approaches and seek alternate ways to engage students. These comments suggest that the benefits of creative pedagogy may reach beyond its influence on students. The process of planning and conducting such activities can also provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on their practice, generate new instructional ideas, and broaden their pedagogical repertoire.

Overall, the findings suggest that gamification and art therapy-inspired activities could influence both students' classroom experiences and teachers' professional practices. Participants linked these techniques to decreased levels of language anxiety, increased motivation, and more opportunities for interaction and collaboration. At the same time, their comments indicate that the teacher's role is shifting toward facilitation and guiding, with possibilities for professional reflection and pedagogical improvement. Thus, the perceived value of these practices appears to lie not only in increasing student engagement but also in creating a more participatory learning environment in which both students and teachers can take on more flexible and active roles.

Implementation Context: Challenges, Support and Future Perspectives

The fourth research question focused on the difficulties EFL teachers face when incorporating gamification and art therapy-inspired practices into language teaching, with particular attention to institutional barriers and professional development needs. The findings pointed to a range of closely related factors that influenced teachers' ability to adopt these approaches in practice. These included access to teacher training, perceptions of professional relevance, the potential for changes in teaching practice, expectations for future use, institutional support, limited time and resources, curricular restrictions, and teachers' practical recommendations. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers generally see value in creative pedagogical practices; however, their capacity to use them effectively is closely linked to the professional and institutional environments in which they work.

Figure 4
Hierarchic Model of Implementation Context

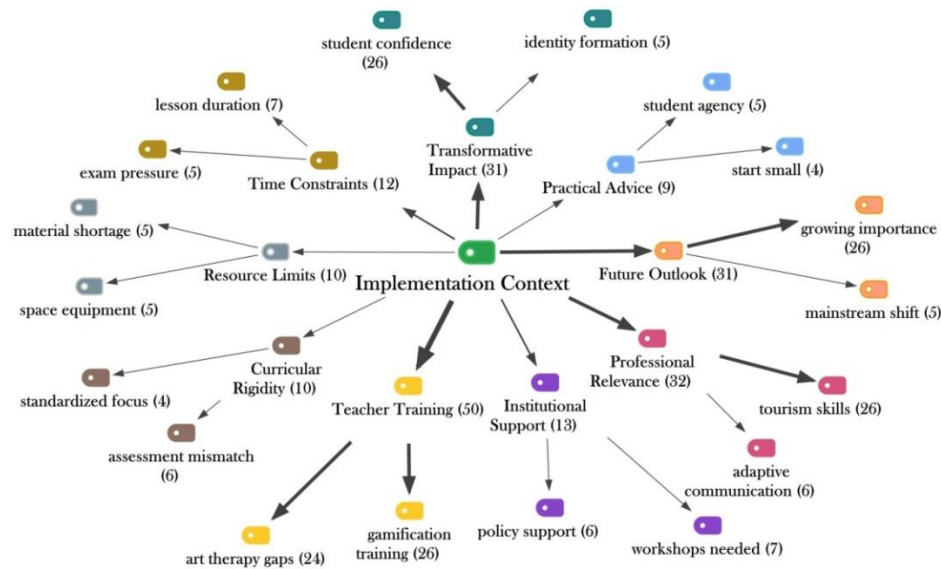


Figure 4 depicts the hierarchical coding model built in MAXQDA to reflect the key requirements for implementing gamified and art therapy-inspired activities. Rather than considering implementation as a single element, the model considers a number of interconnected effects, such as teacher preparation, institutional support, curricular and practical constraints, and perceived professional worth of these techniques. Taken together, these themes shed light on the contexts that may either encourage or limit instructors' use of innovative pedagogies.

Participants' comments emphasised the importance of teacher training. Although most teachers expressed an interest in gamification and art therapy-inspired activities, many stated that they had had little opportunity to acquire formal training in these areas. Their information was frequently gained independently through online resources, short courses, experimentation, or interactions with coworkers. Respondent 20 noted, "I have taken short online courses on gamification, but I have never received formal training in art therapy." "The majority of what I know comes from experimenting and learning from colleagues." Respondent 12 emphasised the importance of seminars that provide practical direction on introducing innovative techniques into language instruction. Such accounts suggest that teachers' engagement with these methods is frequently driven by individual initiative rather than formal professional development. This case points to a noticeable discrepancy between teachers' interest in innovative pedagogies and the structured training available to help them use these approaches effectively.

The findings also suggest that professional preparation cannot be separated from the wider institutional environment. Participants described university-level support as an important condition for experimenting with unfamiliar teaching methods. In particular,

they referred to workshops, supportive policies, and opportunities for professional collaboration as factors that could make innovation more feasible. Respondent 8 observed that teachers tend to feel more confident about trying new methods when universities organize training sessions or collaborative workshops. Respondent 13 likewise drew attention to the role of institutional policies, suggesting that policies which recognize creativity as a legitimate element of teaching can make it easier to incorporate innovative approaches into established programs. Institutional support therefore appears to serve not simply as an additional resource, but as part of the environment in which teachers decide whether new pedagogical practices are realistic and professionally supported.

At the same time, participants identified practical difficulties that complicate the use of creative activities in everyday teaching. Time was one of the most frequently raised concerns. Teachers noted that gamified tasks and creative projects can require substantial preparation and may also occupy more classroom time than conventional activities. Respondent 3 summarized this difficulty by stating that “creative activities are effective, but they take time to organize and implement.” Respondent 9 added that the pressure of preparing students for examinations can leave relatively little room for such activities. These comments indicate that teachers may value creative pedagogy while still finding it difficult to accommodate within existing schedules. The issue, therefore, is not necessarily a lack of willingness to innovate, but the limited space available for innovation within established teaching and assessment demands.

Material conditions presented a further difficulty. Participants referred to shortages of appropriate materials, limited classroom space, and inadequate access to technological equipment. Respondent 4, for example, described the difficulty of organizing art-based activities when suitable materials or physical spaces are not available. This finding adds an important practical dimension to the discussion of implementation. Teachers’ willingness and pedagogical knowledge alone may not be sufficient if the classroom environment does not provide the resources required to put creative ideas into practice.

Curricular expectations were another source of tension. Several participants perceived a mismatch between creative, communicative approaches and assessment systems that continue to prioritize more conventional measures of language performance. Respondent 1 explained that *“our curriculum is quite strict and assessment criteria often focus on grammar accuracy rather than creativity.”* Respondent 15 similarly observed that creative activities are not always easily reconciled with standardized forms of evaluation. This tension is significant because teachers may be expected to encourage communication, creativity, and active participation while simultaneously preparing students for assessments based largely on predetermined linguistic criteria. In this sense, curricular rigidity can restrict not only the amount of time devoted to creative

work but also the extent to which such work is regarded as relevant to formal learning outcomes.

Despite these constraints, participants generally considered gamified and creative pedagogies to have clear professional relevance, especially in language education for tourism. Teachers repeatedly connected these approaches with the communicative demands students are likely to encounter in their future careers. Tourism professionals often need to respond to unfamiliar situations, communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, and adjust their language according to changing circumstances. Respondent 10 suggested that creative teaching methods can help prepare students for realistic tourism situations in which flexible communication is necessary, while Respondent 18 emphasized adaptability as an important element of professional interaction. From this perspective, creative pedagogy was valued not simply because it could make lessons more engaging, but because it could support forms of communication that participants regarded as directly relevant to professional practice.

Participants' comments also reflected a generally positive view of the future role of gamification and other creative approaches in language education. Several teachers believed that teaching practices are gradually moving towards more interactive, experiential, and learner-centred forms of instruction. Respondent 6 anticipated that creative pedagogies would become increasingly common as educational practice places greater emphasis on learner engagement and experience. Respondent 20 linked this development more specifically to changes in the tourism sector, where professionals are increasingly expected to communicate flexibly and creatively across different situations. Overall, these views suggest that participants regarded creative pedagogy as more than a temporary methodological trend. Rather, they saw its growing relevance as connected to broader changes in both educational practice and the communicative competencies expected in tourism-related professions. These findings indicate that teachers anticipate a broader institutional acceptance of creative pedagogical approaches in the future.

Another theme identified in the data was the transformative impact of creative teaching practices on students' personal and professional development. Teachers frequently observed that creative activities help students build confidence and develop a stronger sense of identity as future professionals. Respondent 5 noted that creative teaching encourages students to find their own voice in English, while Respondent 14 explained that such activities help learners envision themselves as professionals capable of communicating with international audiences. The observations suggest that creative pedagogical approaches will contribute to not only the language development but also the formation of professional identities.

Finally, teachers provided practical guidance to colleagues interested in practicing innovative pedagogy. Participants suggested starting with small-scale activities and then extending them as students grew more comfortable with interactive learning methods. Respondent 4 suggested beginning with easy activities before progressing to more complicated creative projects, whereas Respondent 8 stressed the necessity of allowing students to construct their own activities and contribute ideas to the learning process. These proposals emphasise the value of incremental pedagogical innovation, in which teachers gradually incorporate creative practices into their existing teaching routines.

These findings show that the implementation of gamification and art therapy-inspired activities is influenced by a variety of educational, institutional, and professional factors. Although teachers recognise these approaches' potential to improve student engagement and professional communication skills, their implementation is determined by training opportunities, institutional support, resource availability, and curricular flexibility.

Discussion

The present study explored EFL teachers' perspectives on the integration of gamification and art therapy-inspired practices in ESP contexts related to tourism education. The findings demonstrate that teachers perceive these approaches as complementary pedagogical strategies that simultaneously support learners' cognitive, emotional, and communicative development. Rather than viewing gamification solely as a motivational technique or art therapy-inspired practices merely as creative activities, participants described both approaches as interconnected components of learner-centred pedagogy that promote authentic language use, creativity, and emotional engagement. This finding extends previous research by illustrating how teachers integrate these approaches within professional ESP contexts rather than implementing them as isolated instructional techniques.

Teachers consistently associated gamification with increased learner motivation, participation, and collaborative interaction. Their perceptions are consistent with previous studies reporting that gamified instruction enhances learner engagement and classroom participation across diverse EFL contexts (Asiri, 2019; Pham et al., 2025; Alenazi, 2025; Dorgham & Obiad, 2025). However, the present findings also support Hellberg's (2023) argument that effective gamification should be understood as a comprehensive instructional design approach rather than the simple incorporation of points, badges, or competitive activities. Participants emphasized meaningful challenges, storytelling, collaboration, and authentic communication, suggesting that engagement emerged primarily from purposeful learning experiences instead of external rewards alone. Wichaidit and Wichaidit (2024) provide additional evidence

for this view, demonstrating that conceptual learning is enhanced when game-based activities are followed by structured reflection and meaningful conversation.

The findings also emphasise teachers' critical role in determining the efficacy of new pedagogical approaches. Participants believed that successful implementation depended on teachers' instructional judgements, classroom management tactics, and ability to adjust activities to learners' needs. These beliefs are consistent with research showing that instructors' acceptance of gamified instruction is influenced by perceived usefulness, pedagogical confidence, and institutional support. Similarly, studies conducted by Al-Harbi and Madini (2024) and Hong et al. (2025) show that teachers' views, technological ability, and instructional preferences have a significant impact on students' experiences in digitally augmented language classes. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that teachers perceive their role not merely as technology users but as designers of emotionally engaging learning environments.

Another important finding concerns the contribution of art therapy-inspired practices to communicative confidence and emotional well-being. Teachers consistently reported that creative activities such as storytelling, drama, music, and visual expression reduced learners' anxiety while encouraging greater willingness to communicate. These findings align with earlier research emphasizing the affective benefits of arts-based pedagogies in language education (Schander et al., 2013; Timuçin, 2016). They also support more recent studies suggesting that art therapy-inspired educational activities encourage reflective thinking, emotional awareness, and creative self-expression (Khayitova, 2025; Nieścioruk, 2025). From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that emotionally supportive learning environments reduce learners' affective barriers, enabling them to participate more confidently in communicative tasks.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study is the finding that teachers do not perceive gamification and art therapy-inspired practices as competing instructional approaches. Instead, participants described them as complementary strategies serving different but mutually reinforcing pedagogical functions. Whereas gamification stimulated engagement, collaboration, and sustained participation, art therapy-inspired practices encouraged creativity, emotional regulation, and expressive communication. This integrated perspective complements previous research demonstrating that combining creative pedagogies with game-based learning enhances communicative creativity and problem-solving abilities (Yusupova et al., 2025; Kholodniak, 2025). In addition, Maruyama et al. (2025) showed that game-based collaborative environments promote teamwork and authentic interaction even in resource-constrained educational contexts. Collectively, these studies, together with the present findings, suggest that integrating motivational and affective pedagogies

may create richer language-learning experiences than implementing either approach independently.

The study also identified several institutional challenges that influence the implementation of innovative pedagogies. Teachers referred to limited professional training, insufficient technological and material resources, restricted instructional time, and curriculum rigidity as major barriers. Similar implementation challenges have been widely documented in previous research (Umamah, 2022; Cancino & Ibarra, 2023; Al-Harbi & Madini, 2024). These findings indicate that successful innovation depends not only on teachers' willingness to adopt new approaches but also on institutional policies that provide adequate professional development opportunities, curriculum flexibility, and access to appropriate instructional resources. In this respect, the findings reinforce previous recommendations that sustainable educational innovation requires coordinated support at both individual and institutional levels.

An additional contribution of the present study lies in its focus on English for Specific Purposes within tourism education. Unlike many previous investigations that examined general English context, this study shows that in EFL courses, teachers think innovative and gamified pedagogies are very useful for improving professional communication, intercultural interaction, and adaptive problem-solving abilities, which are essential in tourism and hospitality. Research supports the value of real communication, collaborative learning, and technology-enhanced education in ESP environments (Portero & Rodríguez, 2022; Phan, 2024; Hastomo et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2025). They further suggest that innovative pedagogies should be designed not only to improve linguistic proficiency but also to prepare learners for complex professional communication in multilingual workplaces.

From a broader theoretical perspective, the findings support learner-centred approaches to language education that recognize learning as the interaction of cognitive, emotional, and social processes. Teachers' experiences demonstrate that motivation, creativity, emotional security, and collaboration function as interconnected dimensions of successful language learning rather than independent constructs. Consequently, the integration of gamification and art therapy-inspired practices represents a holistic pedagogical framework that supports meaningful communication, professional identity development, and sustained learner engagement.

The findings have several practical implications. First, teacher education programmes should include systematic preparation in designing and implementing gamified and arts-based instructional activities rather than focusing solely on digital tools. Second, universities offering ESP programmes, particularly in tourism and hospitality, should provide institutional support through professional development workshops, curriculum flexibility, and access to appropriate technological and creative resources.

Third, language teachers should design learning activities that blend meaningful game mechanics with collaborative and creative tasks, so that they can foster both communicative competence and learners' emotional well-being. Finally, educational policymakers should acknowledge that innovative pedagogies need ongoing institutional investment, if they are to help contribute effectively to long-term improvements in language teaching and learning.

Conclusion

This study examined EFL teachers' perspectives on the use of gamification and art therapy-inspired practices in foreign language teaching, particularly within ESP contexts related to tourism education. The findings indicate that teachers perceive these approaches as effective strategies for enhancing student motivation, communicative creativity and emotional engagement in language learning. Gamification was primarily associated with the use of structured game elements such as challenges, points and collaborative tasks that stimulate participation and interaction, while art-based activities were viewed as facilitating creative expression and supporting a psychologically safe learning environment. Together, these approaches appear to promote more interactive and student-centered learning environments in which learners are encouraged to experiment with language and engage in authentic communication.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the view that language learning is influenced by the interaction of motivational, social and emotional factors. Gamified learning environments can enhance learner engagement by supporting motivational needs such as competence and participation, while art therapy-inspired activities may contribute to lowering affective barriers and encouraging creative communication. The combination of these pedagogical approaches therefore reflects a more holistic understanding of language learning that integrates cognitive, affective and social dimensions of the learning process.

The study also highlights the evolving role of teachers in innovative learning environments. Participants reported that implementing gamified and creative pedagogical practices encourages them to adopt more facilitative and student-centered teaching roles. In this sense, teachers act not only as knowledge transmitters but also as designers of interactive learning experiences that promote collaboration, creativity and communicative practice. The findings also point to the significant role of teachers in determining how effectively innovative approaches can be incorporated into language education. In particular, teachers' ability to adapt instructional practices, make pedagogical decisions, and use creative methods appears to be an important factor in the successful application of such approaches.

A number of practical implications can be drawn from these results. Integrating game-based elements and creative activities into EFL lessons, for example, may provide learners with more opportunities to become actively involved in the learning process. Similarly, activities involving storytelling, drama, or visual forms of expression may contribute to a classroom atmosphere in which learners feel more comfortable experimenting with the target language and expressing their ideas. However, the effective use of these approaches also depends on adequate preparation and support for teachers. Professional development initiatives could therefore place greater emphasis on practical ways of incorporating gamification and creative methods into everyday language lessons. At the institutional level, teachers may also benefit from greater curricular flexibility and sufficient support to adapt or experiment with teaching practices according to the needs of their learners.

The study nevertheless has certain limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Since the data were based primarily on teachers' own accounts, their responses may not necessarily correspond to what occurs in classroom practice or provide direct evidence of students' learning outcomes. Moreover, the research was conducted within a particular educational setting, meaning that the findings may not be equally applicable to other teaching contexts. Further studies could address these limitations by including learners' perspectives and classroom-based evidence. It would also be useful to investigate whether sustained exposure to gamified and arts-based learning contributes to measurable changes in students' language proficiency and their ability to communicate effectively over time. Mixed-method or experimental studies may also provide further insights into how gamification and creative pedagogies influence language learning outcomes in different educational contexts.

In conclusion, the integration of gamification and art therapy-inspired practices represents a promising direction for contemporary language education. By combining motivational game elements with creative and emotionally supportive activities, educators can create dynamic learning environments that support both linguistic development and learners' confidence in using a foreign language.

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Ziyoda Khalmatova: Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing-Original Draft, Visualization

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In preparing this manuscript, AI-assisted tools were used solely to refine the language (e.g., improving clarity, grammar, style, and readability). All intellectual content, data analysis, interpretation of results, and final manuscript revisions were conducted and verified by the authors. The authors accept full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Ethics Declaration

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Republic of Kazakhstan, and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of International University of Tourism and Hospitality (Reference number: No2 and 17.10.2025).

Consent for Publication

Consent for publication was obtained from the participants in accordance with the ethical procedures approved for this study. No personally identifiable information is included in this article.

Competing Interests

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data Availability

The data are not publicly available because they contain confidential participant information. Access to the data is restricted to comply with the ethical conditions under which the study was approved.

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