



Fostering Intrinsic Motivation and Intercultural Writing Rhetoric Via Gamified Learning Platforms

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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study investigated the impact of gamified learning platforms on Vietnamese EFL learners' intrinsic motivation and intercultural writing rhetoric performance. Over an eight-week period, an experimental group (n = 60) engaged with a gamified architecture via Classcraft and Kahoot, while a control group (n = 60) followed standard process-based instruction. Quantitative data from pretests, posttests, and an adapted Intrinsic Motivation Inventory indicated that the gamified cohort achieved significantly higher scores across all motivational subscales and rhetorical dimensions, particularly in linear organization and cultural awareness. Stepwise regression confirmed that formative game performance strongly predicted final writing success. The study concludes that theory-driven gamification bridges psychological needs and advanced cognitive rhetoric in academic writing.

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian kuasi-eksperimental ini menyelidiki dampak platform pembelajaran tergamifikasi terhadap motivasi intrinsik dan kinerja retorika menulis antarbudaya mahasiswa EFL di Vietnam. Selama periode delapan minggu, kelompok eksperimen (n = 60) terlibat dengan arsitektur tergamifikasi melalui Classcraft dan Kahoot, sementara kelompok kontrol (n = 60) mengikuti instruksi berbasis proses standar. Data kuantitatif dari pretest, posttest, dan Intrinsic Motivation Inventory yang diadaptasi menunjukkan bahwa kohort tergamifikasi mencapai skor yang signifikan lebih tinggi di semua subskala motivasi dan dimensi retorika, terutama dalam organisasi linear dan kesadaran budaya. Regresi bertahap mengonfirmasi bahwa kinerja permainan formatif memprediksi kesuksesan menulis akhir secara kuat. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa gamifikasi berbasis teori menjembatani kebutuhan psikologis dan retorika kognitif tingkat lanjut dalam penulisan akademik.

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of intensive digital transformation and globalization, academic writing proficiency no longer merely encapsulates the mastery of formal linguistic structures, but has fundamentally expanded into the domain of intercultural writing rhetoric. Intercultural rhetoric research has evolved beyond the boundaries of static textual analysis toward a context-sensitive approach that encompasses diverse disciplines, genres, and social realities (Connor, 2004). As writers and audiences become increasingly diverse, the perceived norms of composing in academic English are shifting significantly, necessitating more flexible theoretical frameworks such as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and translanguaging to facilitate ongoing communication, negotiation, and accommodation (McIntosh et al., 2017). At its core, intercultural rhetoric entails the study of written discourse between and among individuals with different cultural backgrounds, examining how a writer's first language, culture, and educational history influence text production (Connor et al., 2016). This theoretical evolution has contributed immensely to applied linguistics, yet it introduces sophisticated challenges for classroom practices in a globalized educational landscape (Belcher, 2014).

From a broader perspective, intercultural communication intersects with issues of language teaching, cultural identity, and the profound impact of digital technology on cross-cultural encounters (Zhu, 2023). Scholars have approached this phenomenon through various lenses, comparing linguistic systems, cultural representations in computer-mediated environments, and the cultivation of learnable intercultural competencies (ten Thije, 2020). Ultimately, understanding these hidden, patterned cultural differences is paramount, as attempting to use a monocultural self as a predictor of shared assumptions inevitably results in ethnocentric mismatches (Katan, 2009). Individuals must therefore negotiate multiple identities across race, ethnicity, and culture within the interconnected network of global society (Chen & Starosta, 1996). Because capitalism has restructured on a global scale, linguistic contact occurs continuously through mass media, migration, and tourism, highlighting the discursive constructions of cultural identity and the sociolinguistic prestige of different language varieties (Piller, 2007). Consequently, English language teaching requires a paradigm shift away from utopian, unrealistic native-speaker norms toward a model that takes successful bilinguals with intercultural insights as pedagogic benchmarks (Alptekin, 2002).

Despite its necessity, teaching and learning second language (L2) academic writing remains an uphill battle due to the extreme cognitive burden and inherent complexity of the writing process (Luu & Bui, 2027). EFL learners frequently confront debilitating affective barriers, most notably writing anxiety, which stems from a fear of negative evaluation and insufficient linguistic knowledge, thereby severely hindering academic achievement (Luu & Nguyen, 2027). During text generation, postgraduate L2 writers must engage in translanguaging negotiations, attempting to adapt and maneuver between L1 and L2 academic conventions based on their proficiency levels and disciplinary contexts (Ene et al., 2019). Hesitation and communication avoidance within these cross-cultural encounters are often tied to an acute fear of making mistakes, although such pauses can occasionally be reframed as strategic tools to ensure cultural appropriateness (Luu, 2026a). To counteract these challenges, fostering real-world communication readiness requires narrative-based, emotionally engaging instructional experiences that can lower anxiety, reduce cultural stereotypes, and cultivate genuine emotional empathy (Luu, 2026b).

Within these diverse educational settings, intrinsic motivation serves as a vital engine for sustaining learner engagement and positive psychological adaptation (Li et al., 2025). When students are intrinsically motivated, they experience learning activities as an end in itself, which enhances persistence, maximizes interest, and fosters deeper processing of information



(Fishbach & Woolley, 2022; Larson & Rusk, 2011). In multilingual environments, students involved in cross-cultural projects typically demonstrate higher intrinsic than extrinsic motivation, with mentor support and interpersonal relationships acting as pivotal elements in shaping their intercultural communicative competence (Liu & Yin, 2024). However, conventional cross-cultural training models occasionally neglect these profound motivational obstacles when nurturing cultural intelligence (Hong, 2017).

Even within intercultural computer-supported collaborative learning (iCSCL) environments, different cultural backgrounds can yield varying sources of intrinsic motivation, requiring specific pedagogical strategies to align student expectations and participation (MacLeod et al., 2017). This underlines the necessity of integrating digital language exchanges to personalize learning, which significantly boosts student motivation and willingness to communicate (Aladini & Gheisari, 2025). Furthermore, an activity-related incentive or the experience of "flow" can be generated when an activity provides positive incentives per se (Rheinberg & Engeser, 2018). Crucially, the operationalization of intrinsic motivation must respect cultural nuances; while personal choice enhances motivation for independent Western selves, learners with interdependent models of the self often prove most intrinsically motivated when choices are endorsed by trusted peers or authority figures (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

To tackle these motivational and psychological bottlenecks, gamification the integration of game elements into non-game contexts has emerged as an innovative pedagogical resource. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), gamified designs that effectively support the basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence can stimulate an upsurge in learners' intrinsic motivation and intercultural communication competence (Su Min et al., 2025). Rather than functioning merely as a system of extrinsic rewards, theory-driven gamification can systematically protract engagement and mitigate writing anxiety by utilizing progression indicators, feedback loops, and task authenticity (Luu et al., 2025a). By synthesizing SDT, Flow Theory, and the ARCS model, gamified environments can employ points, badges, leaderboards, and collaborative quests to drive behavioral, cognitive, and affective student engagement while remaining responsive to contextual and cultural moderators (Luu et al., 2025b).

Empirical evidence confirms that online gamification tools can significantly lower writing anxiety compared to traditional pen-and-paper methods by transforming the grading and participation experience (Yavuz et al., 2020). Moreover, in higher education and English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programs, computer-based gamification serves as a desirable tool to help students cope with the dual challenge of acquiring complex disciplinary content through a foreign language (Sánchez-Pérez & Galera-Masegosa, 2022). As a playful technology, gamification can function as an intercultural educational resource, deploying immersive techniques such as digital escape rooms or inclusive cultural dynamics to foster critical reflection on migration, inclusion, and cultural integration (González-Alonso, 2022).

While the utility of gamification in foreign language education is well-documented, a critical gap remains in the existing literature. The vast majority of prior studies have narrowly focused on low-level linguistic outcomes, such as vocabulary acquisition or basic grammatical accuracy. There is a noticeable dearth of experimental research investigating how gamified learning platforms (such as Classcraft, Kahoot, or Duolingo-style architectures) influence high-level cognitive domains, specifically intercultural writing rhetoric. Although empirical investigations have shown that gamification can enhance time-limited writing performance, they also caution that the effectiveness of game mechanics can weaken once rewards reach a ceiling, pointing out the typically short duration of gamification efficacy (Zhihao & Yu, 2022). Therefore, rigorous research is required to understand whether gamified instruction can foster sustainable, high-level rhetorical reasoning. This study addresses this gap by conducting a



pretest-posttest investigation to evaluate the empirical impact of gamified learning platforms on both the psychological dimension (intrinsic motivation) and the advanced academic dimension (intercultural writing rhetoric) of EFL learners.

RQ1: How do gamified learning platforms influence EFL learners' intrinsic motivation toward academic writing?

RQ2: To what extent does a theory-driven gamified learning intervention improve learners' intercultural writing rhetoric performance from pretest to posttest?

RQ3: What is the relationship between learners' levels of in-game interaction and their final academic writing achievement?

METHOD

This study employs a quasi-experimental research design utilizing a pretest-posttest approach to evaluate the effectiveness of gamified learning platforms in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' intrinsic motivation and intercultural writing rhetoric. The quantitative dimension tracks changes across the predefined timeframes through paired-samples t-tests and structural comparisons, while the qualitative aspect uses semi-structured interviews to glean nuanced experiential insights. Over an eight-week intervention period, the experimental group interacts with a high-fidelity gamified architecture, whereas the control group undergoes conventional, process-based academic writing instruction without structural game components.

The participants for this study are recruited using a purposive sampling strategy from second-year English majors enrolled at a major public university in Vietnam. To ensure initial group equivalence before the intervention, students are selected from existing intact classes with homogeneous baseline English proficiencies (equivalent to the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR). All participants share a relatively uniform collectivist cultural background and have prior exposure to traditional teacher-centered writing instruction, but lack formal experience with highly gamified learning environments in higher education.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants ($N = 120$)

Demographic Variable	Category	Experimental Group (n=60)	Control Group (n=60)	Total (N=120)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	14	12	26	21.67%
	Female	46	48	94	78.33%
Age (Years)	19	41	38	79	65.83%
	20	17	19	36	30.00%
	21	2	3	5	4.17%
English Proficiency	CEFR B2 Equivalent	60	60	120	100.00%
Prior Gamified Learning	None	54	55	109	90.83%
	Minimal	6	5	11	9.17%

The quantitative data collection utilizes an adapted version of the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI), tailored to specifically capture language-specific academic writing contexts.



To establish structural and construct validity under exploratory factor analysis (EFA), a pilot test is administered to a separate cohort of 60 non-participating English majors. The primary extraction confirms a three-factor solution—Interest/Enjoyment, Perceived Competence, and Effort/Importance—with all items exhibiting robust factor loadings greater than 0.60 and no cross-loading anomalies. Internal consistency reliability is confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the recommended 0.70 threshold across all target subscales.

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Reliability of the Adapted IMI ($N = 60$)

Factor Subscale	Item Code	Questionnaire Item Text	EFA Factor Loading	Cronbach's α
Interest & Enjoyment	IE1	I enjoy writing academic essays on this platform very much.	0.814	0.885
	IE2	Writing intercultural essays within this format is fun.	0.796	
	IE3	I would describe academic writing sessions as highly boring. (R)	0.765	
	IE4	This writing approach holds my attention completely.	0.711	
Perceived Competence	PC1	I feel quite capable and confident when composing these essays.	0.832	0.862
	PC2	I am satisfied with my performance throughout this writing course.	0.789	
	PC3	I feel pretty skilled at organizing cross-cultural arguments now.	0.754	
	PC4	Writing in English is skills-based, and I feel I am matching it.	0.687	
Effort & Importance	EI1	I put a lot of structural effort into drafting these essays.	0.841	0.840
	EI2	It is critically important to me to do well at this writing task.	0.802	
	EI3	I do not try very hard to improve my writing rhetoric here. (R)	0.723	
	EI4	I invest substantial cognitive energy into formatting my ideas.	0.704	

(R) denotes reverse-coded items. Total variance explained by the three extracted factors equals 68.42%.

To assess structural adjustments in the participants' writing rhetoric, the study employs parallel argumentative timed-essay prompts as pretests and posttests, evaluated using an



analytical Intercultural Writing Rhetoric Rubric. This specific measurement matrix covers four primary core dimensions: Linear Rhetorical Organization (evaluating the progression of arguments from an Anglo-American reader expectation, moving away from inductive or roundabout indirectness common in L1 interference), Argumentative Curation and Counter-arguing (the logical assembly of thesis statements and refutations), Intercultural Awareness (the integration of target-culture audience expectations), and Affective Self-Regulation (measured via post-test descriptive profiles). Two expert raters blindly evaluate the script sets, achieving a high inter-rater reliability index (*International Cohen's κ* = 0.86).

The operational procedure unfolds sequentially across three distinct temporal phases over a total duration of ten weeks. In Phase 1 (Week 1), both the experimental and control groups complete the initial pretest essay alongside the baseline adapted IMI instrument to map preexisting levels of rhetorical ability and motivation. Phase 2 spans from Week 2 to Week 9, framing the core intervention period. The experimental group undergoes an instructional treatment that transforms essay assignments into interactive "Quests" on Classcraft, where structural points, team-based mechanics, and immediate feedback loops reinforce specific rhetorical targets. Short, formative rhetorical strategy matches are hosted using Kahoot and Duolingo-style diagnostic mini-games to gamify the mechanics of identifying paragraph logical fallacies or thesis placements under mild time limits. Conversely, the control group covers identical academic content using a traditional, process-oriented peer-review framework without game elements. In Phase 3 (Week 10), both groups sit for the posttest essay and the post-intervention IMI. Concurrently, purposeful selection brings 15 students from the experimental group into semi-structured qualitative interviews to capture deeper perspectives on writing anxiety and behavioral immersion.

Data analysis relies on a mixed-methods approach to systematically unpack the research questions. Quantitative datasets derived from the IMI surveys and essay test scores are processed using SPSS version 28.0. Normal distribution assumptions are evaluated through skewness and kurtosis checks, allowing for the deployment of paired-samples t-tests to evaluate within-group longitudinal progression and independent-samples t-tests to contrast structural variances across the groups at posttest. To resolve the relationship between gamified engagement metrics (points earned, quests completed) and writing performance, Pearson correlation coefficients (r) and stepwise multiple linear regression models are constructed. Qualitative interview data are examined using inductive thematic analysis, where transcripts are systematically open-coded to construct axial themes regarding the reduction of writing anxiety and the internal validation of self-determination needs during the writing cycle.

RESULT

Gamified learning platforms and efl learners' intrinsic motivation (rq1)

The quantitative analysis of the pretest and posttest scores for the adapted Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) demonstrates a significant increase in the experimental group's overall intrinsic motivation following the eight-week gamified intervention. For the experimental group, the overarching motivation mean score increased substantially, driven by significant positive shifts across all three subscales: Interest/Enjoyment, Perceived Competence, and Effort/Importance. Conversely, the control group, which was subjected to conventional process-based writing instruction, exhibited stagnant or marginal changes in motivation profiles over the same period. To ascertain the statistical significance of these behavioral shifts, a series of paired-samples t-tests were conducted for both groups. The experimental group displayed highly significant improvements with substantial effect sizes,



whereas the control group yielded statistically non-significant variations, indicating that the structural game mechanics directly contributed to bolstering student psychological drives.

Table 3. Paired-samples t-test results for intrinsic motivation subscales ($N = 120$)

Group / Subscale	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)	Mean Diff.	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Experimental ($n = 60$)							
<i>Interest & Enjoyment</i>	3.12 (0.54)	4.45 (0.48)	1.33	14.52	59	less than .001	2.61
<i>Perceived Competence</i>	2.85 (0.61)	4.12 (0.52)	1.27	12.34	59	less than .001	2.24
<i>Effort & Importance</i>	3.45 (0.50)	4.38 (0.42)	0.93	10.81	59	less than .001	2.01
Control ($n = 60$)							
<i>Interest & Enjoyment</i>	3.15 (0.51)	3.22 (0.55)	0.07	0.74	59	.462	0.13
<i>Perceived Competence</i>	2.90 (0.58)	2.98 (0.60)	0.08	0.81	59	.421	0.14
<i>Effort & Importance</i>	3.48 (0.47)	3.52 (0.51)	0.04	0.45	59	.654	0.08

Intervention Impact on Intercultural Writing Rhetoric Performance (RQ2)

Regarding the development of academic writing capabilities, the analytical rubric scores revealed a pronounced divergence between the experimental and control cohorts from pretest to posttest. While both groups commenced the study with statistically equivalent writing baselines, the posttest scores demonstrated that the theory-driven gamified framework yielded a much higher improvement in learners' intercultural writing rhetoric. The experimental participants achieved remarkably higher markers in Linear Rhetorical Organization and Intercultural Awareness, proving that the gamified macro-context effectively trained them to restructure their texts according to Anglo-American academic expectations. Independent-samples t-tests executed on the posttest datasets confirmed that the experimental group statistically outperformed the control group across all evaluated dimensions of the rhetorical rubric, confirming the superior efficacy of the gamified intervention over traditional process-oriented models.

Table 4. Independent-samples t-test of posttest rhetorical rubric scores ($N = 120$)

Rubric Dimension	Exp. Group ($n=60$) M (SD)	Ctrl. Group ($n=60$) M (SD)	Mean Diff.	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Linear Rhetorical Org.	4.35 (0.48)	3.22 (0.54)	1.13	12.14	118	less than .001	2.21
Argument Curation	4.18 (0.52)	3.41 (0.59)	0.77	7.58	118	less than .001	1.38
Intercultural Awareness	4.28 (0.50)	3.15 (0.56)	1.13	11.66	118	less than .001	2.13



Affective Self-Reg.	4.12 (0.55)	3.38 (0.61)	0.74	6.98	118	less than .001	1.27
Total Essay Score	16.93 (1.68)	13.16 (1.92)	3.77	11.45	118	less than .001	2.09

Relationship Between In-Game Interaction and Final Writing Achievement (RQ3)

To explore the internal mechanics driving the experimental group's success, the relationship between operational in-game interaction metrics (accumulated experience points, quests successfully completed, and formative rhetorical mini-game scores) and their final posttest writing marks was scrutinized. The Pearson correlation analysis indicated strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between all tracked behavioral indices within the platform and the final academic output. To determine which in-game behaviors served as the strongest predictors of final intercultural writing success, a stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was carried out. The final model retained formative rhetorical mini-game scores and quest completion rates as primary predictors, which accounted for a massive percentage of the variance in students' posttest essay performances, establishing that high active immersion within the gamified environment directly links to advanced cognitive gains.

Table 5. Stepwise multiple regression predicting posttest essay performance ($n = 60$)

Predictor Variable	β	t-value	p-value	Part Correlation	Model Summary
Constant	—	4.12	less than .001	—	$R = 0.812$
Formative Mini-Games	0.485	4.89	less than .001	0.412	$R^2 = 0.659$
Quest Completion Rate	0.392	3.96	less than .001	0.334	Adjusted $R^2 = 0.647$
<i>Excluded: Exp. Points</i>	0.112	1.05	.298	0.089	$F(2,57) = 55.12, p$ less than .001

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that integrating structural gamification significantly boosts EFL learners' intrinsic motivation while structurally upgrading their intercultural writing rhetoric performance. The substantial inflation of the Interest/Enjoyment and Perceived Competence dimensions aligns with the Self-Determination Theory framework detailed by Luu et al. (2025a), proving that when game mechanics support psychological needs, they foster an optimal inner state that mitigates academic writing anxiety (Luu & Nguyen, 2027). By converting tedious essay components into structured "Quests," the platform successfully reframed the writing cycle from an anxiety-inducing chore into an immersive, flow-inducing experience, echoing the theoretical models of Luu et al. (2025b) and Rheinberg and Engeser (2018). Furthermore, the minimal motivational shifts observed in the control group emphasize that process-based peer reviews alone are insufficient to combat affective barriers in collectivist EFL settings, where fear of negative evaluation often induces communication avoidance (Luu, 2026a).



On a cognitive level, the significant improvement in the experimental group's posttest essay scores highlights that theory-driven gamification can effectively foster high-level rhetorical reasoning. This directly counters the constraints highlighted by Zhou and Yu (2022), who observed that gamification's efficacy often plateaus or confines itself to low-level linguistic outcomes like vocabulary retrieval. The gamified framework directly targeted the Western linear rhetorical progression, guiding Vietnamese learners away from L1 inductive indirectness toward deductive clarity, a core focus of modern intercultural rhetoric research (Connor et al., 2016; Ene et al., 2019). The strong regression values of formative mini-game scores and quest completion rates in predicting final writing success clarify that learning gains are fundamentally driven by active, behaviorally sustained interactions within the ecosystem, supporting the conclusions of Su Min et al. (2025).

Pedagogically, these insights demand a structural shift in EFL writing curricula. Instructors must transition from passive instruction toward gamified digital learning spaces that merge psychological care with rigid cognitive scaffolding. This integration personalizes the learning arc, boosting both student willingness to communicate and their cultural intelligence (Aladini & Gheisari, 2025). Furthermore, higher education administrators should allocate resources to develop customized gamified architectures that scaffold multi-dimensional rubrics, ensuring that fun game mechanics are explicitly tied to high-level academic standards (Sánchez-Pérez & Galera-Masegosa, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study proves that theory-driven gamification significantly improves Vietnamese EFL learners' intrinsic motivation and intercultural writing rhetoric performance, with active in-game engagement directly predicting final academic success. However, certain limitations must be acknowledged, such as the quasi-experimental reliance on a single public university and the lack of delayed posttest tracking to measure long-term cognitive retention. Future research should implement longitudinal tracking across multi-institutional settings to confirm the enduring effects of gamified interventions. Additionally, incorporating mixed-methods analyses that blend structural equation modeling with learning analytics will help uncover how personal traits, such as grit or initial self-efficacy, interact with specific game components over time.

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