

## Gamified Listening in Hospitality ESP: Enhancing Listening Skills and Engagement of Thai EFL University Students

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### Abstract

This study aimed to: 1) examine the effectiveness of gamified listening activities in improving listening skills, 2) analyze the levels of learners' engagement in a Hospitality English course, and 3) explore students' perceptions of the gamified activities. A mixed-methods design was utilized after the listening gamification intervention, with 22 tourism-major students enrolled in Hospitality English in the second semester of the 2024 academic year, selected through purposive sampling. The research instruments consisted of a pretest and posttest of listening skills, a learner engagement questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The listening tests consisted of three components: general comprehension, lexical recognition, and contextual understanding, all embedded in hospitality situations. The data were collected over a period of 12 weeks. Data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test and content analysis. The findings revealed that: (1) listening skills across all three dimensions significantly improved after implementing the gamified listening activities (pretest:  $M = 12.00$ ,  $SD = 5.589$ ; posttest:  $M = 18.77$ ,  $SD = 3.915$ ;  $p < .001$ ), with the largest gains observed in hotel-specific vocabulary ( $p < .001$ ). 2) The questionnaire results indicated high engagement ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = .645$ ) across emotional, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions. 3) Students reported that game elements such as points, leaderboards, and rewards helped to enhance motivation, increase enjoyment, and improve vocabulary retention, which is aligned with the

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behavioral engagement ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = .615$ ). However, during the focus group interview, some noted anxiety from competitive activities, suggesting that balanced activity design should integrate collaboration and reflection alongside competition. Overall, the study demonstrates that gamified listening effectively enhances listening skills and engagement in ESP, offering practical implications for improving English instruction in hospitality education.

### Keywords

Gamification, Listening Skills, Learner Engagement, Hospitality English, English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

### Introduction

English has long been the primary language used in global business, notably in tourism and hospitality, where it serves as a lingua franca and is necessary for economic success (Crystal, 2003, 112; Nickerson, 2020, 478-490). Tourism is a big part of Thailand's economy and job market (Economics, Tourism, & Sport Division, 2025; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023). Recent data reveal that Thailand received 20.3 million foreign tourists between January and July 2024, a 34 % increase from the previous year. This shows that service workers need to be proficient in English (Reuters, 2024). Effective client interactions have a direct impact on service quality and business outcomes (Husin et al., 2023, 580-589; Marasabessy et al., 2025, 211-224), which is why English communication is such an important ability for hospitality workers. However, some Thai university students encounter difficulties with competency, especially in listening comprehension, owing to insufficient exposure to actual spoken English and unfamiliarity with certain accents (Boonsamritphol, 2022, 86-99). Thailand was 21st out of 23 Asian nations and 106th out of 116 countries globally in the EF Education First (2024) English Proficiency Index. This shows that English competence is still poor in the country. The Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (2024) requires CEFR levels B1, B2, and C1 for diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate students, respectively. However, research indicates that Thai hospitality undergraduates often do not meet the CEFR B1 standard, with the majority exhibiting only beginner-level English listening skills (Pinsirikul et al., 2023, 1–20; Prasongngern & Soontornwipast, 2023, 155–172). This highlights the critical necessity for pedagogical innovations to improve listening proficiency.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) offers a targeted response by situating language instruction in professional contexts (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, 1-10; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, 5; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020, 247-268). In hospitality, ESP listening is essential for handling reservations, answering inquiries, and resolving complaints (Anthony, 2018), as miscommunication can result in dissatisfaction and lost opportunities (Jenkins, 2014, 1-22). However, Thai classrooms often emphasize grammar and reading while neglecting listening, provide little authentic input, and lack contextualized practice (Kirkpatrick, 2012, 331-344). Activities are frequently disengaging and irrelevant to hotel tasks (McDonough & Shaw, 2013, 17-49), leaving students underprepared for the demands of real-world communication.

Gamification offers a way to address these challenges by transforming passive listening into motivating, scenario-based activities through elements such as points, rewards, and leaderboards (Deterding et al., 2011, 9-15). Studies in general EFL contexts confirm its value for motivation and engagement (Huang & Soman, 2013, 1-29; Zainuddin et al., 2020, 1-23), yet applications in ESP listening for hospitality remain limited. By combining intrinsic motivators such as enjoyment with extrinsic rewards like points and leaderboards, gamification turns listening practice into an active and competitive experience that sustains focus (Hamari et al., 2014, 3025-3034). Integrating interactive scenarios or role-plays reflective of hospitality contexts can further foster learner autonomy and meaningful engagement (Danowska-Florczyk & Mostowski, 2012, 1-4; Wichadee & Pattanapichet, 2018, 77-92). Workplace surveys also indicate that listening comprehension remains the most frequently reported weakness among Thai hotel employees, often leading to miscommunication and guest dissatisfaction (Pinsirikul et al., 2023, 1-20). This study, therefore, examines the effectiveness of gamified listening activities in enhancing Thai EFL university students' listening skills, engagement, and perceptions of learning by employing a mixed-methods design that incorporates questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Previous evidence suggests that students generally favor gamified applications because they foster motivation, autonomy, and enjoyment. Thus, this research extends gamification studies to university ESP listening and provides practical insights for hospitality-focused contexts. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent do gamified listening activities improve the listening skills of Thai EFL university students?

RQ2. How do gamified listening activities influence students' engagement?

RQ3. What are students' perceptions of the gamified listening activities?

### Objectives

- 1) To examine the effectiveness of gamified listening activities in improving Thai EFL university students' listening skills: general comprehension, lexical recognition, and contextual understanding.
- 2) To analyze the levels of students' engagement in gamified listening activities across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions.
- 3) To explore students' perceptions of the gamified listening activities used in the course across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions.

### Literature Reviews

#### 1. Listening Skills in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Listening is widely recognized as a fundamental skill in ELT and is often viewed as the most challenging receptive skill for learners (Richards, 2008, 1-3). It requires not only decoding sounds but also interpreting meaning across varied contexts, making it a complex and active process. Fang (2008, 21-29) describes listening comprehension as a dynamic activity involving focused attention, meaning construction, and the connection of new input with prior knowledge. Listening proficiency in this study aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) benchmark of B2, which expects learners to understand extended speech and lectures, follow complex lines of argument, and comprehend standard spoken language even in noisy environments (Council of Europe, 2020). Within ESP, particularly in professional fields such as the hotel and hospitality industry, effective listening is essential for accurate communication and quality service delivery (Anthony, 2018). However, many Thai EFL learners remain below this threshold, particularly in authentic or domain-specific contexts such as hospitality, where listening involves rapid exchanges and industry-specific terminology.

Despite this importance, listening comprehension remains a persistent difficulty for many EFL learners, including Thai university students. Learners often face limited exposure to authentic spoken English, struggle to comprehend different accents and fast speech, and find unfamiliar vocabulary challenging (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2012, 331-344). Thai-based studies further confirm such problems, for example, students frequently misinterpret texts by focusing on similar-sounding words and have difficulty keeping up with rapid input

(Palakaprasith et al., 2024, 17-24; Rutamornchai et al., 2024, 93-125). At more advanced levels, challenges also include identifying main ideas, applying listening strategies effectively, and utilizing overall meaning (Kisawadkorn et al., 2022, 15-28; Laeha & Laohawiriyanon, 2022, 45-64). These findings emphasize the urgent need for pedagogical interventions tailored to ESP contexts.

Many EFL classrooms, however, still rely on repetitive, decontextualized drills that limit engagement and reduce transfer to professional practice. This issue is compounded in non-native English environments, where opportunities to interact with native speakers are limited for many students, making targeted listening practice essential (Hassen, 2016). Effective instruction should therefore move beyond passive comprehension toward tasks that reflect real communication, use authentic materials, and incorporate strategies such as predicting, inferring, and note-taking (Field, 2008, 267-268). For ESP learners in hospitality, contextualized tasks grounded in workplace realities are critical for developing both linguistic competence and situational awareness. In this regard, gamification offers a promising response by sustaining motivation and embedding listening practice within authentic, profession-specific situations.

## 2. Engagement Theory

Fredricks et al. (2004, 59-109) define student engagement through three dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Although often presented separately, these dimensions interact in practice, in which active participation (behavioral engagement) is strengthened by feelings of enjoyment or interest (emotional engagement), which in turn sustains the use of strategies such as monitoring comprehension (cognitive engagement). This interplay emphasizes engagement as a dynamic process in which the three dimensions are constantly influencing one another, rather than remaining as three distinct or separate categories. Critics, however, argue that this model may overlook the social dimension, since social aspects such as peer collaboration and classroom climate also influence how engagement develops (Appleton et al., 2008, 369-386). In ELT contexts, this interactional view is particularly important, as language learning is inherently communicative and requires emotional resilience. Research shows that interactive tasks can foster comprehension by promoting cognitive engagement (Henrie et al., 2015, 36-53), while emotional support enhances persistence (Reeve & Tseng, 2011, 257-267).

Engagement theory has been widely adopted in education, and gamification has proved potential to activate all three dimensions by encouraging participation, enjoyment,

and deeper processing (Wichadee & Pattanapichet, 2018, 77-92; Flores, 2015, 32-54; Sailer et al., 2017, 371-380; Zainuddin et al., 2020, 1-23). Yet the framework is not without limitations. Cultural contexts may shape how engagement is expressed, and emotional engagement is often difficult to measure reliably (Fredricks et al., 2004, 59-109). Research that explicitly applies engagement theory to gamified ESP listening in hospitality higher education remains limited, highlighting the significance of the present study in furthering research within this field.

### 3. Gamification: Definition and Key Concepts

In response to challenges in ESP listening instruction, gamification has emerged as a promising approach to make listening practice more interactive, motivating, and aligned with professional communication needs. It involves embedding game-based mechanics and dynamics, such as points, levels, rewards, badges, and leaderboards, into non-gaming contexts to create an enjoyable and engaging learning atmosphere (Deterding et al., 2011, 9-15). These elements are designed to enhance motivation, sustain engagement, and improve performance by turning traditional tasks into goal-oriented activities. In education, applying game design principles, aesthetics, and interactive strategies can increase learner participation, boost motivation, and support both learning and problem-solving (Kapp, 2012). By drawing on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, gamification transforms routine exercises into enjoyable and competitive experiences (Hamari et al., 2014, 3025-3034). Incorporating role-playing within gamified tasks further encourages active participation and learner autonomy, which can lead to better academic outcomes (Danowska-Florczyk & Mostowski, 2012, 1-4; Wichadee & Pattanapichet, 2018, 77-92).

Gamification has continued to evolve thanks to advances in technology, offering educators both challenges and new opportunities. As Coponetto et al. argue, integrating game design and interactive elements enhances engagement and motivation (as cited in Dichev & Dicheva, 2017, 9). Similarly, Huang and Soman (2013, 7) proposed the “Educational Gamification Five-Step Model,” offering a structured framework to effectively implement gamification elements as part of classroom activities (see Figure 1).

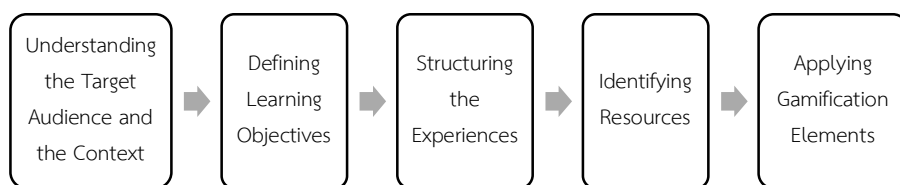


**Figure 1:** Educational Gamification Five-Step Model

**Source:** Huang & Soman, 2013, p.7

Games are fundamentally structured around four elements: rules, a clear objective, competition, and chance. Building on these foundations, gamification incorporates points, badges, levels, leaderboards, feedback, and rewards as tools to engage learners (Govindarajan, 2020, 238-251) and sustain participation (Hwang & Choi, 2020, 365-376). In language education, these elements have been shown to enhance engagement, oral communication, and willingness to participate in interactive tasks (Girardelli, 2017, 156-161). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that effective gamification enhances intrinsic motivation by satisfying learners' psychological demands for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 227-268). Feedback, progression metrics, and observable advancement augment proficiency; avenues for self-directed engagement promote autonomy; and social components like leaderboards and peer cooperation reinforce connectedness. When these requirements are fulfilled, learners encounter prolonged engagement and enhanced pleasure (Ryan & Deci, 2020, 227-268; Sailer et al., 2017, 371-380). However, critics caution that an overreliance on extrinsic rewards may undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 227-268), and outcomes vary depending on task design and context (Seaborn & Fels, 2015, 14-31). Thus, while gamification can create interactive and rewarding learning experiences, its effectiveness depends on thoughtful pedagogical integration to ensure that game mechanics complement rather than overshadow deeper learning goals.

In the realm of teaching or learning EFL, gamification has been widely recognized as an effective approach in language learning due to its potential to enhance motivation, concentration, and learner engagement (Veljkovic Michos, 2017, 511-516). It creates a more conducive and interactive learning environment and allows students to take an active role in their learning process. According to Flores (2015, 32-54), integrating game elements in L2 classrooms fosters learner autonomy, encouraging students to shift from passive engagement to a more motivated and involved learning stage. In addition, Dehghanzadeh et al. (2019, 934-957) conducted a comprehensive review from 2008 to 2019, which identified four key benefits of gamified language learning: content acquisition, engagement, motivation, and satisfaction, and also confirmed the positive impact of gamification on learning experiences and outcomes. As a result, gamification remains a highly applicable strategy for improving learning effectiveness in both foreign and second language education, highlighting the importance of fostering motivation and engagement in language instruction. Even though gamification has

been widely used for teaching and learning in EFL contexts, research on the use of gamification to assist with ESP listening in hospitality is still limited.

#### 4. Previous Studies on Gamification in Language Learning

Recent studies have highlighted the effectiveness of gamification in EFL contexts, particularly for enhancing student motivation (Huseinovic, 2023, 10-36; Matyakhan et al., 2024, 121-239), engagement (Aguilos et al., 2022, 1098-1103; Huseinovic, 2023, 10-36; Hwang & Wu, 2012, 6-10), and language proficiency in areas such as speaking (Huseinovic, 2023, 10-36), listening (Hwang & Wu, 2012, 6-10), reading (Matyakhan et al., 2024, 121-239), and grammar and vocabulary (Panmei & Waluyo, 2022, 1-22; Waluyo et al., 2023, 1-17; Waluyo & Balazon, 2024, 1-13). Hwang and Wu (2012, 6-10) conducted an experimental study involving Taiwanese middle school students, which demonstrated that gamified listening activities enhanced comprehension and heightened engagement. Matyakhan et al. (2024, 121-239) found that gamified reading activities that use points, badges, leaderboards, and interactive challenges greatly improve Thai EFL undergraduates' understanding and motivation, as well as their participation and attention. Gamification has also been shown to work in college to teach grammar and vocabulary. For example, platforms like *Quizizz* and *Quizlet* can help students stay interested and remember what they learn, even if their English is at low proficiency (Waluyo et al., 2023, 1-17; Waluyo & Bucol, 2021, 164-185).

Recent research based on Self-Determination Theory corroborates these findings, illustrating that gamified learning environments improve motivation and performance by satisfying learners' needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Hanus & Fox, 2015, 152-161; Mekler et al., 2017, 525-534; Sailer et al., 2017, 371-380). When students feel like their needs are being met, like getting feedback, keeping track of their progress, and talking to other students, they are more likely to stay interested and work hard. These motivational effects elucidate the continuous enhancement of language learning outcomes across various skills and contexts through gamification.

Sailer et al. (2017, 371-380) demonstrated that game elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards enhanced emotional and behavioral engagement, particularly in attention-demanding tasks like listening comprehension. Huseinovic (2023, 10-36) substantiated these advantages in a study of Bosnian higher education, illustrating that gamification markedly enhanced motivation, engagement, and outcomes in speaking and listening. Aguilos et al. (2022, 1098-1103) discovered that game-based elements enhanced participation and interest

in virtual language learning in Thailand, whereas Waluyo and Balazon (2024, 1-13) emphasized their function in fostering positive psychological engagement and perseverance. A recent mixed-methods study using a gamified flipped classroom application (*Classcraft*) reported improved posttest performance and positive student perceptions related to motivation and autonomy (Nilubol, 2023, 24-38). Although these findings confirm the effectiveness of gamification, there is a lack of research specifically addressing its implementation in ESP listening within hospitality higher education. This study addresses these deficiencies by examining the impact of gamified listening activities on Thai EFL university students enrolled in a Hospitality English course, focusing on the enhancement of their listening skills, engagement, and perspectives.

In summary, three interconnected domains are highlighted in the reviewed literature as the foundation for this study: (1) listening instruction in ELT and ESP, which emphasizes contextualized, authentic communication; (2) engagement theory, which views learning as a multifaceted process of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation; and (3) gamification, which operationalizes these concepts through engagement, motivation, and rewards. By incorporating these frameworks into the context of hospitality English, the groundwork is laid for investigating how gamified listening exercises enhance Thai EFL university students' listening skills and level of involvement. This study uniquely integrates these three frameworks to provide empirically grounded, practical insights into a critically under-researched area: the use of gamified pedagogy to improve specific listening sub-skills within a Thai Hospitality ESP program.

## Research Methodology

### 1. Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, 336-438). Quantitative methods were first used to explore the effectiveness of gamified listening activities to improve listening skills (RQ1) through pretest and posttest, and to analyze levels of student engagement (RQ2) using survey questionnaires. After that, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explain the quantitative results and provide deeper insights into students' opinions and experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) for RQ3. This sequential design ensured a comprehensive understanding of the

impacts of gamification, capturing both measurable outcomes and subjective perceptions of the gamified activities utilized in the study.

## 2. Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at a public university in northern Thailand with approval from the university's ethics committee. The population comprised undergraduate students in the Faculty of Humanities majoring in Tourism. From this population, purposive sampling was used to select participants relevant to the research objectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The sample included 22 tourism-major students enrolled in the *English for Hotel Business* course (001292), chosen for its integration of ESP listening tasks related to hotel and hospitality communication. The group consisted of eight males and fourteen females aged 20–21. Participants were selected based on regular class attendance and completion of prerequisite Fundamental English courses, ensuring consistent exposure to the intervention. All students had achieved at least CEFR B1 proficiency, which indicates general communicative competence but difficulty with specialized tasks. Participants were excluded if they had less than 80% attendance (over six absences) or voluntarily withdrew from the study. Withdrawal did not affect their academic standing or course evaluation. The researcher acknowledged that the small sample ( $n = 22$ ) limits quantitative generalizability. However, this is mitigated by the mixed-methods, intact-class pre–post design, which emphasizes within-group change, effect sizes, and triangulation with qualitative data.

## 3. Research Instruments

### 3.1 Listening Comprehension Test

The listening comprehension test used to investigate RQ1 was developed based on Buck's (2001) Model of Listening, which emphasizes assessing multiple dimensions of listening skills. The test comprised three components (24 items): general comprehension, lexical recognition, and contextual understanding, which were embedded in hospitality-related situations. The general comprehension component (10 items) measured understanding of main ideas, details, and overall meaning in oral communication, including tasks such as handling room reservations and check-in/check-out. It consisted of five multiple-choice and five true/false items, totaling 10 points. The hotel-specific vocabulary component (10 items) assessed knowledge of industry terms related to food and beverage orders and event negotiations through 10 fill-in-the-blank items, also totaling 10 points. The hotel-context scenario component (4 items) evaluated learners' ability to interpret and respond to

conversations, such as handling guest dissatisfaction, using four multiple-choice items worth 4 points in total. The listening passages were adapted from the in-house coursebook *English for Hotel Business*, provided by the English Department, and aligned with the CEFR B2 standard to ensure authenticity and consistency with the course content. The pretest and posttest shared the same structure and specifications but used different tracks and questions to prevent familiarity. The overall difficulty was set at the CEFR B2 level. Content validity, verified by three ELT experts, yielded IOC scores of 0.98 and 0.89 for the pretest and posttest. A pilot study with 10 non-participant tourism-major students with similar academic backgrounds and B1 proficiency yielded KR-20 coefficients of 0.79 and 0.78, confirming item consistency and test reliability.

### 3.2 Listening Engagement Questionnaire

The listening engagement questionnaire used to investigate RQ2 was adapted from Fredricks et al.'s (2004, 59-109) engagement theory and measured student engagement across three dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Its purpose was to examine students' listening engagement after the implementation of gamified listening activities. The questionnaire contained 24 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), divided into behavioral engagement (items 1–8), emotional engagement (items 9–16), and cognitive engagement (items 17–24). Content validity was established by three ELT experts using the IOC, which produced a score of 0.90 and exceeded the acceptable threshold (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011, 53-55), while reliability was assessed with Cronbach's alpha and produced a score of 0.79, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

### 3.3 Semi-structured Interview Questions

For the qualitative data, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to address RQ3 and gain deeper insights into students' perceptions and experiences with the gamified listening activities. Sample questions included: "How do you feel about participating in gamified listening activities compared to traditional listening exercises?"; "Have these activities helped you understand hotel-specific vocabulary better? Can you give an example?"; and "Did gamification elements (e.g., points, leaderboards, rewards) help sustain your engagement and motivation in learning? Why or why not?"

Six volunteer students were chosen to represent low-, mid-, and high-performance groups based on their posttest scores. Each student took part in a 20-minute focus group interview conducted in Thai or English, depending on their preference, to ensure clarity and

elicit detailed responses. Trustworthiness was enhanced through researcher-led coding with iterative refinement, peer debriefing, member checking, and qualitative–quantitative triangulation, compensating for the absence of inter-coder reliability statistics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### 3.4 Data Collection

The data collection spanned 12 weeks. In week 1, students were provided with information about the course's ethical considerations. Consent forms were obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained strictly throughout the research process. Next, the pretest, which lasted for approximately 30 minutes, was conducted in the class. From Weeks 2 to 11, gamified listening tasks were integrated into 10 lessons of the *English for Hotel Business* course. Each lesson lasted three hours per week, divided into two 1.5-hour sessions. The gamified listening activities were conducted during the final 10–15 minutes of each session to reinforce students' listening skills and consolidate lesson outcomes. The listening materials were adapted from authentic hospitality situations, such as handling room reservations, guest complaints, and food and beverage orders, which corresponded to each week's lesson content. *Kahoot!* was used as the gamification platform, featuring 10–12 listening-based questions per session. Accordingly, the distribution of item types varied by lesson focus, but the overall intervention addressed all three listening sub-skills (general comprehension, lexical recognition, and contextual understanding) across the 10 lessons. Each activity combined short audio clips with multiple-choice or true/false items. The researcher displayed the QR code for the gamified listening activity on the screen, and students listened and responded in real time on their smartphones, receiving instant feedback after each question. Game elements such as points, ranks, leaderboards, and avatars promoted enjoyment, competitiveness, and motivation. The leaderboard at the end of each activity highlighted top performers, which fostered engagement and friendly competition within a supportive atmosphere. Quality control and consistency are the researcher's consideration. Thus, all sessions were conducted using the same classroom, equipment, and timing. Instructions were standardized and delivered verbatim each time, ensuring identical conditions for all participants. In week 12, the posttest, which took approximately 30 minutes, was administered to measure improvements in listening skills. Then, survey questionnaires, which took roughly 10 minutes to complete, were distributed at the end of the intervention via Google Forms. Following the quantitative phase, an explanatory sequential approach was applied by conducting a 20-minute focus

group interview with six students to further explain and elaborate on the quantitative data collected, resulting from the gamified listening activities intervention.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Because this study adopted a mixed-methods research design, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to evaluate the effectiveness of gamified listening activities and their impact on students' listening skills and engagement. For the quantitative data, the IBM SPSS Statistics version 29 was utilized to analyze the pretest and posttest scores. The Shapiro–Wilk test was applied to examine the normality of score distributions, and results indicated non-normality. Therefore, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, a non-parametric alternative suitable for paired data, was employed to assess differences between pretest and posttest scores. Because the participants were purposively selected and the study used a single-group pre–post design, inferential statistics were used only to examine pre–post change within this cohort, not to make population-level generalizations. Accordingly, results are interpreted primarily through descriptive change ( $M$ ,  $SD$ ) and effect sizes ( $r$ ). The significance level was set at  $p < .05$ , and effect sizes ( $r$ ) were calculated to indicate the magnitude of observed changes. The assumption of independence was met, and outliers were checked and removed before the analysis. Engagement questionnaire data were analyzed across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004) using descriptive statistics ( $M$ ,  $SD$ ), interpreted according to Table 1.

**Table 1** Interpretation Criteria for Mean Scores (5-Point Likert Scale)

| Likert | Interval  | Difference | Description     |
|--------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| 1      | 1.00–1.80 | 0.80       | Strong Disagree |
| 2      | 1.81–2.60 | 0.79       | Disagree        |
| 3      | 2.61–3.40 | 0.79       | Neutral         |
| 4      | 3.41–4.20 | 0.79       | Agree           |
| 5      | 4.21–5.00 | 0.79       | Strongly Agree  |

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using content analysis to investigate students' perceptions of gamified listening activities and their engagement. The analysis involved transcribing interviews, coding responses, and categorizing them into themes aligned with the research questions. To strengthen trustworthiness, coding was researcher-led; therefore, codes and emerging themes were refined through iterative review and peer

debriefing with an ELT colleague. Member checking was conducted by sharing summarized interpretations with selected participants to confirm accuracy. Finally, quantitative and qualitative triangulation was used by comparing statistical trends with participants' reported experiences, enhancing credibility and reducing researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Research Results

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of gamified listening activities in enhancing Thai EFL university students' listening skills, their impact on behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, and students' perceptions of these activities. The participants were 22 tourism-major students (8 males, 14 females) enrolled in the *English for Hotel Business* course, aged 20 to 21 years old. To demonstrate the results effectively based on the research objectives, the results from the study are illustrated as follows, based on each research question:

**RQ 1: To what extent do gamified listening activities improve the listening skills of EFL university students?**

**Table 2** Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Scores using the Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test (N = 22)

| Tests    | M     | SD    | z      | Asymp. Sig.<br>(2-tailed) | r    |
|----------|-------|-------|--------|---------------------------|------|
| Pretest  | 12.00 | 5.589 | -4.047 | <.001                     | .610 |
| Posttest | 18.77 | 3.915 |        |                           |      |

To address the research question RQ 1, Table 2 above illustrates the paired listening scores of 22 students. Mean performance increased from 12.00 ( $SD = 5.589$ ) at pretest to 18.77 ( $SD = 3.915$ ) at posttest, indicating higher and more consistent performance at posttest. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to examine within-sample change, showing a clear pre-post difference ( $z = -4.047$ ,  $p < .001$ ) with a large effect size ( $r = .610$ ). Therefore, these results suggest substantial improvement in listening performance within this cohort following the gamified listening activities.

**Table 3** Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Scores in Dimensions of Listening Skills using the Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test (N = 22)

| Dimensions                      | Pretest |       | Posttest |       | z      | Asymp. Sig.<br>(2-tailed) | r    |
|---------------------------------|---------|-------|----------|-------|--------|---------------------------|------|
|                                 | M       | SD    | M        | SD    |        |                           |      |
| General listening comprehension | 5.68    | 2.514 | 7.77     | 1.445 | -2.955 | .002                      | .445 |
| Hotel-specific vocabulary       | 4.45    | 2.385 | 7.77     | 2.069 | -4.034 | <.001                     | .608 |
| Hotel-context scenarios         | 1.86    | 1.356 | 3.23     | .973  | -3.296 | <.001                     | .497 |

Table 3 illustrates the comparison between pretest and posttest based on the three-dimensional level of listening skills. The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed that, following the gamified activities, students demonstrated significant improvements in all listening subskills. First, general listening comprehension increased from  $M = 5.68$  ( $SD = 2.514$ ) to 7.77 ( $SD = 1.445$ ) at the significant level of  $p = .002$ , with a medium-to-large effect ( $r = .445$ ). The largest improvement emerged in hotel-specific vocabulary, rising from 4.45 ( $SD = 2.385$ ) to 7.77 ( $SD = 2.069$ ),  $z = -4.034$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .608$  (large). Performance in hotel-context scenarios also improved noticeably from 1.86 ( $SD = 1.356$ ) to 3.23 ( $SD = .973$ ),  $z = -3.296$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .497$  (approaching large). From the results, the strongest vocabulary gains are likely due to the task design, which provided repeated exposure to key hotel terms, immediate feedback, and close alignment between lesson content and gamified items, which are features that support recognition and recall within the lexical component. In addition, posttest standard deviations were lower in all three dimensions, indicating more consistent outcomes. Taken together, the gamified approach yielded broad, meaningful gains, with the strongest effects in domain-specific vocabulary and scenario-based listening.

#### RQ 2. How do gamified listening activities influence students' engagement?

Table 4

Survey Questionnaire of Students' Engagement in Terms of Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive Aspects after the Intervention of Gamified Listening Activities (N = 22)

| <b>Behavioral Engagement</b>                                                          |             |             |                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1. I actively participate in gamified listening activities.                           | 4.59        | .503        | Strongly Agree        |
| 2. I pay full attention when engaging with listening tasks in gamified activities.    | 4.41        | .590        | Strongly Agree        |
| 3. I complete all the listening tasks even when they are challenging.                 | 4.00        | .617        | Agree                 |
| 4. I follow the rules and instructions of gamified listening activities.              | 4.73        | .456        | Strongly Agree        |
| 5. I try to earn points or rewards in the gamified activities.                        | 4.50        | .740        | Strongly Agree        |
| 6. I consistently engage in gamified activities without external pressure.            | 4.41        | .590        | Strongly Agree        |
| 7. I encourage my classmates to participate actively in gamified listening exercises. | 4.18        | .795        | Agree                 |
| 8. I prefer gamified listening activities over traditional listening exercises.       | 4.73        | .631        | Strongly Agree        |
| <b>Average Total in Behavioral Engagement</b>                                         | <b>4.44</b> | <b>.615</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |
| <b>Emotional Engagement</b>                                                           |             |             |                       |
| 9. I find gamified listening activities enjoyable.                                    | 4.64        | .658        | Strongly Agree        |
| 10. I feel motivated to improve my listening skills through gamification.             | 4.68        | .477        | Strongly Agree        |
| 11. I feel less anxious when participating in gamified listening activities.          | 4.05        | 1.046       | Agree                 |
| 12. I look forward to the next gamified listening session.                            | 4.50        | .673        | Strongly Agree        |
| 13. Gamified activities make listening practice less stressful for me.                | 4.45        | .671        | Strongly Agree        |
| 14. I feel a sense of accomplishment when I complete a gamified listening challenge.  | 4.68        | .568        | Strongly Agree        |

Table 4

Survey Questionnaire of Students' Engagement in Terms of Behavioral, Emotional, and Cognitive Aspects after the Intervention of Gamified Listening Activities (N = 22)(Continue)

| Dimensions                                                                                               | M           | SD          | Interpretation        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 15. The competitive elements of gamified activities keep me engaged.                                     | 4.68        | .646        | Strongly Agree        |
| 16. I feel emotionally connected to the learning experience when participating in gamified activities.   | 4.23        | .528        | Strongly Agree        |
| <b>Average Total in Emotional Engagement</b>                                                             | <b>4.49</b> | <b>.658</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |
| <b>Cognitive Engagement</b>                                                                              |             |             |                       |
| 17. I try to apply strategies to understand spoken English better in gamified activities.                | 4.32        | .646        | Strongly Agree        |
| 18. I challenge myself to improve my listening comprehension through gamified tasks.                     | 4.41        | .590        | Strongly Agree        |
| 19. Gamified activities help me stay focused for a longer period while listening.                        | 4.36        | .658        | Strongly Agree        |
| 20. I reflect on my mistakes and try to improve after each gamified activity.                            | 4.18        | .733        | Agree                 |
| 21. I believe gamified listening activities enhance my ability to process spoken English.                | 4.36        | .581        | Strongly Agree        |
| 22. I attempt to use new vocabulary or phrases I hear during gamified listening activities.              | 4.36        | .727        | Strongly Agree        |
| 23. I analyze the listening content in gamified activities to identify key ideas and supporting details. | 4.64        | .581        | Strongly Agree        |
| 24. I apply the listening strategies practiced in gamified activities to real-world conversations.       | 4.32        | .780        | Strongly Agree        |
| <b>Average Total in Cognitive Engagement</b>                                                             | <b>4.37</b> | <b>.662</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |
| <b>Average Total</b>                                                                                     | <b>4.43</b> | <b>.645</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |

This section reports results for research question RQ 2. Mean scores were interpreted using a 5-point Likert criterion as shown in Table 4. Overall, participants reported high engagement towards the three dimensions ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = .645$ ), interpreted as *strongly agree*.

For behavioral engagement, the average of this engagement was  $M = 4.44$  ( $SD = .615$ ), which can be interpreted as *strongly agree*. The strongest behaviors were following rules/instructions ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = .456$ ) and preferring gamified over traditional listening ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = .631$ ), alongside active participation ( $M = 4.59$ ) and striving for rewards ( $M = 4.50$ ). Comparatively lower, yet positive, were completing all tasks when difficult ( $M = 4.00$ ) and encouraging classmates ( $M = 4.18$ ), both in the *agree* band, suggesting room to strengthen perseverance and peer prompting.

For emotional engagement, the average of this engagement was  $M = 4.49$  ( $SD = .658$ ), a *strongly agree* interpretation. Participants reported high enjoyment ( $M = 4.64$ ), motivation ( $M = 4.68$ ), a sense of accomplishment ( $M = 4.68$ ), and sustained interest via competitive elements ( $M = 4.68$ ), with many looking forward to future sessions ( $M = 4.50$ ) and experiencing reduced stress ( $M = 4.45$ ). Notably, “feeling less anxious” was lower ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.046$ ), indicating that while the effect is largely positive, anxiety persists for some students and may warrant additional scaffolding.

For cognitive engagement, the overall mean was  $M = 4.37$  ( $SD = .662$ ), indicating *strong agreement*. Students reported actively challenging themselves to improve listening comprehension ( $M = 4.41$ ), applying listening strategies ( $M = 4.32$ ), and sustaining focus during gamified tasks ( $M = 4.36$ ). They also valued the role of gamified listening in enhancing their ability to process spoken English ( $M = 4.36$ ) and in attempting to use new vocabulary or phrases ( $M = 4.36$ ). The highest-rated item was analyzing content to identify key ideas and details ( $M = 4.64$ ), showing deeper cognitive processing. Transfer of strategies to real-world conversations ( $M = 4.32$ ) was also noted. By contrast, reflective practice ( $M = 4.18$ ) received the lowest rating, suggesting that additional scaffolding may be needed to foster more deliberate reflection and consolidation of learning.

From the three dimensions surveyed, participants reported high overall engagement ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = .645$ ). Gamified listening most strongly energized the emotional dimension, such as enjoyment, motivation, accomplishment, and competitive interest were consistently high. Similarly, behavioral engagement was also strong, reflected in rule-following, active participation, and a clear preference for gamified over traditional listening tasks. Cognitive engagement was likewise high, with sustained focus, deeper processing of key ideas, and strategy use/transfer to real contexts. The pattern suggests that gamification reliably drives broad engagement, though perseverance when conducting difficult tasks, peer

encouragement, anxiety reduction, and structured reflection remain priority areas for targeted scaffolding.

### RQ3. What are students' perceptions of the gamified listening activities?

Regarding the overall experience with gamified listening activities conducted in the class, all six participants of the focus group held a positive attitude towards the use of the gamified format that was more stimulating, enjoyable, and motivating. They emphasized that the combination of competitive elements, such as points, levels, leaderboard, interactive design, and immediate feedback, helped them maintain focus. Below are the excerpts collected from the participants' interviews.

*"In normal listening exercises, I sometimes lose focus halfway, but with the game, I feel I must keep listening to win points."* (S2)

*"The leaderboard made me motivated when I saw the score. It's more exciting than just answering questions from an audio track and filling in the coursebook. The game features were colorful, and the music aroused my feelings."* (S4)

*"The leaderboard made me want to improve each time I finished the activity. Once, I found that my score was higher than my competitors, I meant my friends. I felt accomplished."* (S6)

Several participants noted that gamification reduced the monotony often associated with traditional listening practice, describing it as "less like a test" and "more like a challenge."

*"It doesn't feel like an exam. I enjoy competing with my friends and seeing my score immediately."* (S1)

*"I felt more relaxed by doing this kind of learning activity than marking on the answer sheet. It was like playing a game at home."* (S5)

Students perceived gamified listening activities as highly effective in improving their listening skills, particularly general comprehension and contextual understanding in hotel-related situations. All six students unanimously reported that the gamified activities helped them follow and understand hotel industry-related conversations more effectively. This aligns with the significant improvements in listening scores shown in RQ1. The repeated exposure to realistic dialogues and role-specific scenarios enhanced their confidence in comprehending both the main ideas and specific details.

*“The Kahoot! Quizzes helped me understand the sequences of handling guests’ complaints, being able to start conversations, carry out talks, and end with the solutions for guests’ issues.” (S1)*

*“When we listened to check-in and check-out conversations, I could catch more details after a few weeks of playing Kahoot!. At first, it was difficult, but I improved.” (S3)*

Interview data demonstrated that gamified listening activities significantly enhanced students’ mastery of vocabulary, and the acquisition and retention of hotel-specific vocabulary was a major perceived benefit. Students consistently attributed these gains to repeated exposure to authentic hotel dialogues, embedded in competitive and interactive formats. They emphasized that the gamified tasks not only helped them recall key terms during gameplay but also facilitated the use of the language while participating in other class activities (e.g., role-play scenarios, hotel presentation) and imagined real-world scenarios. Excerpts from the interviewed students are shown below (as illustrated in S3, S5, S6).

*“Before, I sometimes forgot the hotel vocabulary we learned in class. But in Kahoot!, when the question came with a picture of seating styles in a meeting, I recognized the terms like ‘theater style’ or ‘horseshoe style’.” (S3)*

One student reflected on the benefit of contextual use (see S5), while another student highlighted the role of repetition and competition (see S6).

*“When I heard phrases like ‘continental breakfast’ or ‘banquet arrangement’ in the listening games, I understood better because they came with situations, like a guest ordering or asking questions. It made it easier to use them in my speaking.” (S5)*

*“The game made me want to answer faster, so I tried to remember the vocabulary quickly. Words like ‘aperitif’ and ‘appetizer’ are now clear for me because I saw them many times in different questions.” (S6)*

Students’ perceptions of gamified listening activities could also be interpreted through the three interrelated engagement dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive, which aligned with Fredricks et al. (2004, 59-109). The following sections present these three dimensions in detail, supported by illustrative excerpts from participants.

### **Behavioral Engagement**

It appeared through students’ consistent participation and adherence to rules (see S2). They reported being more alert and willing to participate, as the competitive structure

encouraged careful listening and quick responses. Immediate feedback in *Kahoot!* further motivated them to stay focused throughout the activity (see S4).

*“In normal listening exercises, I sometimes get distracted. But when it’s a game, I want to keep up with the ranking, so I focus more and follow every instruction.” (S2)*

*“I didn’t want to lose points, so I made sure to complete every question, even the hard ones. It made me put in more effort than usual.” (S4)*

### **Emotional Engagement**

It was reflected in students’ enthusiasm, enjoyment, and reduced anxiety. They described gamified listening as “fun,” “exciting,” and “less boring” than traditional tasks, with motivation driven by competition and the satisfaction of correct answers. This positive emotion made them look forward to future listening practice rather than avoid it (as illustrated in S3, S2).

*“I felt more motivated and fun when I saw my name move up on the leaderboard. Even if I got something wrong, I still wanted to try again next time.” (S3)*

*“Usually, listening tests make me nervous, but the game felt less serious and less boring. I could still learn without feeling too much pressure.” (S2)*

### **Cognitive Engagement**

It emerged through students’ use of listening strategies and deeper content processing. They reported applying prediction and inference to improve speed and accuracy (see S5), while the time-limited format of *Kahoot!* encouraged quick analysis and efficient information processing (see S4).

*“I started to remember patterns, like how certain hotel terms are used. It made me connect the listening with real situations in hotels.” (S5)*

*“Because the time was short, I had to listen carefully for the main idea and choose the best answer quickly. It trained my brain to work faster.” (S4)*

Although most comments were positive, a few participants suggested adding more team-based games and opportunities for post-game discussion to consolidate learning and reduce pressure for those who felt anxious about competition (see S1, S3).

*“It would be nice to sometimes play in teams so the pressure is not all on one person.” (S1)*

*“I enjoy the competition, but maybe after the game, we could talk about the answers together.” (S3)*

Overall, students expressed positive perceptions of gamified listening, finding that it not only enhanced their listening skills but also that it was more engaging, motivating, and enjoyable than traditional listening tasks. Competitive features such as points, leaderboards, and instant feedback sustained focus and reduced monotony, while repeated exposure to authentic dialogues improved comprehension of hotel-related situations and reinforced hospitality and hotel-specific vocabulary. Engagement was evident in students' active participation, enjoyment, reduced anxiety, and their use of strategic listening and deeper processing of content through reinforced critical thinking. Students agreed that gamification enhanced both skills and motivation, though a few suggested incorporating team-based formats and post-game discussions to consolidate learning and ease the pressure associated with individual competition.

## Discussion

The discussion of this study is organized according to the three research questions, presented sequentially to align with the research objectives and to provide a coherent interpretation of the findings.

1) The findings showed that gamified listening activities significantly improved students' performance in the cohort, particularly in general comprehension and hotel-specific vocabulary. This supports research showing that gamification transforms passive listening into active, goal-oriented engagement, enhancing comprehension and retention (Sailer et al., 2017, 371-380; Zainuddin et al., 2020, 1-23) and affirms Field's (2008, 267-268) view that listening instruction should incorporate contextualized, real-world tasks. Vocabulary gains were most notable, reinforcing Anthony's (2018) claim that ESP learners benefit from language practice embedded in professional contexts. As Basturkmen (2010) and Nation (2001, 114-143) emphasize, vocabulary is central to professional communication, and in this study, the competitive, feedback-rich nature of gamification appeared to strengthen retention through repeated exposure and retrieval (Hamari et al., 2014, 3025-3034). The great improvement in hotel-specific vocabulary also aligns with prior research showing that gamified learning enhances lexical acquisition through repetition and feedback (Zainuddin et al., 2020, 1-23; Panmei & Waluyo, 2022, 1-22; Waluyo et al., 2023, 1-17; Waluyo & Balazon, 2024, 1-13). Because vocabulary items are discrete and easily embedded into game-based tasks, learners benefited from immediate feedback and frequent retrieval, supporting Nation's (2001, 114-

143) principle that frequency and meaningful use promote long-term retention in ESP contexts. In contrast, smaller gains in scenario-based listening suggest that gamification may better support vocabulary and discrete skills than discourse-level comprehension. Since extended workplace dialogues require pragmatic awareness and sustained processing, this may reflect the challenge of aligning game mechanics with complex communicative tasks and the traditional Thai EFL focus on grammar and vocabulary (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2012, 331-344). Gamification is most effective in ESP listening when the requirements of the task match the abilities of game mechanics to improve quick recognition, focused attention, and frequent retrieval of specialized vocabulary. Conversely, discourse-level comprehension may necessitate supplementary supports that are less suited to time-constrained, score-oriented formats (e.g., guided reflection, strategy instruction, or post-listening discussion), suggesting that gamification may initially enhance item-level listening outcomes while higher-order scenario comprehension evolves through complementary instructional strategies.

2) The results indicated strong engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, confirming gamification's value in sustaining learner interest and participation (Fredricks et al., 2004, 59-109; Aguilos et al., 2022, 1098-1103). Emotional engagement was most pronounced, with students reporting enjoyment, motivation, accomplishment, and sustained interest through competitive features (Zainuddin et al., 2020, 1-23; Deterding et al., 2011, 9-15). This pattern suggests that engagement theory may manifest differently in ESP contexts, where affective responses play a central role in motivating hospitality students. The findings do not refute Fredricks et al.'s (2004, 59-109) theory; rather, they indicate that in hospitality ESP listening, the affective dimension may serve as a principal catalyst that invigorates behavioral engagement and fosters prolonged attention. The three elements remain valuable. However, their relative significance may vary depending on the context in professional language acquisition. Behaviorally, learners preferred gamified activities over traditional tasks, supporting Dichev and Dicheva's (2017, 9) finding that clear rules and feedback enhance effort and persistence. Cognitive engagement also emerged through the strategies and deeper processing of hotel-related input (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Zainuddin et al., 2020, 1-23). However, weaker persistence with difficult tasks and limited reflection (Waluyo et al., 2023, 1-17) suggest a need for designs that balance immediate engagement with opportunities for resilience and deeper learning. Engagement was closely linked to listening development, as students showing higher behavioral and emotional engagement

performed better in listening tasks, indicating that attention, enjoyment, and participation supported deeper processing of auditory input (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). Beyond these patterns, students' sustained motivation can also be explained through Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which highlights competence, autonomy, and relatedness as drivers of intrinsic motivation. The gamified activities fulfilled these needs by offering feedback and visible progress that fostered competence, self-paced participation promoting autonomy (Nilubol, 2023, 24-38), and leaderboards that encouraged social connection. When these needs were met, students demonstrated greater persistence, satisfaction, and engagement, leading to improved listening development. This perspective underscores a conflict frequently addressed in SDT-informed analyses of gamification. Although feedback and progress indicators might enhance competence, points and leaderboards may redirect focus towards external comparisons and performance results. This study revealed a dichotomy in students' responses, while many expressed drive and delight, others encountered competitive anxiety, indicating that the motivational advantages may hinge on whether game mechanics are viewed as informational input or as a method of managing social assessment.

3) Interview data supported these findings, revealing students' positive perceptions of gamified listening activities. They consistently described the tasks as more enjoyable than traditional exercises and credited game elements, such as points, leaderboards, and rewards that enhance attention and participation, reflecting both emotional and behavioral engagement (Girardelli, 2017, 156-161; Govindarajan, 2020, 238-251; Hwang & Choi, 2020, 365-376). Vocabulary acquisition was also noted as a major benefit, as repeated exposure in competitive contexts improved recall, consistent with statistical results. However, some participants reported anxiety stemming from competition, echoing survey findings and suggesting the need for balance through collaborative elements to reduce stress while sustaining engagement (Zainuddin et al., 2020, 1-23). Similar observations have also been found that excessive competition can diminish intrinsic motivation and create performance pressure. Thus, such anxiety may reflect the tension between collaboration-oriented learning cultures and individual competition (Hanus & Fox, 2015, 152-161; Mekler et al., 2017, 525-534). This response may also reflect contextual expectations in Thai higher education, where classroom harmony and face-saving concerns can make public ranking feel high-stakes for some learners. In such contexts, competitive visibility may amplify anxiety even when overall engagement is high, although this interpretation is offered cautiously because culture interacts

with individual differences and classroom climate. Future applications should therefore integrate both competitive and cooperative components, such as team-based challenges or reflective discussions, to maintain motivation while minimizing stress and fostering inclusive participation.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of gamified listening activities in developing English listening skills and engagement among Thai EFL university students in Hospitality English. Using a mixed-methods design with pretest and posttest, surveys, and semi-structured interviews, firstly, the results showed significant improvement in hotel-specific vocabulary, followed by general comprehension and scenario-based listening within the sample group. Secondly, the activities also fostered strong engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Emotional engagement was most evident, as students reported enjoyment, motivation, and a sense of accomplishment encouraged by points, leaderboards, and rewards. Behavioral engagement appeared through consistent participation, persistence, and a preference for gamified activities over traditional exercises, while cognitive engagement was reflected in deeper processing of listening input. Thirdly, despite these positive outcomes, smaller gains in scenario-based listening and reports of anxiety suggest that gamified tasks alone may not fully prepare learners for real-world, authentic, professional communication.

These limitations may reflect both the challenges of transferring skills to discourse-level tasks and the competitive nature of game mechanics. The findings, therefore, emphasize the need for balanced instructional designs that integrate competition with collaboration, scaffolding, and reflection. With such adjustments, gamified listening activities can serve as an effective approach to enhance language performance and engagement, ultimately supporting the development of listening skills essential for success in the hospitality industry.

## Implication

The results indicate that gamified listening exercises are beneficial in ESP training, especially within the hotel and hospitality sector. Instead of employing gamified listening activities intermittently, they should be consistently integrated into lessons to enhance engagement and motivation, as Fredricks et al.'s (2004) framework demonstrates, which shows how these activities can elevate students' participation, emotions, and cognitive processes in ESP listening. Clear improvements in vocabulary and comprehension demonstrate the benefits

of repeated exposure, immediate feedback, and retrieval practice, all of which are naturally provided by gamified tasks through cycles of listening, response, and reinforcement.

Pedagogically, these results provide practical guidance for instructors and curriculum developers. Teachers can use gamified tools such as *Kahoot!* to reinforce key vocabulary and comprehension while sustaining motivation through point-based and interactive challenges. Curriculum designers and educational administrators may also consider incorporating structured gamified modules into ESP courses to enhance engagement and active learning as a part of the course design. Although the study's primary implications are academic, the enhanced listening competence of hospitality students indirectly contributes to professional and social benefits by preparing a more communicatively capable workforce for Thailand's tourism and service industries.

### Limitations

This study possesses limitations that must be acknowledged when evaluating the results. Initially, the participants comprised tourism and hospitality majors from a singular cohort; hence, the findings may not apply to students from different fields or institutions. The intervention was executed and assessed by a sole instructor, so instructor-related variables (e.g., pedagogical approach, classroom atmosphere, encouragement of gamified activities) may have impacted participation and results. Ultimately, while the 12-week length was adequate to assess pre-post changes, it does not permit judgments regarding long-term retention or the sustainability of benefits over extended periods.

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