

Gamified Student Response Systems for ESL Classrooms: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamic landscape of Student Response Systems (SRS), commonly known as Clickers in the context of ESL classrooms. It critically analyses five prominent gamified SRS tools, Kahoot, Nearpod, Socrative, Padlet, and Quizlet, to assess their unique features and contributions to ESL education. This study investigates three primary aspects: educational support, game elements, and language skill enhancement. It was found that SRSs significantly enhanced students' involvement, learning quality, and assessment effectiveness. Kahoot and Nearpod have emerged as the top contenders, offering extensive gamification and comprehensive support for various language skills. This analysis provides ESL educators with valuable information on selecting the most appropriate SRS to enhance their teaching strategies. By understanding the strengths and capabilities of these gamified SRS tools, educators can create dynamic and interactive ESL learning environments, ultimately enhancing language acquisition and proficiency.

Keywords: Student Response Systems; Engagement; Motivation; Gamification.

Introduction

In ESL classrooms, educators face an ongoing challenge: the struggle to sustain students' engagement and motivation. ESL instruction demands active participation and consistent practice to achieve language proficiency, yet many ESL learners often grapple with disinterest and lack of motivation, leading to suboptimal learning outcomes. Traditional teaching methods fall short in capturing and retaining students' attention, resulting in an engagement crisis that impedes their language acquisition. Moreover, ESL teachers confront the difficulty of providing timely, individualized feedback and adapting instruction to diverse a student's needs. The conventional classroom setting poses limitations in addressing these issues effectively, exacerbating the problem.

This study addresses the engagement and motivation crises in ESL classes by exploring the potential of Student Response Systems (SRS), specifically gamified platforms such as Kahoot, Nearpod, Socrative, Padlet, and Quizlet. These SRS tools offer interactive features, immediate feedback, and gamified elements, which have the potential to reinvigorate ESL learning environments. Through a comprehensive analysis of these SRS tools, this research seeks to demonstrate how their integration can effectively motivate and engage ESL learners, ultimately improving language acquisition and enhancing the overall ESL classroom experience.

Student Response System (SRS)

Student Response System (SRS), also known as Clicker, is originally a small hand-held device with which students would remotely respond to the

questions posed by the teacher during lectures (Gok, 2011, p. 68). In the present scenario, SRSs are available as websites or applications that allow students to participate in real-time learning activities, such as quizzes, polls, and interactive presentations, using their hand-held smart devices in the classroom (Carnaghan et al., 2011).

Studies suggest that SRS supports three major areas: (a) student involvement (in terms of attendance, attention, participation, and engagement), (b) learning (in terms of interaction, discussion, contingent teaching, learning performance, and quality of learning), and (c) assessment (in terms of feedback, formative assessment, and comparison of students' performance) (Dangel & Wang, 2008; Gok, 2011; Han & Finkelstein, 2013; Liu et al., 2019). Since SRSs provide immediate feedback to teachers and students, they help teachers adjust their instruction on the go, and students fill gaps in their learning through peer or classroom discussion (Kay & LeSage, 2009). Thus, it becomes apparent from the extant literature on SRS that the use of SRS in the classroom results in numerous pedagogical benefits such as increasing students' motivation, learning, engagement, competitiveness, cooperation among peers, and interaction between teacher and students.

Objectives of the Study

This paper attempts to critically analyse the following popular gamified SRS tools that are currently available for use in the ESL classroom: Kahoot, Socrative, Nearpod, Padlet, and Quizlet. These tools are compared in various aspects to better understand their unique features and affordances for language classes.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, this paper answers the following research questions:

- What educational aspects are supported by the selected gamified SRS tools?
- What elements of the game are available in the selected gamified SRS tools?
- What language skills are supported by the selected gamified SRS tools?

Research Method:

This study is qualitative in nature. The gamified SRSs that are chosen for this study are compared against the following criteria: aspects of learning supported, use of game elements, and affordances offered by the tool to teach specific language skills. Such a comparison will assist English language teachers in selecting an SRS relevant to their needs and in understanding the difficulties in using these SRS platforms. This study reviews five popular Student Response Systems namely Kahoot, Nearpod, Socrative, Padlet, and Quizlet.

1. Kahoot

Kahoot, a quiz-based student response system, has gained prominence in English-language classrooms due to its gamified pedagogical approach (Benhadj et al., 2019; Fotaris et al., 2016). Teachers design quizzes on the platform, projecting questions onto a screen, while students respond using personal devices. This dynamic improves participation, collaborative active learning (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018), and linguistic proficiency. Kahoot's gamified quizzes contain types of questions such as multiple choice, true/false, short answers, drag and drop, and audio-based questions. After the students answer each question, a scoreboard is displayed for them, while the teacher is presented with a leaderboard that identifies the top five scorers. In addition, teachers also receive a colourful bar graph summarising students' answers. This graph is

helpful for teachers to monitor student comprehension and mastery of the topic (Fotaris et al., 2016). Kahoot's game elements such as points, characters, scoreboard, leaderboard, podium, and verbal and visual feedback make it a perfect platform for self-assessment and formative assessment. These elements transform a classroom into a fun and engaging learning environment and help learners quickly master new knowledge (Fotaris et al., 2016).

2. Socrative

Socrative, a flexible and interactive student response system, finds application within English language classrooms by facilitating interactive and formative assessment practices. This platform enables educators to gauge student understanding in real time through quizzes, polls, and open-ended questions. As students respond via personal devices, the instructor receives instant feedback, allowing for timely instructional adjustments. This aligns with the principles of formative assessment, fostering continuous learning improvement. By fostering active participation and reflective engagement, Socrative contributes to peer interaction and enhanced English language comprehension and expression within the classroom context. It also promotes active learning, a positive attitude, and an interactive class (Kaya & Balta, 2016).

3. Nearpod

Nearpod is an interactive presentation tool with features such as gamified quizzes, polls, collaborative boards, and so on. Using Nearpod in a language classroom supports active learning and increases interactivity, collaboration, and student satisfaction (Jing & Yue, 2016), since it supports different ways to engage students in the class (Dong et al., 2018). Teachers can create lessons with a free account, and students can join them

through their devices. Although students can access the lessons on their devices, teachers have control over the pace of the presentation. Students can respond to quizzes and polls, and participate in various activities including collaborative boards. While teaching a lesson, teachers receive a lot of data about students' performance in various forms: qualitative, quantitative, and visual. These data help teachers provide constructive feedback to students or modify their instruction. All these features make Nearpod an excellent SRS tool to be used for formative and self-assessment (Burton, 2019).

4. Padlet

Padlet offers virtual bulletin boards to gather and organise ideas, review and summarise them, and receive feedback (Fisher, 2017; Sangeetha, 2016). Incorporating Padlet in online learning platforms for students and teachers transforms classrooms into fun-filled, non-threatening, and collaborative environments (Taufikurohman, 2018). Teachers can post topics/questions on Padlet walls for students to review the topic, hold discussions, and write assignments. They can also share materials and evaluate students' comprehension in real time (Fisher, 2017). Students can respond to teachers' questions in the form of words, pictures, videos, links and other related materials. Both teachers and students will be able to add comments and offer feedback that will lead students to reflect on their performance (Rashid et al., 2019). Many research studies highlight the benefits of using Padlet in the classroom, such as improved teacher-student relationships, increased motivation and self-esteem, and various modes of interaction in the classroom (Rashid et al., 2019).

5. Quizlet

Quizlet, an interactive SRS, is significant in tapping different learning domains as it encourages active

student participation and assessment of vocabulary through digital flashcards (Nguyen et al., 2021). Quizlet provides a variety of ways, such as flashcards, quizzes, and games, for students to engage with language-related material. Teachers can create quizzes and assessments that students can respond to by students on their devices in real time. They can also create customised study sets that include terms, their definitions, and their context-specific usage. With the audio feature in Quizlet, students can practise listening and pronunciation (Thi Thu & Satomi, 2021). Similarly, reading can be practised through activities such as menu scatter and space race, and writing skills can be enhanced through activities such as speller, test, and space race. Teachers can monitor individual progress and identify areas of improvement, aligning with the principles of formative assessment. Students can access a particular test repeatedly until they are satisfied with their performance. The results of the test are stored on the website. Students can review them, and receive feedback on their performance. Gamified components, such as timed quizzes and competitive games, stimulate motivation, active participation, and positive attitude, and provide immersive learning opportunities (Çinar& Ari, 2019; Sanosi, 2018; Thi Thu & Satomi, 2021).

Analysis and Discussion

1. Educational Aspects Supported by SRSs

SRSs support four main educational aspects: teaching/pedagogy, learning, assessment, and classroom management. The viability of using SRSs to teach in real-time is an essential feature regarding teaching/pedagogical aspect. All selected SRSs have the option to teach in real time. Students can access the content and activities created by teachers in real-time in these SRSs using the codes generated by the teacher.

While Kahoot, Nearpod, Socrative, and Quizlet look similar to presentations, Padlet looks like a bulletin board to which all students contribute their ideas. Polls are another excellent pedagogical strategy available in these SRSs. Conducting polls can initiate discussions in the classroom and help identify students' preferences. Kahoot, Socrative, Nearpod, and Padlet have polls as one of the many features they have. But Quizlet does not have a poll feature. All selected SRSs allow teachers to provide multimodal inputs such as visuals, audiovisuals, audio, and text. Another interesting teaching strategy embedded in all these SRSs is gamification. Gamification is using game elements in a non-gaming context. All the SRSs under study make use of game elements such as points, leaderboards, avatars or characters. These elements make students engaged in learning and motivated to participate in the activities and relieve their anxiety. Specifically, gamified quizzes such as 'Time to Climb' in Nearpod, 'Space Race' in Socrative, and 'Live' in Quizlet excite students.

Many research studies confirm that SRSs support the learning aspect effectively (G. Kaya & Sagnak, 2022). The ability to view peers' work eventually allows students to learn from each other. Such an option is available only in Padlet and Quizlet while Kahoot, Nearpod, and Socrative do not let students see their peers' work. Collaborative learning is another feature worth mentioning. Padlet, Socrative, and Kahoot have options to make students collaborate and contribute to the success of their team. All selected SRSs allow students to participate in activities anonymously. This feature enables students to interact with teachers, peers, and content confidently through their comments, suggestions, and feedback. Students can also respond in multiple modes – text, pictures, audio, and video. In addition to live mode, these SRSs

also have self-paced modes in which students can learn at their convenient time and pace.

Researchers also highlight the nature of SRSs as assessment tools (G. Kaya & Sagnak, 2022). All selected SRSs under study are suitable for formative assessment as they have the provision to conduct assessments used while teaching. Additionally, these SRSs except Padlet have assessment tasks that can be conducted in real-time and provide immediate feedback. For example, Kahoot and Socrative notify correct answers, and how well students have performed through points, leaderboard and comments. Peer feedback can be provided in Nearpod, Socrative, and Padlet in the form of likes, ratings, and comments. This facility is not available on Kahoot and Quizlet. Students can also monitor and compare their progress with others using the leaderboards and graphs shown on these SRSs. Though Padlet does not have any such leaderboard or graph, students can see their peers' work directly and compare theirs with others' work. This comparison in turn instils a competitive spirit among students.

SRSs are also helpful in effective classroom management. In all the SRSs under study, students can join the activities only by entering the codes/PINs generated by the teacher. This feature ensures that these SRSs are secure. Additionally, the names are also displayed on the teacher's screen when students join the activities

through their devices. Hence, teachers can easily track students' attendance and participation precisely throughout the lessons/activities. SRSs also play a pivotal role in behavioural governance, enabling instructors to address misconduct by employing measures such as temporarily banning/muting students from classroom activities. The assignment of students to different teams is another interesting feature of managing a large group of students. This feature is available in Kahoot, Socrative, and Padlet. Content/activities in all these SRSs can be designed, edited, and controlled by the teachers. Especially during real-time teaching, teachers have the control to move students to different activities or content. One of the serious problems that Indian ESL teachers face is the large classes wherein there are more than 40 students. All SRSs can accommodate up to 50 students. When there are more than 50 students in a class, teachers can launch the same lesson on two different browsers and admit more students. Padlet and Quizlet do not have any maximum limit to the number of students.

Of all the SRSs considered in this study, Nearpod stands out as the best SRS in all four educational aspects. It has a variety of interesting activities and content. It also has a library of content and activities prepared by other teachers around the world, sorted according to subjects and levels. The following table (Table 1) summarises the educational aspects supported by the SRSs under study.

Table 1 Educational Aspects Supported by SRSs

Aspects of Learning	Kahoot	Nearpod	Socrative	Padlet	Quizlet
Teaching/ Pedagogical strategies					
Teaching in real-time (Live)	4	4	4	4	4
Conducting polls	4	4	4	4	4
Providing multimodal inputs	4	4	4	4	4
Implementing gamification	4	4	4	4	4
Learning					
Learning from peers				4	4
Learning collaboratively	4		4	4	
Participating anonymously	4	4	4	4	4
Conducting engaging activities	4	4	4	4	4
Interacting with others		4	4	4	
Multimodality	4	4	4	4	4
Self-paced learning	4	4	4	4	4
Assessment					
Formative assessment	4	4	4	4	4
Real-time assessment	4	4	4		4
Immediate feedback	4	4	4	4	4
Peer feedback	4	4	4	4	4
Peer comparison	4	4	4	4	4
Monitoring progress	4	4	4	4	4
Classroom Management					
Tracking attendance	4	4	4	4	4
Removing/banning students	4	4	4	4	4
Grouping students	4	4	4	4	4
Controlling content	4	4	4	4	4
Monitoring students	4	4	4	4	4
Accommodating large classes	4	4	4	4	4

2. Game elements available in SRSs

Three types of game elements are present in SRSs: Components, Mechanics, and Dynamics (Goethe, 2019; Werbach & Hunter, 2015). Game components are distinctly visible representations in a game or gamified system (Werbach & Hunter, 2015). There are various game components used in SRSs: points, scoreboards, leaderboards, avatars, levels, quests, and teams. Points are numerical representations of the gain of a player. Except for Padlet, all four other SRSs offer points to students based on how fast and accurately they answer the questions. A scoreboard refers to a display that displays the scores or points achieved by players during a game. It is a visual representation of the performance of individual players. They provide immediate feedback to players about their performance and progress within the game. Of the SRSs under study, Kahoot, Nearpod, and Socrative alone have scoreboards while Padlet and Quizlet do not have that feature. Unlike scoreboards, leaderboards display the top-performing players' scores, achievements, and progression in rank order. They foster competition among players by allowing them to compare their performance against others and strive to achieve higher rankings. Except Padlet, all the other four SRSs display leaderboards on teachers' screens throughout and at the end. Levels in games refer to steps in player progression. Of the SRSs selected for this study, Quizlet alone has levels – 'Learn', 'Test', and 'Match' – which students have to complete in the same sequence without skipping any of them. Avatars are game components that represent a player of the game on the game screen. All the selected SRSs except Padlet have avatars or nicknames in some way or the other to personalise the immersive experience of the gameplay. Kahoot has bitmojis; Nearpod has animal avatars; Socrative has

characters; and Quizlet has animal characters. Quests in games are challenges that a student/player must overcome. Nearpod, Socrative, and Quizlet have quests namely 'Time to Climb', 'Space Race', and 'Quizlet Live'. Teams are another game component that allows players to work together as a group. All selected SRSs except Nearpod have the ability to create teams.

Game mechanics are the fundamental game elements that initiate participants' actions within a game. It encompasses challenges, competition, feedback, cooperation, rewards, resource acquisition, transactions, win states, and turns (Goethe, 2019, p. 73). These mechanics are responsible for fostering the engagement of players (Werbach & Hunter, 2015). In the SRSs under study, only two game mechanics are integrated: competition and feedback. Competition refers to a state in which players focus solely on maximising their own performance to overtake other players. It motivates students and can be leveraged by a scoreboard that displays students' points and places in the ranking order. Kahoot creates a competitive environment throughout by displaying scoreboards and leaderboards to students. Socrative, Nearpod, and Quizlet also have features such as 'Time to Climb', 'Space Race', and 'Quizlet Live' to create competitive environments. On the other hand, Padlet does not encourage a competitive environment but a collaborative environment where students work together to develop or generate ideas. Feedback is the guiding direction offered to students with regard to their performance. In SRSs, students receive feedback in various forms: comments, ratings, points, ranks, and visual and audio cues. All SRSs, except Padlet, generate comments, points, ranks, and visual and audio cues. On the contrary, Padlet does not generate these kinds of feedback automatically but has the provision

for students to manually give feedback and ratings on peers' performance.

Game dynamics refers to the elements of the game related to its structure. Narrative, constraints, emotions, and progressions are some of the game dynamics used in the SRSs. Narrative is a common game dynamic that deals with a sequence of events in a game. Technically, it can also refer to level progression (Goethe, 2019, p. 77). Of the SRSs that were analysed in this study, Nearpod and Socrative alone have narratives. Nearpod has a gamified activity called 'Time to Climb', in which students virtually run and climb a mountain answering questions correctly. Similarly, Socrative has a 'Space Race' activity where teams of students race towards the goal. Constraints are game dynamics that increase the difficulty of a task by setting time limits and adding distractors for students (Werbach & Hunter, 2015, p. 21). Except for Padlet, all the other SRSs have time limits and the possibility of adding distractors. Emotions are another game dynamic that is tapped into while using SRSs. For example, a challenge or quest ignites excitement and competitive spirit, correct answers bring success and happiness, whereas wrong answers result in frustration and fear. Kahoot, Nearpod, Socrative, and Quizlet kindle various emotions in students through other game elements such as points, leaderboard, scoreboard,

feedback, avatars, and game aesthetics such as colours, visuals, and sounds. Progression is a game dynamic that gives players a sense of direction and movement. The players learn new things and acquire new skills as they progress. All selected SRSs except Padlet have the game dynamic progression. Students build on their skills as they continue to use these SRSs. Kahoot, Nearpod, Socrative, and Quizlet have progression bars that provides insight about students' progression.

In addition to the above-mentioned three types of game elements, there is an aesthetical side of games which primarily deals with the sensory and emotional aspects of game players. The aesthetical side helps create an engaging and appealing game environment through auditory and visual effects (Goethe, 2019, p. 86). Kahoot, Nearpod, Socrative, and Quizlet have auditory effects such as adaptive background music, cues, etc., and visual effects such as background colours, charts, animations, etc. The 'Celebration dance' is a worthy audiovisual element in Kahoot. However, Padlet has no auditory or visual effects.

A comparative analysis of the selected SRSs with regard to their use of game elements reveals that Kahoot and Nearpod are highly gamified SRSs. The following table (Table 2) highlights the game elements available in the SRSs under study.

Table 2 Game elements available in SRSs

Game Elements	Kahoot	Nearpod	Socrative	Padlet	Quizlet
Game Components					
Scoreboard	4	4	4		4
Avatars	4	4	4		4
Leaderboards	4	4	4		4
Levels					4
Points	4	4	4		4
Quests		4	4		4
Teams	4		4		4
Game Mechanics					
Competition	4	4	4		4
Feedback	4	4	4	4	4
Game Dynamics					
Constraints	4	4	4		4
Emotions	4	4	4	4	4
Progression		4	4		4
Game aesthetics					
Audio cues	4	4			4
Visual cues	4	4	4		4

3. English Language Skills Supported by SRSs

Many research studies emphasise that SRSs are effective in teaching English vocabulary and grammar. Kahoot, as demonstrated by Medina, E. G. L., & Hurtado, (2017), enhances motivation and facilitates vocabulary acquisition. Srisakonwat, (2022) highlights that Nearpod positively impacts the learning of grammar and vocabulary. Socrative, according to Rahmawati&Liskinasih (2022), improves vocabulary skills. Alabbad (2020) discuss the role

of Padlet in enriching vocabulary. Waluyo&Bucol, (2021) underline the benefits of Quizlet in gamified vocabulary learning for low-proficiency students. Further, Rajapova (2023) illustrates Nearpod’s versatility in supporting writing, grammar, and vocabulary instruction.

Researchers have also documented the benefits of SRSs in teaching speaking skills. Nearpod is lauded for its facilitation of speaking skill development due to its provision of a high level of interactivity (Ryan, 2017). Similarly, Syahrizal&Rahayu (2020) underscore Padlet’s

role in supporting speaking activities. In addition, Kim & Cha (2019) accentuate the significant impact of Socrative on the development of speaking skills.

Studies also emphasise the importance of SRSs in enhancing reading, writing, and listening skills. Nearpod supports reading processes (Pupah&Sholihah, 2022), improves students' writing abilities (Lestari & Sihombing, 2022), and contributes to an increase in students' listening

abilities (Turahmah et al., 2023). Socrative sparks student interest in reading, leading to skill improvement (Fatmawaty&Sholihah, 2020), and substantially impacts listening skills (Kim & Cha, 2019). In the same way, studies report that Padlet enhances reading skills (Puspita et al., 2023), writing skills and motivation (Meletiadou, 2021; Taufikurohman, 2018) and listening skills (Alabbad&Huwamel, 2020). The following table (Table 3) presents an overview of language skills supported by SRS tools.

Table 3: Language skills supported by SRSs

Game Elements	Kahoot	Nearpod	Socrative	Padlet	Quizlet
Vocabulary	4	4	4	4	4
Grammar	4	4	4	4	
Reading	4	4	4	4	
Writing	4	4		4	
Listening	4	4	4	4	4
Speaking		4	4	4	

Conclusion

Based on the extensive analysis of various gamified SRSs in the ESL context, it is evident that these platforms offer significant potential to address the ongoing challenges of student engagement and motivation in language learning. The SRS tools examined in this study, including Kahoot, Socrative, Nearpod, Padlet, and Quizlet, have demonstrated the capacity to effectively support and enhance various educational aspects, game elements, and language skills in ESL classrooms. The findings of this study underscore the profound impact of SRSs on teaching, learning, assessment, and classroom management. Notably, these platforms enable real-time teaching, multimodal inputs, and gamification strategies that significantly enhance

students' engagement and participation. The incorporation of features such as polls, collaborative activities, and anonymous participation foster an inclusive and interactive learning environment. Moreover, the immediate and peer feedback mechanisms integrated into these platforms facilitate effective formative assessment, promoting a deeper understanding of the language and encouraging continuous improvement. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the SRS tools effectively support various language skills. By providing interactive and diverse learning activities, these platforms cater to the holistic development of language skills, thereby facilitating comprehensive language acquisition among ESL learners.

Overall, the comprehensive analysis of the

selected SRSs demonstrates that Kahoot and Nearpod are the most effective and efficient SRSs due to their comprehensive gamification elements and robust support for diverse language skills. By leveraging the interactive and engaging features of these SRS platforms, ESL educators can create vibrant learning environments that promote student engagement, collaboration, and motivation. By integrating these innovative SRS tools, ESL teachers can effectively address the engagement and motivation challenges, leading to an improved language acquisition and a more enriched ESL classroom experience.

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