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Level Up Learning

Exploring Game Elements in Contemporary English Language Textbooks

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Abstract

Gamification ist in der pädagogischen Forschung zu einem zunehmend bedeutenden Thema geworden, doch die Integration von spielerischen Elementen in herkömmlichen Schulbüchern für den Englischunterricht ist bisher nur wenig erforscht. Die vorliegende Masterarbeit untersucht das Vorkommen und die Umsetzung solcher Gamification Elemente in Englisch Lehrwerken, die in der österreichischen Sekundarstufe I verwendet werden. Im Fokus stehen die beiden Schulbücher *More! 4* und *Easy 4*. Die Studie analysiert, wie gamifizierte Elemente in den Aufgaben der Lehrwerke eingebettet und über verschiedene Aufgabentypen verteilt sind.

Auf Grundlage von Forschung zu Gamification sowie Ansätzen zur Analyse und Entwicklung von ELT Lehrmaterialien kombiniert die Arbeit zunächst eine überblicksartige Analyse der beiden Lehrwerke mit einer systematischen Untersuchung einzelner Aufgaben. Aufbauend darauf, werden mögliche Adaptionen einiger Aufgaben vorgeschlagen. Die für die Analyse berücksichtigten Gamification Elemente beinhalten: Punkte, Badges, Wahlmöglichkeiten für Lernende, narrative Kontexte, Levels, Feedback, Leaderboards, Wettbewerb, Kooperation und Herausforderungen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass einige dieser Elemente, insbesondere Zusammenarbeit und narrative Kontexte, durchaus in den Lehrbüchern vorkommen. Allerdings werden sie meist nicht als Teil eines bewusst spielerisch gestalteten Designs eingesetzt.

Die anschließend vorgeschlagenen Adaptionen sollen veranschaulichen, wie typische Aufgaben aus Englischlehrwerken mithilfe von Gamification Prinzipien umgestaltet werden können. Weitere Forschung ist nötig, um diese Adaptionen empirisch zu untersuchen und Aussagen über deren Effektivität im Englischunterricht und Auswirkungen auf Lernende zu treffen.

Key words: gamification, ELT, coursebook analysis, Austria

Abstract

Gamification has become an increasingly prominent topic in pedagogical research, yet its integration into traditional print ELT materials remains underexplored. This master's thesis investigates the presence and implementation of gamification elements in English as a foreign language coursebooks used in Austrian lower secondary education. Focusing on *More! 4* and *Easy 4*, two widely used textbooks aligned with the Austrian national curriculum, the study examines how game design elements are embedded in textbook tasks and how these elements are distributed across activity types.

Drawing on frameworks of gamification research and ELT materials evaluation and development, the study combines an impressionistic overview of the two ELT manuals with a structured analysis of the tasks, followed by a series of proposed adaptations. The selected game elements for the analysis included: points, badges, learner choice, narrative contexts, levels, feedback, leaderboards, competition, collaboration and challenges. The results show that while certain elements, particularly collaboration and narrative contexts, occur with some frequency, they are rarely implemented as part of a coherent or explicitly gamified task design.

Based on the findings of the analysis, the thesis proposed adaptations of typical textbook tasks to illustrate how gamification principles can be integrated at the academic level. These adaptations are presented as design examples rather than empirically tested interventions. Further research is needed to explore how such adaptations are perceived by learners and teachers and to examine their effectiveness in ELT contexts.

Key words: gamification, ELT, coursebook analysis, Austria

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1. Introduction

Classrooms have always been places where teachers work hard to keep students focused. In recent years, however, it has become more and more challenging to maintain student attention. While learners once sat patiently through textbook exercises, students now grow up in a world shaped by instant notifications, fast-paced digital content and algorithms designed to captivate them for hours. Despite their best intentions, teachers often find themselves competing with smartphones, social media, and immersive gaming platforms that seem to offer students something which traditional learning rarely does: a sense of challenge, progress, autonomy and reward.

This tension raises important questions for teachers today. If games can keep learners focused and emotionally invested for a long period of time, why do so many classroom activities struggle to do the same? To answer this, we need to have a look at the methods and materials that are used by teachers. Coursebooks, the most widely used materials to prepare and carry out lessons, need to be carefully analyzed to see how well equipped they are to meet the motivational needs of a generation raised in a swipe and scroll environment, which Mercer et al. (2021: 143) aptly call “age of distractions”.

One concept which has emerged as a response to this issue is gamification. Gamification makes use of engaging game features, such as points, challenge, feedback, narrative, progress, and integrates them within non-game contexts like a classroom (Deterding et al. 2011). Over the last decades, studies across education have consistently shown that these elements can increase participation, persistence, and enjoyment, especially in settings where students can practice and receive feedback on their skills with minimal impact on their final grade (Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli 2021; Zainuddin et al. 2020). Still, despite the growing interest in gamification within educational research, it remains underexplored in the one tool most teachers rely on the most: printed textbooks.

In Austrian schools, where textbooks still function as the backbone of lesson planning and curriculum alignment, this gap becomes especially significant. Teachers are encouraged to make learning motivating and interactive for their students, but due to time constraints they often depend heavily on ready to use coursebook materials which may be repetitive and do not really reflect principles that make gamification

effective. Even though digital tools are increasingly used in classrooms due to factors such as a generational shift in the teaching body and a sudden need for digitalization during the COVID pandemic, printed materials still dominate classroom practice, particularly in lower secondary schools. That is why it is essential to closely examine coursebooks and the exercises included in them, especially with regard to how, and to what extent, they incorporate gamification principles.

At the same time, enthusiasm for this approach must be tempered by critical perspectives. Scholars warn that superficial integration of game elements can undermine intrinsic student motivation, lead to unfair behavior displayed by students to gain an advantage and ultimately reduce learning to reward hunting rather than meaningful engagement (Nicholson 2012). The value of gamification therefore lies not in sprinkling game features randomly across activities, but in thoughtfully integrating them to support learners and increase their involvement. Whether contemporary Austrian ELT coursebooks succeed in doing so remains an open question and one that has direct implications for both pedagogy and material design.

This thesis responds to that question by investigating the presence and distribution of game elements in two widely used Austrian ELT textbooks, “*More! 4*” and “*Easy 4*”. By analyzing these materials systematically and adapting selected tasks through the integration of gamification principles, the study aims to bridge the gap between research and the practical realities of classroom materials. In doing so, it seeks not only to evaluate existing resources but to explore how thoughtful gamified design could make everyday textbook tasks more engaging, meaningful, and learner centered.

The following chapters therefore outline the conceptual foundations of gamification, examine game elements as pedagogical tools, analyze their occurrence in textbook activities, and propose concrete adaptations that illustrate how ELT materials might better harness the motivational potential of game-based learning.

1.1. Background & Rationale

The motivation behind this thesis has been shaped by my own affinity for games and learning through play. I have always found that games provide an engaging and low-pressure environment for exploration, problem solving and discovery. Games invite curiosity, reward persistence and allow players to experiment without fear of failure.

Essentially, these characteristics mirror what teachers want to cultivate in their classrooms, particularly in language learning, where confidence, repetition and active participation are key. Therefore, I used my personal experience with the motivational power of play as a starting point to dig deeper and understand how game design might be meaningfully integrated into traditional educational materials.

After brief initial online research, I found many studies that have shown the positive impact of gamification on student motivation, engagement and learner autonomy. At the same time, it became obvious that the realities of teaching often do not match what research suggests because of practical limitations. Teachers often lack the time to prepare elaborate materials, let alone games, for their classes. The reason they heavily rely on textbooks is not their affection for them. In fact, most teachers are not fully satisfied with the coursebook they are using, yet they continue to use them because they provide structure and ready-to-use activities which can be implemented without excessive preparation time. For most teachers, textbooks are not an ideal resource but a convenient and feasible one.

This tension between research which advocates for more engaging materials and the inclusion of game design elements versus the practical realities of teaching highlights the need to evaluate the materials used by teachers. If teachers cannot find time to create engaging materials themselves, the question needs to be asked, whether existing ELT textbooks already incorporate elements that support the theoretical findings or whether important opportunities to increase learner motivation remain unaddressed. Understanding this gap is essential, because it determines not only what students experience in their everyday lessons, but also how teachers might be supported in the future. A closer examination of current textbooks can therefore offer valuable insights into the extent to which gamification principles are already present, where they are missing, and how existing activities might be improved to better meet the needs of today's learners.

1.2. Research Problem & Objectives

Despite growing research on gamification in education, its integration into ELT coursebooks remains underexplored, particularly in the Austrian context. While textbooks largely shape lesson planning and the realization of classes, many activities

appear to follow traditional formats. However, it needs to be determined in how far these materials also incorporate elements that support learning in a playful way. For this reason, several foci will be guiding this research. Firstly, we will have a look at the extent of game elements included in two contemporary ELT coursebooks. Furthermore, the study investigates which type of game elements appear most frequently, which ones are largely absent, and how the identified elements are distributed across different language skills. Finally, the thesis explores how selected activities might be meaningfully adapted using gamification principles.

Building on these aspects, the overarching aim of this study is to bridge the gap between gamification theory and the practical realities of teaching materials. Although the benefits of gamification are well documented (see chapter 3), it is less clear whether these principles are already present in the printed materials that teachers rely on most. By systematically analyzing the structure and content of two popular Austrian ELT textbooks, this thesis seeks to establish a clearer picture of the role of gamification within existing coursebook materials.

A further objective is to move beyond analysis and explore the potential for pedagogically sound adaptations. Since many teachers express interest in using more engaging, playful tasks but lack the time or resources to design materials themselves (Wagner 2023). For this reason, the thesis demonstrates how specific tasks can be remodeled through the integration of game elements, while still remaining feasible for everyday classroom use.

Through this combination of analysis and practical adaptations, the study not only identifies the current state of gamification in two current Austrian ELT coursebooks but also provides concrete examples of how game principles might enrich existing materials. Ultimately, the objectives of this thesis are to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of textbook design, offer relevant insights to material developers and teachers and highlight the potential of playful approaches to support meaningful learning.

2. Gamification and Game Elements

When people hear gamification, their first associations are often video games, online multiplayer games, leaderboards, something that is fun and maybe a waste of time. Others who have engaged further with the topic might be aware that gamification has been trending for a while now in different fields, such as marketing and commerce, finance, education, or even health and fitness. But what is meant exactly by gamification? What ideas hide behind this flashy and buzzing concept that seems to be presented as a panacea for boosting engagement, motivation, and productivity across multiple domains?

A much-cited definition for gamification was suggested by the German researcher Sebastian Deterding and his team, who described the phenomenon of gamification as “[...] an umbrella term for the use of video game elements (rather than full-fledged games) to improve user experience and user engagement in non-game services and applications” (Deterding et al. 2011). By tapping into elementary principles of psychology, like rewards, achievements, progress and competition, ordinary tasks can be transformed to become more compelling and enjoyable. However, other scientists have claimed that the term, as defined by Deterding, is too vague and lacks clear boundaries. Ferrara (2013: 291), for example, points out that gamification could refer to anything from the game “FarmVille” to LinkedIn’s progress bar. Before we dig deeper into this discussion, however, let us first explore the origins of gamification.

In 2002, the term “gamification” was first coined by the British game developer Nick Pelling. At the time, Pelling was shifting away from game development and into integrating game-like user interfaces into everyday transactions on devices like ATMs, vending machines, and mobile phones. He used “gamification” to describe the application of game-like designs to make these transactions faster and more engaging. (Pelling 2011)

It took several years before gamification gained traction in the field of education. Almost a decade after the term “gamification” was first coined by Nick Pelling, a British game developer, other researchers (Zichermann & Cunningham 2011: xiv) put forward their own definition: “The process of game-thinking and game mechanics to engage users and solve problems.” This was the same year Deterding et al. (2011) introduced

their widely cited definition, reinforcing gamification as a structured concept in both academic and practical applications. More researchers began to explore the idea of gamification and the concept gained momentum, especially for commercial applications. Reward systems, such as leveling up, were integrated, acting as “biological candy” (Wheeler & Palmer 2019: 124, as cited in Adare-Tasiwoopa et al. 2024: 14) to stimulate customers and keep them coming back for more. Since then, gamification elements have been frequently used in non-game environments, such as work, health or commercial appliances (Gerdenitsch et al. 2020; Johnson et al. 2016; Wee & Choong 2019).

After witnessing the success and growing profitability of gamification in commercial contexts, educators began to consider its potential for learning environments. Teachers started recognizing that the same psychological principles driving customer engagement could be adapted to enhance student motivation and participation. Subsequently, gamified learning approaches started emerging, integrating game elements like points, badges, rewards, competition and more to make learning more engaging.

Today, gamification has become a much-explored topic in education, with institutions integrating different game elements into traditional and digital learning spaces. However, with its growing popularity, the discussions and controversies surrounding the definitions and related concepts like game-based learning (GBL) and serious games have also amplified. While the terms are sometimes used interchangeably in literature, they represent distinct approaches to blend game elements with education.

To establish a clear foundation for this thesis, it is necessary to define gamification and distinguish it from related concepts. Although some approaches share common elements, their underlying principles may vary and must be explored in detail. The following chapters will analyze various perspectives and definitions of the key concepts: games, gamification, game-based learning, game elements and game mechanics as well as serious games.

2.1. Gamification and related concepts

As gamification is becoming increasingly popular amongst researchers from various domains, particularly in education, it is essential to clearly define it within the context of this investigation and address common perceptions on related concepts.

2.1.1. Gamification

While Sailer (2016, as cited in Fischer & Reichmuth 2020: 11) claims that there is no universally valid definition for gamification, many researchers have tried to come up with a way to define it. As mentioned in the beginning, Deterding et al. (2011) proposed the most widely cited definition for gamification, describing it as using game elements in non-game environments. Similarly, other scientists (Figueroa 2015: 38; Cancino & Viguera 2024: 34) have suggested that the use of game design techniques in contexts unrelated to gaming are a key feature of gamification. According to Kapp (2012: 66), these designs include “game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems”. The mechanics Kapp refers to are typically implemented through the integration of elements such as points, levels, challenges, rewards, leaderboards, and badges.

Even though the inclusion of game elements, such as the ones mentioned above, is central to many definitions of gamification, some researchers argue that it is not enough for these elements to merely exist in a non-game context. Hamari et al. (2014: 3026), for instance, emphasize that the successful application of gamification requires more than just the presence of these mechanics. They go beyond the widely cited and often superficial definitions, arguing that the game elements must be strategically designed to foster engagement, motivation and behavioral change. Instead of just adding game-like features, their idea of gamification focuses on creating meaningful experiences that enhance interactions within the context in which gamification is applied. This perspective is supported by Lee & Hammer (2011: 2), who also highlight the shortcomings of our traditional school system. They assert that school offers gamified features, such as badges (grades), leveling up (advancing academic years), and reward-punishment systems. However, these features alone do not necessarily engage learners. Their argument thus reinforces the idea that gamification is not just

about the presence of game elements but their intentional and thoughtful implementation to drive motivation and active student participation.

A more recent and comprehensive definition that aligns with the aforementioned perspectives emphasizes not only the presence of game elements but also their role in engaging the learners. Adare-Tasiwoopa & Silva define gamification the following way:

For us, gamification means using games and game elements or mechanics in order to motivate students to become actively involved in the learning process, applying knowledge to current circular learning as a way to solve authentic problems and overcome challenges, either collaboratively or individually, and, ultimately, increasing competence skills and self-confidence, improved communication skills, and achieving goals. (Adare-Tasiwoopa & Silva 2024: 15)

This description highlights the broader impact of gamification, as opposed to Deterding's (2011) widely cited definition. Here, the researchers reinforce an understanding of gamification as an idea that, when implemented effectively, goes beyond the use of game elements in non-game contexts.

After taking all of the discussed perspectives into account, it becomes clear that gamification is more than the incorporation of game elements, such as points, leaderboards, badges, leveling up etc., in non-game environments. Instead, it is a strategic and purposeful approach aimed at fostering engagement, motivation, and meaningful interactions. While early definitions emphasize the presence of game elements and mechanics, more recent contributions point out the importance of their intentional application to drive learning, motivation, and engagement. Building on these insights, for the purpose of this thesis, gamification will be defined as the deliberate application of game elements, mechanics, and design principles in non-game contexts to create meaningful, engaging experiences that promote motivation, participation, and learning. This definition reflects the necessity of purposeful implementation, ensuring that gamification is a transformative tool that enhances the learning experience for students.

2.1.2. Games and Play

"Anyone who makes a distinction between education and entertainment doesn't know the first thing about either." (McLuhan, as cited in Prensky 2002: 8) This statement

encapsulates the fundamental overlap between games and learning, while challenging traditional views that separate work from play or education from entertainment. Fortunately, educators have recently become increasingly aware of the value of games in fostering cognitive, social and emotional development in learning contexts.

Growing up, we all played games, and many of us still enjoy them today. We have different associations and know what games are, but how are games defined by research? Various scholars have attempted to define games, each emphasizing different aspects. Kapp (2012: 280) characterizes games as experiences in which players engage with an abstract challenge, guided by rules. Further key elements of games are interactivity, feedback and measurable outcomes which lead to an emotional response. Before Kapp, Salen and Zimmerman (2003: 80) defined games similarly, describing them as “a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome.” Beyond these aspects, Vygotsky (1978: 95) viewed games as a means for children to engage with real world aspects through imaginary situations. In his seminal work, *Mind in Society*, he argued that imaginary situations inherently set the rules of play, shaping how children interact within the game. For instance, when a child takes on the role of a mother in a game, she instinctively follows behaviors associated with maternal care, such as comforting or instructing. In this way, play allows children to explore and internalize concepts and structures of the real world that might otherwise go unnoticed. This shows the educational value of games, as they provide an environment where humans can experiment with behaviors, roles and problem-solving in meaningful ways.

More recent research (Boghian et al. 2019: 51) constitutes that games are not only engaging, but also an effective tool for cognitive development and complex decision making. Similarly, Doney (2019: 9) highlights the potential of games to foster collaboration and critical thinking, suggesting that well-designed games offer learners opportunities to experiment, fail, and succeed in ways that traditional classroom environments may not always allow. The benefits of gamification in education will be explored in more detail later (Chapter 3).

2.1.3. Game-Based Learning

With a growing interest in the use of games and game elements in education, various concepts have been coined and can be encountered in the literature. Among these, game-based learning (GBL) and gamification are frequently discussed. It can be observed that the two concepts are sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes characterized as distinct approaches.

Adare-Tasiwoopa & Silva (2024: 17) define game-based learning the following way:

In general, GBL involves the inclusion of games and game elements or mechanics into courses with the expressed purpose of motivating students to achieve at a higher level because the games appeal to them.

While their conceptualization closely resembles how gamification is often defined, the [University of Waterloo](#) (2025) offers a clear differentiation. They suggest that gamification refers to the “integration of game elements”, such as points, leaderboards and badges, into existing learning activities. Game-based learning, on the other hand, means structuring the learning itself around a game. As an example, they mention a gamified discussion forum, which awards badges to its contributors, whereas a GBL approach in a Politics course could involve a role-play in mock negotiations.

Even though this distinction between gamification and game-based learning provides a useful framework for understanding their differences, the line between the two concepts is often blurred in practice (Deterding et al. 2011). Because the differentiation is not always clear-cut and researchers do not always make a distinction or sometimes use the concepts interchangeably, this thesis will adopt the same approach. Thus, gamification and game-based learning will be used synonymously in this thesis, as both refer to the use of game mechanics and principles to enhance engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. (Boghian et al. 2019: 54; Doney 2019; Adare-Tasiwoopa & Silva 2024: 17)

2.1.4. Serious Games

Another concept that is often mentioned along with gamification and game-based learning is called serious games, particularly in discussions about digital learning games. Wilms (2015: 6) defines serious games as all applications that utilize playful elements and game mechanics but are not primarily intended for entertainment.

Similarly, Arnab et al. (2014: n.a.) highlight that serious games “[...] are not designed mainly for entertainment purposes [...]”, but to exploit the attractiveness of games for pedagogical aspirations, such as developing knowledge and skills.

Landers (2014: 754ff) explores the distinction between serious games and gamification, arguing that while substantial overlap exists, a differentiation of the concepts is necessary. While both approaches utilize game design to enhance learning, serious games are full-fledged games with educational intent, whereas gamification refers to selectively applying game elements to non-game contexts.

Serious games are used in a variety of fields, including education, healthcare, military training, and corporate learning. Well-known examples of serious games are SimCityEDU, which teaches students about urban planning and resource management, and Minecraft Education, which fosters creativity, problem solving, collaboration, and lets learners explore various subjects in a digital environment.

For the purpose of this thesis, the notion of serious games will not be relevant, as the focus will be on exploring ways to adapt existing educational materials by incorporating game elements, rather than developing full-fledged educational games. However, due to the overlap in research and the similar effects on learners and their motivation, it is important to address the concept of serious games. Many of the principles that drive engagement in serious games, such as challenge, feedback, and interactivity, are also fundamental to gamification. With this in mind, the next chapter (2.2. Game Elements) will explore the key elements in gamification that contribute to a more engaging learning experience.

2.2. Game Elements

In the initial chapter about the definition of gamification and its related concepts, we mentioned the key role of game elements. Borrowed from video- or traditional tabletop games, these elements are essential for creating engaging and motivating learning experiences. While different gamification strategies may focus on different aspects, researchers identified several key elements that are frequently used in educational contexts. Despite many overlapping game design features in the lists provided by various researchers, they contain differences as well.

Attempts to classify game elements within gamification have been made by different researchers, with early discussions by Gee (2007) and Gentile & Gentile (2008) focusing on educational principles in games. Prensky (2001) noted twelve core characteristics of games that make them engaging, including fun, challenge, interactivity, well-defined goals, feedback, and social interaction. Reeves & Read (2009, as cited in Sailer et al. 2017: 372f) proposed ten categories, which include elements like avatars, three-dimensional environments, narrative context, ranks, competition, and time pressure. Cugelman (2013) noted seven essential gamification elements that are consistent with behavior change theories, such as goal setting, feedback, rewards, and storytelling. Unlike the digital-focused models, Cugelman's framework is relevant for both digital and non-digital educational contexts.

Several other researchers have also sought to organize game elements systematically. Cheong et al. (2014) classified them into dynamics, mechanics, and components, distinguishing between the overall game principles and particular interactive features. Blohm & Leimeister (2013) and Robson et al. (2015) go further still, incorporating emotional engagement and motivational factors into their models.

Another approach to classify game elements is presented by Paiva Franco (2022: 2), who distinguished different levels of game design, reaching from interface components to broader conceptual models and design methods (Table 1). This categorization highlights how gamification elements can be structured based on their function and scope within game-based learning environments.

Table 1 Levels of game design elements (Paiva Franco 2022: 2)

Level	Description	Example
Game interface design patterns	Common, successful interaction design components and design solutions for a known problem in a context, including prototypical implementations	Badge, leaderboard, level
Game design patterns and mechanics	Commonly reoccurring parts of the design of a game that concern gameplay	Time constraint, limited resources, turns
Game design principles and heuristics	Evaluative guidelines to approach a design problem or analyze a given design solution	Enduring play, clear goals, variety of game styles
Game models	Conceptual models of the components of games or game experience	MDA ¹ ; challenge, fantasy, curiosity; game design atoms; CEGE ²
Game design methods	Game design-specific practices and processes	Playtesting, playcentric design, value conscious game design

In the end, various frameworks are in agreement with respect to some essential aspects, such as rules, goals, feedback, social engagement, and emotional motivation, thus validating the effectiveness of gamification in improving learning experiences. Nevertheless, as the field develops, the question of how game elements should be defined, categorized, and applied within educational contexts remains unresolved. Deterding et al. (2011) emphasize that determining what actually counts as a game element is far from straightforward. Drawing on Reeves and Read's (2009) proposed list of elements, such as teams, narrative context, avatars, or time pressure, they argue that none of these features, when considered on their own, can be regarded as inherently gameful or even game specific. Instead, they propose viewing elements as flexible building blocks rather than as a fixed set of mandatory criteria for gamified design. A key concern, as they note, is that overtly strict interpretations would lead to an extremely narrow set of unstable components, whereas overly liberal interpretations that accept any feature would make the category too broad to be

¹ Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics

² Core Elements of Game Experience

meaningful. This ongoing debate highlights the complexity of selecting and implementing game elements in educational settings and underscores the need for continued theoretical refinement as gamification research progresses.

In light of these conceptual uncertainties, it is critical for practical applications to establish a clear and workable understanding of what constitutes a game element in the context of language learning materials. One goal of this thesis will be to identify game elements that can be integrated into existing ELT schoolbook exercises to enhance engagement and motivation. Therefore, it is essential to consider and closely define the key game elements such as narrative contexts, points, badges, avatars, leaderboards, feedback and competition. These aspects, drawn from various gamification frameworks that have been used previously in research, will provide a foundation for modifying exercises in a way that aligns with the principles of gamification.

2.2.1. Narrative context

One of the most significant game-design elements is the narrative context or storyline. It provides players, or learners in our case, with an immersive experience that makes tasks feel less isolated. A compelling story not only enhances motivation to continue with a task, it is also an effective tool for knowledge transfer and retention that has been used since ancient times (Fischer & Reichmuth 2020: 19).

Stories can take various forms in gamified learning contexts. While some approaches work with a structured overarching narrative, where learners advance as they progress throughout the term, others are less organized and may include only small missions. Research suggests that narrative driven gamification boosts learner motivation and empathy by establishing emotional bonds with the characters within the story (Leiningen & Kelly 2018: 379). When students feel like they are part of an unfolding narrative, they are more likely to persist through challenges and remain engaged with the material (Naul & Liu 2020: 703).

Adare-Tasiwoopa & Silva (2024: 23) provide an example of how storytelling enhances engagement in language learning. They describe a Spanish language course where students followed a two-semester-long unfolding narrative in the style of a telenovela. This approach allowed learners to engage with the language through a rich and

evolving story, following a Mexican man who hired a lawyer to find his estranged daughter. On her mission, the lawyer travels across various Spanish-speaking countries, exposing students to diverse cultures, traditions and dialects. The students participating in the course were eager to learn more and more about the underlying narrative, picking up the necessary language features to comprehend the details of the story on the way.

Another example of this approach can be found in the *Easy* textbook series, where students follow the story of Mira, a little witch, and her friends. The characters appear in all four textbooks for the lower secondary, providing continuity. Importantly, the characters do not only function as superficial figures but instead they have distinct personalities, relationships and appearances that change over time.

2.2.2. Points

Another essential element for gamification is the use of points. Points serve as a fundamental game mechanic that provides learners with immediate feedback and a sense of progression (Zichermann & Cunningham 2011: 36). They can be part of a reward system, where students earn points for completing tasks to track their progress or even redeem them to unlock some special features. Fischer & Reichmuth (2020: 20) highlight that awarding points can help guide student behavior in a desired direction by reinforcing positive engagement.

According to Zichermann & Cunningham (2011: 38f) there are five different point systems that can be differentiated within the context of gamification:

- experience points
- redeemable points
- skill points
- karma points
- reputation points

Experience points are considered the most essential, as they can be earned through completing tasks, participating in activities, and progressing through missions,

providing a sense of achievement and long-term growth. Redeemable points, on the other hand, offer tangible rewards, allowing learners to exchange them for certain privileges, hints or additional resources. Skill points are tied to specific competencies, helping track proficiency in certain areas. Karma points encourage collaboration by rewarding prosocial behavior, like assisting peers or contributing valuable insights to help the group. Lastly, reputation points indicate social recognition, reflecting a learner's reliability and expertise based on peer or instructor evaluations. (ibid.)

By incorporating different types of points into gamified learning, educators can significantly enhance student engagement by fostering motivation, competition, and collaboration. When applied thoughtfully, teachers can create a more dynamic and interactive learning experience and reinforce desired behaviors amongst students.

2.2.3. Badges

Badges or achievements are a form of recognition that serve as trophies or virtual status symbols, making the efforts of the players or learners visible. They can be earned to mark progress and accomplishments or be awarded for reaching important milestones. While badges do not usually contribute to a narrative, their presence can influence behavior by motivating learners to take on specific tasks or challenges. (Sailer et al. 2017: 373)

When learners are aware of the requirements for obtaining a badge, they have a concrete short-term goal, helping them to guide engagement in a structured way. Besides knowing what they have to do to get it, Fischer & Reichmuth (2020: 21) argue that learners also need to be aware of the consequences of unlocking an achievement. If earning a badge comes with an additional reward or privilege, it can serve as an extra motivational boost.

While badges can be used as an incentive to earn a reward, some learners find satisfaction in the process of collecting them systematically. Additionally, badges can function as a means of self-representation and status display. They can reinforce social identification within a group, strengthening solidarity and belonging among peers. Therefore, the presence of badges in a learning environment can contribute to individual motivation as well as group cohesion (ibid.).

2.2.4. Avatars

“Avatars are a visual representation of players within the game or gamification environment” (Sailer et al. 2017: 373). Players or learners typically choose or design their own avatars through which they then experience the narrative. The primary function of avatars is to differentiate players from one another, providing them with a unique identity within the game (Fischer & Reichmuth 2020: 19). Therefore, avatars should be aesthetically pleasing to ensure a higher grade of identification. As the narrative progresses, avatars can evolve by acquiring new items, changing appearance, or unlocking customization options. This development reflects the learner’s progress and can enhance engagement and motivation (ibid.).

2.2.5. Leaderboards

Leaderboards are a central feature in gamification which display rankings based on players’ or learners’ performance, fostering a sense of competition and achievement. By publicly showcasing scores or progress, leaderboards provide immediate feedback and encourage learners to improve their performance in order to climb the ranks. They can be based on different metrics, such as accumulated points, task completion, speed or accuracy, depending on the learning objectives. (Sailer et al. 2017: 373)

One essential aspect of leaderboards is their psychological impact. The visibility of rankings can trigger a sense of achievement for those at the top, while motivating others to strive for improvement. However, research suggests that leaderboards can also have varying effects depending on their design (Costa et al. 2013). Park & Kim (2021) highlight that while competition can drive engagement, overly competitive environments may discourage lower-ranking participants. To counteract this, adaptive leaderboards that group individuals based on skill level or highlight personal progress rather than absolute rankings can be more effective in maintaining motivation across different learner types. Aware of the ambivalent effects of leaderboards on learner motivation, Fischer & Reichmuth (2020:22) suggest using them primarily in group work. By focusing on collective achievements rather than individual rankings, leaderboards can help create a sense of teamwork and reduce the risk of lower-ranked learners feeling discouraged. This approach fosters collaboration while maintaining the motivational benefits of competition.

When designed carefully, leaderboards can be a powerful tool to enhance motivation, engagement, and performance in learning environments. Studies have provided mixed results on the effectiveness of competition in educational settings, which is why teachers need to be mindful of how they implement leaderboards to maximize their benefits while minimizing potential drawbacks (Park & Kim 2021). To create a positive competitive environment, it is essential to avoid highly heterogeneous leaderboards with big gaps in the rankings between individual learners. Instead, participants should be grouped together in similar skill levels. Alternatively, leaderboards for teams can be used to take pressure off of individuals and foster collaboration and positive competition.

2.2.6. Feedback (Progress bars)

Feedback is considered another fundamental game mechanic and has become a key element in gamification. Within a game context, feedback refers to providing players with information about their current status, ideally in relation to their overall progress. As players accumulate points, they receive clear and direct confirmation that they are making progress. Moreover, levels and other progression systems help structure the experience by breaking down a long journey into more manageable steps, reinforcing a sense of achievement. (Zichermann & Cunningham 2011: 77)

This can be translated to educational environments, where feedback plays a crucial role to help students track their progress and stay motivated. Just like in a game, learners benefit from clear and immediate feedback on their performance (Wulnatari et al. 2023: 2853) to develop a sense of personal growth and monitor their progression towards learning goals. The feedback helps them understand where they stand. Yet, researchers (Domínguez et al. 2013: 391; van Roy & Zaman 2018: 294) highlight the importance of real-time feedback to help students pinpoint areas that can be improved and adjust their learning behavior.

We have already covered points, badges and leaderboards, which can all function as a means of providing feedback to the learners. Unlike leaderboards, which compare learner's performance to others, progress bars focus solely on the journey of an individual. They visually represent a student's advancement over time, offering an "individual reference standard" (Sailer et al. 2017: 373). This individualized feedback

allows learners to track their own progress without the pressure of comparison and external competition. Fischer and Reichmuth (2020: 22) claim that this may be particularly helpful and motivating for weaker students.

2.2.7. Competition

Competition is closely connected to other aspects such as points or leaderboards. In gamification, competition serves as a motivational driver that can enhance engagement and performance. It creates an environment where learners strive to do well and surpass challenges, which may not necessarily involve direct comparison with their peers. While some studies suggest that competition can improve learner motivation, attention, and student excitement (Cagiltay et al. 2015: 38), its effectiveness is not universally guaranteed.

Previous research (Van Eck & Dempsey 2002: 24) indicates that competition functions differently depending on various factors, such as the type of game or the form of competition (against oneself, others, chance, or time). Although competition can provide additional challenge, active participation and motivation, as Burguillo (2010) suggests, there is no consensus about its overall impact on learning outcomes.

When implementing competitive game elements, it is essential to focus on fostering positive aspects such as collaboration and team-based challenges to mitigate potential drawbacks like student anxiety and decreased self-efficacy (Kohn 1992). It seems that competition alone does not necessarily lead to better learning outcomes and may, in some cases, demotivate learners who struggle to keep up with their peers. However, when implemented and structured carefully, when learners work together to compete against a game, time constraints or other groups of learners, competition can create a positive and exciting learning atmosphere (Cagiltay et al. 2015: 39). Therefore, educators should consider balancing competitive elements with collaborative aspects to ensure that all students, regardless of their proficiency within a certain subject area, remain engaged and encouraged to participate.

2.2.8. Levels and Progression

Levels and progression constitute a core component of gamified designs, providing learners with a structured sense of advancement as they move through increasingly

difficult tasks. These progression systems serve several purposes. On the one hand, they offer players clear orientation within a larger game environment, while also providing feedback on performance and creating a sense of growth (Werbach & Hunter 2012). Progression typically unfolds through stages, levels, milestones or missions, each signaling that the learner has mastered a particular set of skills or overcome a specific challenge. This structure helps sustain motivation by allowing learners to visualize improvement over time, thereby reinforcing a sense of achievement and feelings of competence, which are key drivers of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci 2000).

In educational contexts, levels and progression have shown to support motivation and learning by breaking down complex learning processes into smaller, manageable pieces with clear goals and outcomes (Sailer et al. 2017). When learners understand what they are working towards and see evidence of their advancement, they are more likely to sustain effort and engage more deeply with the material. In language learning specifically, structured progression can support the development of communicative competence by gradually increasing task complexity in line with the learners' growing linguistic abilities (Carrillo et al. 2019).

However, the value of progression extends beyond motivational benefits. Progression can also create a sense of identity and agency within a learning environment. By giving learners the opportunity to "level up", assume new roles, access new content, or unlock previously unavailable options, progression systems mirror the personalized pathways common in digital games (Gee 2007). Such systems encourage learners to see themselves as active participants in their own learning journey, rather than passive recipients of instruction.

Despite these strengths, the integration of explicit progression systems in print materials remains limited. Traditional textbooks tend to follow a linear unit structure organized around themes or grammatical content, offering little visible progression beyond the turning of pages. Unlike digital platforms, print materials are rigid and cannot really visualize progress through dashboards, badges or similar mechanisms. Therefore, opportunities to implement these elements remain limited in many ELT coursebooks.

Nonetheless, progression can be incorporated in non-digital formats through creative task design. For example, missions with multiple steps or staged tasks that offer increasingly complex prompts can create a sense of advancement. As later chapters of this thesis illustrate, progression does not necessarily require technology and can be implemented through thoughtful sequencing and framing of tasks.

3. Benefits & Challenges of Gamification in ELT

Over the past decades, gamification has been increasingly applied in education, following promising results in areas such as health, business, and sustainability. In educational contexts, gamification is often associated with attempts to boost learner motivation and engagement through the integration of game elements. In the previous sections, various game elements were explored, emphasizing their potential to increase engagement, motivation, and active participation in learning. Yet, despite the growing interest and the optimistic discourse surrounding this topic, empirical evidence “[...] on the effectiveness of incorporating game elements in learning environments is still scarce” (Dicheva et al. 2015: 10). Considering this limitation, the present chapter reviews existing literature on gamification with a focus on language teaching.

3.1. Benefits of gamification in ELT

While gamification has attracted significant attention across various fields, much of the existing research focuses on areas outside of education, such as marketing, health, business, and software development. Gamified strategies have been employed to increase customer engagement and brand loyalty (Punwatkar & Verghese 2025), promote healthy behavior in fitness apps (Feng et al. 2020), improve employee performance in corporate settings (Kalaman 2012), and enhance user experience in digital platforms (García-Magro et al. 2023).

In the field of education, although often cited as a promising area for gamification, there is still room for empirical attention left to explore. Nevertheless, a growing number of studies emphasize its positive impact on learning experiences, including within the ELT context. Wulantari et al. (2023: 2850), who examined the effects of gamification in ELT, found that students often find gamified tasks more compelling than traditional exercises, leading to increased participation and sustained interest in

the subject matter. These findings are supported by Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli (2021), who have conducted a structured literature review of 103 articles focusing on gamification in language learning and teaching. Their results indicate that gamification in language education is primarily used to enhance learner motivation and engagement, most commonly through game elements such as points, time constraints, as well as features like competition and leaderboards. Furthermore, they claim that implementation of such elements makes foreign language learning more enjoyable.

When certain game or gamification elements are incorporated into learning activities, they can help create a low-stakes environment in which mistakes are expected and accepted, allowing learners to experiment more freely and engage creatively without fear of judgement. This idea aligns well with the observation of play by Hansen (2011: 406):

Play (in the sense of just playing a game as opposed to doing an exercise) is one way of avoiding the storm of limitations and negative expectations that descend unconsciously when we labour to learn in classrooms: nobody judges or criticises your performance in snakes and ladders! Transform an exercise into a game and (provided you get it right) it will invite instead a confident expectation of fun and effortless success.

Games provide a space where learners can explore, make mistakes, and learn from them without having to feel pressure or anxiety associated with traditional classroom settings. A concrete example of this approach was *Classcraft*, a learning platform that turned the classroom into a role-playing game, allowing students to create avatars, work in teams, earn experience points, unlock abilities and features or lose health points based on real-life actions. *Classcraft* has been researched empirically on many levels before it was shut down in 2024 due to a lack of funding. Zhang et al. (2021) carried out a content analysis (n=18) and a meta-analysis (n=27) of studies that investigated *Classcraft*. Results demonstrated that an increase in motivation and learning achievement can be attained through the implementation of the game in classrooms. Rivera-Trigueros & Sánchez-Pérez (2020) devised a *Classcraft* course for EFL high school learners (n=43) in Spain, based on the popular TV show Game of Thrones. Questionnaires were distributed before and after the intervention to measure intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the participants. While the results revealed that students did not perceive the gamified method as being helpful for passing exams,

their responses confirmed a strong impact on motivation and engagement, with some students saying that they would have liked to be chosen more frequently by the game mechanics. Armada & Priyana (2023: 105) conducted a review of research about the effectiveness of *Classcraft* in English teaching. They analyzed 153 articles published between 2018 and 2023, finding that the use of *Classcraft* had positive effects on “[...] academic performance, positive behavior, motivation, engagement, active learning, and overall satisfaction.” In particular, they found that gamified environments offer a low-risk and engaging space for learners to explore and practice a foreign language while promoting teamwork and social interaction at the same time.

The positive impact of gamification on student motivation and engagement is further demonstrated by different research. Domínguez et al. (2013) created a gamified plug-in for an online learning space for university students, investigating the effects on motivation and engagement. The online module to be completed by the students was adapted for the experimental group, adding elements of personalization, challenges, and medals for completing tasks. Their results show that gamification elements such as badges and leaderboards “[...] can have a great emotional and social impact on students, as reward systems and competitive social mechanisms seem to be motivating for them” (Domínguez et al. 2013: 391). This aligns with earlier research on motivation, which highlights the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors in learning (Ryan & Deci 2000). However, authors consistently emphasize that in order to capitalize on the positive effects of gamification, careful planning and big effort are required. (Rivera-Trigueros & Sánchez-Pérez 2020: 19; Domínguez et al. 2013: 391)

Beyond boosting motivation and engagement, gamification also appears to support vocabulary acquisition, particularly when integrated into mobile-assisted language learning environments. Gao and Pan (2023) examined the gamified features of two of the most popular vocabulary learning applications in the Asian context. Their findings suggest a positive correlation between interactive game designs and vocabulary retention, motivation, and emotional engagement. Besides presenting vocabulary through visual and auditory input, the use of game elements like leaderboards, daily streaks and reward systems had positive effects on the users and their learning. However, the authors of the study caution that poorly designed activities could lead to

opposite effects and disengage learners. For example, if pictures failed to accurately represent word meanings, learners felt confused rather than supported.

A positive correlation between retention and gamification is corroborated by Putz et al. (2020), who conducted a longitudinal study with secondary and university level students from Austria (n=617). Over the course of two years, multiple workshop designs were carried out, tested, and improved. The gamified workshops of the experimental group included clear goals, immediate feedback, leaderboards, time constraints, competition & cooperation, storytelling, and rewards & badges. Participants were tested for knowledge at three instances: right before the workshops, 20 minutes after and 14 days after participating. The results revealed that: "Overall, gamification turned out to have a positive effect on students' knowledge retention, independent of age and gender" (Putz et al. 2020: 9).

While the previous study did focus entirely on knowledge retention, there is another Austrian study that did engage specifically with the effects of gamification in an EFL lesson sequence that lasted one month. Stocker (2020) administered her study at a vocational school in Graz, with 15 female students aged between 15 and 17 years participating. She confirmed her hypothesis that students would find a gamified lesson approach more attractive by collecting quantitative as well as qualitative questionnaire data. Her findings suggest a clear preference to conventional English lessons communicated by the students: "Compared to their regular EFL classes, students' perceived autonomy, competence, and emotional engagement were improved [...]", with competitive elements, such as points, badges, leaderboards, emerging as the most compelling elements. (Stocker 2020: 110).

In summary, the reviewed literature suggests that gamification can offer several benefits, particularly in terms of enhancing learner motivation, engagement and, in some contexts knowledge retention. Studies across different educational levels indicate that well-designed gamified activities may foster participation and support positive learner attitudes. At the same time, researchers warn that the effectiveness of such activities is highly dependent on thoughtful planning and careful selection of game elements.

3.2. Challenges and Limitations of Gamification in ELT

Although gamification and game-based learning are often associated with promising benefits, their implementation in educational settings is far from straightforward, and several limitations must be taken into consideration. As Landers (2014: 753) notes, the assumption that any use of gamification will inherently improve learning outcomes is unsupported by empirical evidence. Many studies comparing gamified and non-gamified contexts report positive results (Dicheva et al. 2015; Wulantari et al. 2023; Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli 2021), yet they often overlook crucial factors such as instructional context, learner diversity, and the design quality of the gamified activity. Under these conditions, commonly used elements such as points, badges, or levels may foster learning in some environments while hindering it in others.

Beyond these general challenges, a substantial body of research highlights deeper conceptual issues. Deterding et al. (2011: 11) distinguish between *playing* and *gaming*, emphasizing that gaming experiences are frequently competitive and structured around rule-bound progression systems. *Play*, on the other hand, is more free, unstructured and even “tumultuous”. Features like scores, leaderboards, or ranking mechanisms are often borrowed directly into educational gamification. However, these features primarily boost *extrinsic* motivation. This is one of the central criticisms raised by Stocker (2020), who argues that designs relying heavily on competitive mechanics risk promoting what is known as *pointsification*: the reduction of gamification to simple reward structures that can undermine intrinsic motivation over time. In an article published online, [Robertson \(2010\)](#) similarly warns that elevating points or badges to the core of the gamified experience means “taking the thing that is least essential to games and representing it as the core of the experience.”

These concerns are echoed in Nicholson’s (2012) argument for *meaningful gamification*, which foregrounds user-centric and intrinsically motivating design. Nicholson cautions that narrow, reward-based approaches may generate short-term excitement but are unlikely to lead to deep learning and may even decrease motivation when their novelty wears off. This critique is particularly relevant in ELT classrooms, where learners bring diverse needs, abilities, and emotional responses to the learning environment. In addition to general cognitive or motivational differences that different learners have in a classroom, in ELT lessons there are more factors like proficiency

levels, linguistic backgrounds, willingness to communicate, and language anxiety, that need to be considered. Unlike in many other subjects, language learning requires frequent performances through speaking, interacting, or writing in front of peers. In such an environment, reward-driven gamification may disproportionately benefit confident or highly proficient learners, while discouraging others who need more time, scaffolding, or psychological safety to participate. Consequently, gamified designs that rely heavily on ranking or point accumulation risk reinforcing a gap between EFL learners rather than supporting inclusive and meaningful learning experiences.

Empirical studies have also demonstrated counterproductive learner behaviors emerging from gamified systems. Diefenbach and Müssig (2019), in their study of the gamified task manager *Habitica*, describe how reward-driven environments can lead users to bypass meaningful activities in favour of tasks that yield more points or fewer penalties. Comparable patterns were reported by Stocker (2020), where students admitted to cheating during the gamified English lesson sequences or avoiding difficult tasks simply to climb the leaderboard. In both cases, learners prioritized game performance over genuine learning, a behavior directly linked to extrinsic motivational structures.

Other scholars have reported different consequences of poorly implemented gamification. Boulet (2016), for instance, argues that extrinsic incentives do not necessarily translate into increased learning motivation and may even distract students from the core learning objectives. This is further supported by findings from a longitudinal study (Hanus & Fox 2014) comparing a gamified and a non-gamified university course over a 16-week semester. Despite the inclusion of three popular gamification mechanics (competition, leaderboards, and badges) students in the experimental group reported declining levels of motivation and ultimately achieved lower exam scores. Similarly, Seaborn and Fels (2015) highlight the broader problem of limited theoretical grounding in early gamification research and note that relying purely on incentives risks masking deeper pedagogical issues. If gamification is needed merely to make content “interesting”, it may signal that the underlying material lacks relevance on its own.

Furdu et al. (2017: 58) further warn that gamification may backfire when it becomes too rigid or mandatory, as overly structured mechanics can reproduce the same

pressures found in traditional schooling. When students are rewarded solely for correct outcomes, they may become risk-averse, discouraged by failure, or reluctant to try challenging tasks. This contradicts one of the key educational advantages that gamification should support, namely the normalization of failure as an essential part of learning. To prevent such unintended effects, gamified activities in ELT must emphasize effort, persistence, and exploration rather than mere performance metrics. Allowing students to experiment, fail safely, and try again fosters resilience and supports the development of intrinsic motivation, an outcome consistently advocated by Nicholson (2012) and aligned with broader critiques of reward-based designs.

Finally, qualitative data collected by Wagner (2023) shows that Austrian EFL teachers are rather unfamiliar with the concept of gamification. The study identifies several possible reasons, including a lack of formal training in gamification during teacher education programs, limited access to resources and support, and the constraints imposed by teachers' heavy workloads.

In sum, while gamification holds considerable potential, these challenges underscore the need for thoughtful, theoretically grounded, and learner-centered design in ELT. Without careful consideration, gamification risks shifting attention away from meaningful learning and toward superficial indicators of progress. When applied critically and sensitively, however, it can enrich classroom experiences rather than reduce them to point-based competition.

4. Theoretical foundations of materials analysis

Materials analysis in the context of language teaching involves examining textbooks and other teaching materials to evaluate their content, design, and pedagogical approach. This process aims to ensure effective and engaging materials, as well as their alignment with curricular objectives. Theoretical foundations for materials analysis and textbook development draw on different perspectives, including communicative language teaching and task-based learning.

Textbooks, also known as coursebooks, serve as a cornerstone in most language teaching courses. Richards (1998: 125) underscores the central role of textbooks in language learning worldwide, identifying them - alongside teachers and learners - as

one of three fundamental elements present in most classrooms. While other resources and materials exist, none of them are used as much as coursebooks. Yet, the predominance of textbooks, especially global ones from big publishers, has sparked debates regarding their suitability in diverse teaching contexts.

Tomlinson (2012: 158) and McGrath (2002: 10) note that the majority of popular textbooks designed for a global audience fail to engage learners appropriately and do not sufficiently address the needs of specific learner groups. Instead, they argue for the usage of local contents tailored to their cultural and educational contexts. Looking at the Austrian context, however, most textbooks used in schools are indeed local or adapted and aligned with local curricular and approved by the Ministry of Education. This, according to Beißkammer (2014: 25), “[...] might better cater to all various contexts and foci of schools” in Austria.

Furthermore, the continued use of textbooks over time can lead to different experiences for teachers and students. Fredriksson & Olsson (2006: 22) highlight that students use textbooks for only one year, while teachers continue to work with these materials throughout consecutive years. The repeated utilization of materials creates comfort for teachers yet leads to dissatisfaction when they perceive the materials as outdated or restrictive.

Previous research and teachers’ personal accounts documented by McGrath (2013) show that most instructors are not completely satisfied with their coursebooks. Alamri (2008: 81) reported that numerous participants found their textbooks to be outdated regarding teaching methods and learning strategies because they presented a teacher-centered approach that restricted student participation. Similarly, Graves (2000: 188) provides the account of a teacher who actively sought to enhance student engagement through activities that were relevant and participatory: “My main concern was to develop activities that would focus on learners’ needs, give some control to the students, allow for students’ creativity and innovation to enhance students’ sense of competence and self-worth.”

The student-centered approach to education which emphasizes personal growth and self-directed learning aligns with the principles of game-based learning and the adaptations to the materials that will be proposed in this thesis. Simone, a different teacher mentioned in Graves’ work, actively adapted coursebook materials to promote

more interaction and make activities more relevant to her students' lives: "Her understanding of what her students needed in order to be able to participate in these activities [...] was a key factor in the success of her course" (Graves 2000: 191).

Contrary to the unsatisfied teachers' opinions, the reality is that textbooks are a necessity for teachers as they often lack "[...] time or resources to prepare their own materials" (Graves 2000: 173). Well-designed ELT coursebooks offer a framework that aligns with curricular objectives and provide structure, content, and valuable materials for teachers. They come with ready-made activities to practice a variety of skills and prepare learners for important exams. Especially Austrian ELT coursebooks provide lots of materials to make progress towards meeting curricular expectations, saving teachers hours of lesson planning time. However, this convenience may come at the cost of reduced learner engagement, as Wagner (2023: 59) implies that the strong reliance on the textbooks can result in lessons that "[...] might not be very engaging".

Tomlinson (2013: 16) conducted an analysis of globally published coursebooks and found a significant mismatch between SLA theory and the materials commonly used in ELT classrooms. According to his findings, the textbooks tend to be overwhelmingly forms-focused, meaning that they prioritize item practice over meaningful communication. While some coursebooks make attempts at personalization and provide opportunities for noticing, there is almost no choice of content, route or activities offered to the learners. The most prevalent shortcomings of the analyzed materials according to Tomlinson (2013: 17) were:

- Little use of literature or engaging texts beyond simplified, short passages.
- Activities are generally practice-based rather than usage-based.
- Topics and tasks are bland and safe, often failing to provoke affective responses or creativity.
- Learners are rarely asked to think critically, interact meaningfully, or produce extensive written or spoken output.
- Limited recycling of language through meaningful use.

The discussion above highlights that while textbooks function as important scaffolding tools for teachers with limited time and resources, they may fail to engage learners properly. While gamification cannot address all of the structural limitations identified

above, selected game principles may offer opportunities to tackle some of the shortcomings, particularly with regard to learner engagement, interaction, and meaningful language use. These findings underscore the need to carefully analyze and adapt materials to align them with CLT principles. The following section will therefore focus on how coursebooks can be evaluated and modified to mitigate these limitations.

4.1. Materials Analysis, Evaluation and Adaptation

Several scholars have proposed approaches to material analysis and evaluation. Material analysis is a process that precedes evaluation, where information about the material's features is gathered (Cunningsworth 1995: 9). The analysis is essential to understand the structure and contents of textbooks. Evaluation, in contrast, involves interpretative judgements based on the data from the analysis, which makes it inherently more subjective (McGrath 2002: 28; Tomlinson 2012: 158).

The different approaches to material analysis and evaluation suggested by earlier research vary in terminology but offer significant overlaps in terms of their frameworks. While Cunningham (1995) discusses evaluation "approaches", Littlejohn (2011: 184) outlines "levels of analysis", and McGrath (2002) describes "methods of analysis".

The first step typically involves an initial overview of the material, which may include physical aspects such as layout, design, color usage, audience, and publication details (Littlejohn 2011; McGrath 2002). Following this overview, a more structured *checklist method* (McGrath 2002: 32) is employed to systematically assess key aspects such as learning objectives, skill coverage, content organization, and language focus. A similar approach is endorsed by Cunningsworth (1995: 2) who proposes to adapt checklists to individual needs and research foci. Finally, the *in-depth method* (McGrath 2002: 33) or *in-depth evaluation* (Cunningsworth 1995: 2), involves a deeper exploration of specific elements based on learner needs, curricula, or institutional expectations. This stage requires actively seeking information rather than just noting down observations.

Another comprehensive framework for the analysis and adaptation of textbooks is provided by Graves (2000). Similarly to the aforementioned frameworks, this process involves understanding the structure of coursebooks, considering contextual factors,

evaluating textbook content, and finally engaging in a process of adaptation. The elements of the process are interconnected and essential for a thorough and meaningful analysis of teaching materials.

Graves (2000) further outlines a range of adaptation strategies available to teachers, depending on their familiarity with the coursebook and the needs of their students. Adaptations, Graves (2000: 188) suggests, can be made at three levels: the activity level, the unit level, and the syllabus level. In light of the focus of this thesis, which explores how to adapt textbook activities through the integration of game elements, particular attention will be given to the first level. This level allows for targeted modifications that have been shown to improve student engagement, promote interaction, and align more closely with a learner-centered approach to language teaching (ibid.).

At the activity level, teachers may choose to change, supplement, or eliminate activities. The adaptations should always align with both pedagogical aims as well as classroom realities, such as time constraints, student expectations, and institutional demands. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their learners' needs, experiment with alternatives to the activities found in coursebooks, and remain flexible. Change can be "*radical*", as McGrath (2013: 141) points out, as he gives an example of a Chinese teacher who adapted a text into a play performed by his students.

Another illustrative example of textbook adaptation is provided by Simone Machado Camillo, a language teacher from Brazil. To teach the past simple tense of the verb *to be*, she designed warm-up, presentation, practice, and consolidation activities. Her exercises make use of personalized grammar content, as well as student creativity and autonomy. Through activities like role-plays, personalized dialogues, and games, she provided meaningful contexts for language use and fostered learner participation. Judging by the positive remarks of her students in their journals, her changes to the textbook exercises demonstrate that even small adaptations at the activity level can enhance learner motivation and comprehension. (Graves 2000: 188-191)

5. The Study

Textbooks continue to be a fundamental aspect of language teaching around the world, and the Austrian context is no exception. Ready-to-use materials remain central to instructional planning, providing structure, consistency, and alignment with curricular expectations. In Austrian English classrooms, ELT coursebooks function as essential pedagogical tools that guide teachers through their lessons and supply much of the content students engage with on a daily basis. Despite their importance, however, coursebooks are often disconnected from individual learner needs and interests and frequently lack mechanisms that sustain engagement or support intrinsic motivation.

Gamification, the use of game elements in non-game settings, has gained increasing attention as a promising approach to enhance motivation, participation, and overall learning outcomes. Research has shown that thoughtfully implemented gamification can boost student engagement, encourage persistence, and create more meaningful learning experiences. At the same time, scholars warn that poorly designed or overly superficial gamified approaches risk reducing learning to the mere accumulation of points or rewards, ultimately undermining intrinsic motivation in the long term. This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as pointsification (see section 2.3.2.), highlights the need for careful and theoretically grounded application of gamification principles.

In the context of ELT materials, this caution is particularly relevant. Although the potential of gamification and game-based learning has been discussed in the literature ([see section 3.1.](#)), their practical implementation in textbooks remains underdeveloped. Many tasks found in contemporary coursebooks still rely on traditional, repetitive formats and make limited use of elements associated with increased engagement, such as narrative framing, clear feedback loops, challenge structures, progress indicators, or opportunities for collaboration and competition. The existing materials therefore offer a valuable site for investigation: they are widely used, pedagogically influential, but not yet fully aligned with insights from current gamification research.

This study aims to determine to what extent gamified design features are present in ELT coursebooks used in Austria and, furthermore, to explore how selected activities

could be adapted to better reflect principles drawn from game-based learning. By doing so, the study contributes to the critical evaluation of teaching materials and supports their continued development in line with contemporary pedagogical research.

5.1. Aim, Research Questions and Hypotheses

The aim of this thesis is twofold: first, to analyze the presence and distribution of game elements in Austrian ELT textbooks; and second, to propose adaptations to selected materials that incorporate gamification principles in a pedagogically meaningful way. Establishing a clear conceptualization of game elements is essential to this process, particularly given the ongoing debate in the literature about what should be considered a game element and how these elements can best be integrated into educational contexts. Since many game features found in instructional materials are not explicitly labeled as gamified, careful identification and interpretation are required.

The following research questions serve to guide the present investigation:

1. To what extent are game elements present in contemporary ELT coursebooks used in Austrian schools?
2. How are game elements distributed across different areas of language competence (vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, writing, speaking)?
3. How can selected tasks be adapted using gamification principles?

Based on research presented in previous chapters the following hypotheses can be formulated in relation to the research questions guiding this investigation.

H1: Game elements such as feedback, challenge, and collaboration are expected to appear more frequently in ELT textbooks than others like points, badges, avatars or leaderboards.

Feedback is a core component in education and can be expected to be encountered in some form, either through answer keys, peer-review tasks or teacher guided reflections, within the textbooks. Likewise, challenge and collaboration are sometimes embedded in textbook activities. Even though they may not be framed as explicitly gamified, they serve similar purposes and align with gamification principles.

H2: Speaking and writing tasks are more likely to include game-based elements than grammar and vocabulary tasks.

This hypothesis is based on the assumption that productive skills often require interaction, creativity, and engagement with others. They offer more opportunities to incorporate motivational elements than grammar and vocabulary tasks. The latter, by contrast, tend to follow formats that do not involve game elements and lack immersive or interactive features.

H3: Game elements in textbooks are implicit rather than explicitly labelled or structured.

It is expected that elements that align with gamification principles exist implicitly within coursebook activities. While they may fulfill similar pedagogical objectives, they are most likely not labelled as game-based features. For example, progress and achievement may be reflected through self-checks or cumulative activities, but not through visible points, leaderboards or badges. Similarly, narratives and collaborative tasks may be found in textbooks, yet it is unlikely that they are presented as missions, quests, or competitive challenges.

5.2. Methodology

This study analyzes two widely used ELT textbooks in the Austrian lower secondary context. Both coursebooks are aligned with the national curriculum for English as a foreign language classes and target learners at CEFR levels A2 to B1. The two coursebooks under examination are *More! 4*, a long-standing edition and popular choice in Austrian schools, and *Easy 4*, part of a recent series of publications that follow the adventures of Mira and her friends.

The two coursebooks were selected due to their availability, broad usage in Austrian lower secondary classrooms, as well as structural comparability. Each book provides a rich variety of language tasks covering all four skills and a range of different topics corresponding to the suggested thematic areas that can be found in the curriculum.

The methodological framework of this study draws on established approaches to textbook analysis, particularly those discussed earlier by Littlejohn (2011), McGrath (2002), Cunningsworth (1995), and Graves (2000). To effectively explore the

integration of gamification and game elements in ELT coursebooks, the research design is structured into three phases: (1) an impressionistic overview, (2) a structured analysis of tasks, and (3) the adaptation of selected tasks.

The first phase consists of an initial overview of the selected textbooks. The focus is on physical and structural features such as layout, design, visual appeal color schemes, and overall presentation. In addition, supplementary components such as companion apps or online materials are documented. The corresponding analysis sheet for this part can be found in the Appendix section (Appendix A, p. 92). This overview helps establish a first impression of the qualities of the coursebooks, creating a foundation for a more detailed investigation.

The second phase includes a structured analysis to examine each task across both textbooks. A digital spreadsheet (Appendix B, p. 94) was used to document each task and to code the presence of selected game elements. For each task, basic identifying information was recorded (coursebook, unit, page number) to ensure traceability. In addition, each task was coded by primary skill focus (vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, speaking, writing), allowing for comparisons across language-skill areas and the identification of distribution patterns.

The third phase goes beyond observation and analysis and involves the adaptation of selected tasks from both coursebooks. The aim of this stage is to apply informed changes at the activity level to illustrate how gamification principles can be integrated into existing coursebook materials. For this purpose, a number of typical tasks from each coursebook were selected and revised to incorporate game elements that were underrepresented or absent in the original materials. The selection was guided by multiple criteria: (1) high frequency of task type across units, (2) low density or absence of gamification elements, and (3) feasibility of adaptation within realistic classroom constraints. The adaptations were designed to remain aligned with learner-centered principles as well as practical constraints such as time and curricular requirements. Each adapted activity is accompanied by a brief rationale outlining the choice of game elements, intended learning outcomes, and practical considerations for implementation.

5.2.1. Selection of Game Elements

In order to investigate gamification in ELT coursebooks in a systematic and theoretically grounded manner, it was first necessary to determine which game elements would be included in the analysis. The selection of elements was informed by the gamification literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. Although frameworks differ in terminology and classification, there is substantial overlap regarding the elements most frequently associated with gamified learning environments (Deterding et al. 2011; Sailer et al. 2017; Cugelman 2013; Nicholson 2012). The following game elements were selected for the analysis:

- Points or scoring systems
- Badges or achievements
- Levels or progression indicators
- Narrative or storytelling elements
- Learner choice
- Feedback
- Leaderboards
- Competition
- Collaboration
- Challenges or missions

These elements were chosen for two main reasons. First, they appear consistently across multiple theoretical frameworks and empirical studies on gamification and game-based learning, particularly in educational and ELT contexts. Second, they are not limited to digital environments but can, at least in principle, be implemented in non-digital and print-based learning materials, which is essential given the focus on traditional coursebooks. Game mechanics that depend exclusively on digital contexts were not included, as they cannot reasonably be expected to occur in printed

textbooks. The selected elements therefore represent a balance between theoretical relevance and practical applicability within the context of Austrian lower secondary ELT materials.

A clarification is required regarding the category of learner choice. Initially, the analysis aimed to identify tasks in which learners could personalize an avatar or create a character representing themselves within an activity. Since no such tasks were found in either textbook, the criteria were broadened to include any activities offering learners meaningful choice (e.g., selecting a role for a role-play, choosing between task options, or selecting between alternative writing prompts).

5.2.2. Operationalization of Game Elements

To ensure consistency and transparency in the analysis, each game element was operationalized through explicit criteria that guided the coding process. A task was coded as containing a specific game element only if the element was identifiable through clear and observable features within the task instructions or structure (Table 2).

Table 2 Operationalization of Game Elements

Game Element	Operational Definition
Point Systems	Tasks explicitly awarded points or similar numerical indicators linked to performance or task achievement.
Badges	Tasks included symbolic rewards or achievements earned through completing specific actions or milestones.
Levels / Progression Indicators	Tasks formed part of a staged or sequenced structure with clearly distinguishable steps or increasing difficulty.
Narrative / Storytelling Elements	Tasks embedded learner activity in a fictional, role-based, or story-driven context.
Learner choice	Tasks offered learners meaningful options influencing task content, process, or outcome (e.g. choice of role, topic, or task format).
Feedback	Tasks provided explicit information on learner performance or progress beyond simple correct/incorrect answers (e.g. self-checks, peer feedback, progress indicators).
Leaderboards	Tasks involved ranking learners or groups based on points, performance, or task completion.
Competition	Tasks involved direct or indirect comparison between learners or groups (e.g. contests, races, point-based rivalry).
Collaboration	Tasks required learners to work together toward a shared goal, emphasizing cooperation over individual performance.
Challenges / Missions	Tasks were framed as goals, problems, or missions to be completed, involving difficulty or achievement beyond routine practice.

5.2.3. Coding Procedure

The structured analysis was conducted by a single researcher, which is a common and accepted approach in small-scale research project. Rather than aiming for statistical reliability through interrater procedures, which would not be feasible within the scope of this study, the analysis focused on consistency and transparency.

To achieve this, the coding process followed an iterative procedure. Initial coding decisions were reviewed and refined during the analysis to ensure that categories were applied consistently across both textbooks. Ambiguous cases were resolved by returning to the operational definitions (see Table 2) and checking alignment with the theoretical frameworks discussed in earlier chapters.

In cases where textbook activities consisted of multiple sub-tasks (e.g. 1a listen and answer; 1b listen again and check), the task was treated as a single analytical unit. If a game element such as a narrative context, challenge, or feedback was already present in the initial sub-task, it was not coded again for subsequent sub-parts of the same activity. This approach was adopted to avoid double counting and consequently falsify the results. Importantly, the mere presence of multiple sub-tasks within an activity was not interpreted as an instance of levels or progression. Tasks were only coded as containing this element when a staged structure with clearly indicated advancement or increasing difficulty was explicitly signaled.

All coding decisions were documented in a digital spreadsheet (Appendix B, p. 94), allowing for traceability and systematic comparison. This transparent documentation supports the internal consistency of the analysis and enables readers to understand how coding decisions were made.

6. Results

The following chapter presents the findings from the textbook analysis, structured in three parts, reflecting the three methodological phases outlined in the previous section. There will be a general overview of the two selected coursebooks, followed by a systematic analysis of the presence of specific game elements. The findings will be presented quantitatively through frequency tables and distribution charts, and qualitatively through selected examples. Lastly, the final stage takes this project beyond a descriptive analysis, exploring how textbook tasks can be adapted by using gamification principles.

Together, these three phases provide an insight into the extent and manner in which gamification is integrated into contemporary ELT textbooks in Austria, and how such materials can be further developed to better align with current findings in game-based learning research.

6.1. Phase One - Overview of the Coursebooks

The first phase of this analysis consists of an overview of the two selected coursebooks *More! 4* and *Easy 4*. This section provides a comparison of the structural and design features and impressions of each textbook. The aim is to develop an understanding of the materials, which will establish a foundation for a more detailed investigation to follow.

More! 4, first published in 2019, by Helbling Languages, is a well-established and widely used ELT textbook and part of the *More!* series that is frequently used in Austrian lower secondary classrooms. The edition under examination is designed for learners at the A2-B1 CERF level, targeting students aged approximately 12 to 14. When skimming through the table of contents, the colorful design is already noticeable. *More! 4* includes 13 units, each with a different thematic emphasis. Each unit encompasses a variety of tasks that cover the four major skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. Each unit also includes grammar summaries in blue boxes as well as review sections labeled “Essential English”. Navigation through the book is supported by color-coded headings, a well-structured table of contents, and visual icons that signal digital resources and different activity types, such as listening, or preparatory tasks for standardized testing. Digital components include an

accompanying app where learners can find audios, graphic stories and videos. Additionally, students can find practice materials and tasks in the “ezone” on the publisher’s website.

Easy 4, published in 2022, by Veritas, adopts a more simple and traditional design. Developed for the same target group, learners aged between 12 and 14 years, at the A2-B1 CERF level, this coursebook is divided into twelve thematic units and three “Culture Spots” about the US, Australia and New Zealand. In comparison to the *More! 4*, this coursebook looks cleaner and more spacious, offering learners plenty of room to write, annotate and engage with the materials directly on the page. Even though the color palette is more muted than that of its competing textbook, different color schemes are used to differentiate grammar and vocabulary sections from the rest of the unit.

Visuals are frequently used in both textbooks, although their stylistic approaches differ. While *More! 4* includes mostly real-life photographs, the grammar boxes make use exclusively of cartoon-style illustrations. Some recurring characters are featured in video and comic segments (“The Mag” & “The Girl Next Door”), which contribute to narrative continuity across units. In contrast, *Easy 4* prominently makes use of illustrated characters such as Mia and her friends, who appear regularly throughout the *Easy* coursebook series and accompany the learners all four years of lower secondary. This creates a stronger sense of narrative identity and offers learners repeated interaction with familiar personas.

Thematically, both textbooks are aligned with curriculum standards and include topics of relevance to teenagers. *More! 4* features units on different cultures, detective stories, careers, food, literature, among others. While varied and engaging, topics tend to follow a more traditional ELT approach. *Easy 4*, on the other hand, includes broader and more socially engaged and up to date themes such as activism, inclusion, climate change, emotional health and personal identity. These topics are introduced through accessible language and personalized tasks that invite learner reflection and

autonomy. In terms of motivational and gamified elements, the companion app *Easy* stands out in this review, as it features many gamification characteristics. The structure of the contents mirrors the unit structure of the book. For each unit, the app provides a set of four tasks consisting of vocabulary practice alongside either two reading and one grammar task or one grammar and two reading tasks. The application enables users to track their progress through a dynamic dashboard (Image 1), which displays statistics such as total points collected, time spent learning, number of repetitions completed, and the percentage of finished tasks.

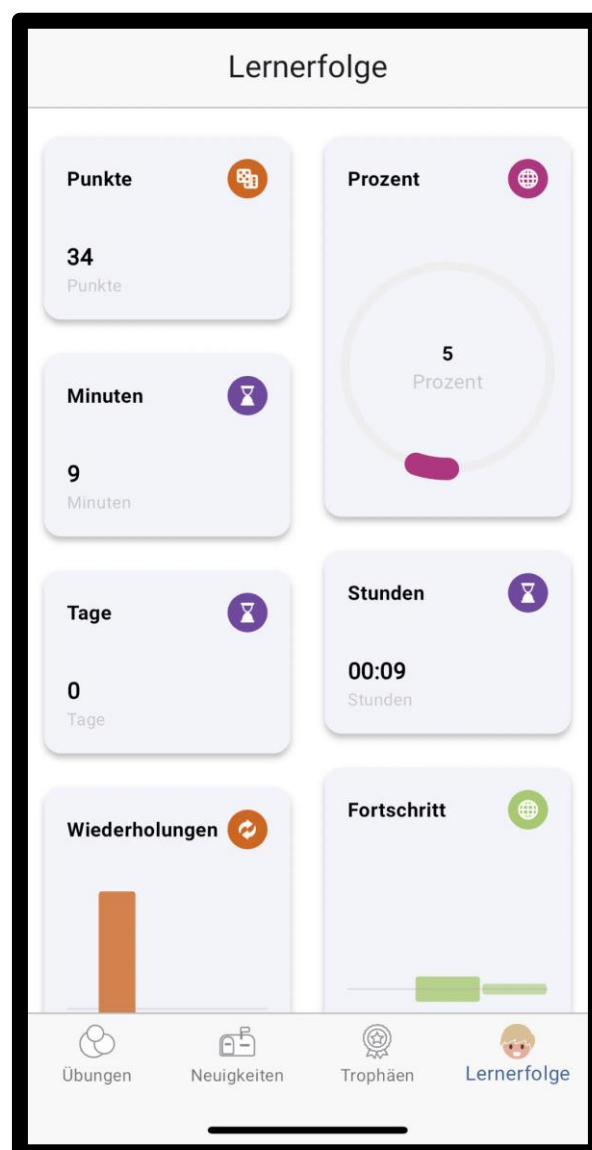


Image 1 Visualized progress in the Easy companion app

Upon completing a task, users receive immediate feedback in the form of points they scored and performance summaries. Moreover, the app allows learners to earn badges and collect stars as they advance, this way incorporating further gamification principles. This helps foster motivation and gives learners a sense of achievement and reward for their learning journey.

In summary, both coursebooks offer curriculum aligned, visually engaging materials aimed at learners in the Austrian lower secondary context. *More! 4* stands out for its vibrant and modern layout and its wide variety of supplementary multimedia content, including audios, videos and graphic stories. Its traditional ELT structure and clear unit organization make it a reliable and familiar tool for both learners and teachers. *Easy 4*, in contrast, is characterized by a more spacious and minimalist layout, providing learners with plenty of room to write directly on the page. It distinguishes itself through a choice of socially relevant topics and a recurring cast of illustrated characters who accompany learners across the textbook series. Also, the *Easy* companion app provides learners with a lot of learning and practice materials. The app makes use of various game elements such as point scoring, immediate feedback, progress tracking and allowing the users to earn badges and achievements to keep them motivated and reward them for their learning. Together, the two coursebooks reflect fundamental pedagogical and curricular priorities. The preliminary overview concludes that both books, while different in their design, meet curricular expectations and have a strong focus on the four essential skills of language learning. This initial analysis forms the basis for a more systematic checklist-based investigation to find out which game elements and principles are included in the coursebooks.

6.2. Phase Two - Structured Analysis of Game Elements

This section presents the results of the structured analysis phase focusing on the presence and distribution of gamification elements across the two ELT coursebooks *More! 4* and *Easy 4*. The analysis is guided by the two research questions:

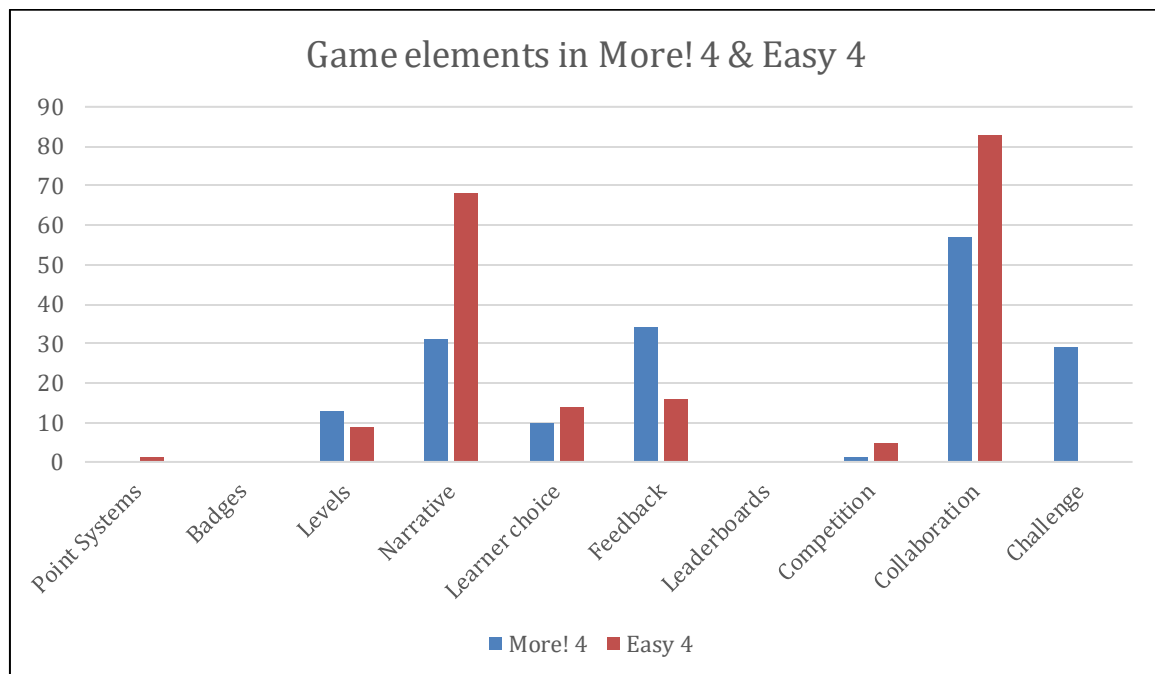
1. To what extent are game elements present in contemporary ELT coursebooks used in Austrian schools?
2. How are game elements distributed across different areas of language competence (vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, writing, speaking)?

To address these questions, a total of 314 tasks from *More! 4* and 483 tasks from *Easy 4* were analyzed. Tasks were categorized by language skill and assessed for the presence of the game elements discussed earlier. The findings are presented in several stages to provide a comprehensive overview of how gamification is reflected in the two coursebooks. First, a summary of game element frequency will be provided, comparing how often different features occur and highlighting the most prominent elements. After that, the analysis examines the difference between the two textbooks in terms of depth and variety of gamification strategies. Finally, we will explore the key areas of language competence to identify which skill makes most use of gamified elements and where such features remain underrepresented.

6.2.1. Overall Frequency of Game Elements

The analysis of the two coursebooks reveals that gamification, while present, is unevenly represented across different features and remains largely implicit rather than explicit. Table 2 summarizes the overall frequency of game elements identified in *More! 4* and *Easy 4*, indicating which aspects of gamification are prioritized and which are neglected in the selected ELT materials.

Diagram 1: Frequency of game elements in More! 4 and Easy 4



A total of 797 tasks (314 in *More! 4* and 483 in *Easy 4*) were analyzed. Out of all analyzed tasks in *More! 4*, 55,7% contain at least one game element, while for *Easy 4*

this percentage is lower (40,5%). The following patterns were discovered by the investigation:

1. Collaboration was the most frequent game-related feature, occurring 140 times across both books.
2. Narrative contexts were the second most common element, present in 99 tasks.
3. Feedback appeared 50 times.
4. Challenge-based tasks were present exclusively in *More! 4*.
5. Learner choice appeared modestly (24 times in total).
6. Explicit game mechanics such as points, badges, leaderboards, and competition were almost entirely missing, with only seven total instances recorded across both books.

The analysis of the two coursebooks revealed several key trends regarding the integration of gamification elements. The most frequent feature which was observed was collaboration, appearing prominently across a wide range of tasks. In total, 140 tasks included collaborative components, with *Easy 4* containing 83 instances (approximately 17% of its 483 tasks) and *More! 4* containing 57 instances (about 18% of its 314 tasks). Pair and group work activities stand out in particular, especially in speaking tasks where students are encouraged to role-play dialogues, share thoughts and opinions, or discuss and negotiate information to complete communicative exercises. In both books the distribution across skills is similar, with speaking tasks including the vast majority of collaborative elements. While in *More! 4* 86% (49 out of 57 tasks) of the collaborative features were found in speaking activities, these elements were slightly more distributed across other competence areas in the *Easy 4*, with 79.5% (66 out of 83 tasks) of the speaking exercises including collaboration.

The second most prevalent game-based element were narrative contexts, appearing in 99 tasks across both textbooks. This time, *More! 4* includes a lower concentration of the found instances (31), with almost 10% of its tasks including some sort of narrative context. The features were found scattered across multiple skill areas, with thirteen speaking tasks, nine listenings, four readings, four writings and one vocabulary activity containing such elements. In *Easy 4*, narrative features appeared 68 times (14% of all tasks), occurring in twenty-four reading tasks, eighteen listening

tasks, twelve writing tasks, seven speaking activities, four grammar tasks, and three vocabulary exercises.

Another frequently identified element was feedback. Tasks including this feature were found with a higher frequency in *More! 4*, where 10.8% of all exercises provided some sort of feedback to the learners. In *Easy 4*, by contrast, only 3.3% of the tasks did the same. Out of the 34 tasks that include this element in the *More! 4*, 19 are listening comprehension tasks and 12 are vocabulary exercises. These tasks very often include instructions to check one's answers during the second round of listening. While there are less tasks displaying the feedback feature in the *Easy 4*, they are more scattered across different skill areas. Of the 16 tasks six are vocabulary, four reading, three speaking, two listening and one writing task.

Learner choice was present in 24 of the 797 analyzed tasks. With 14 exercises featuring this element, *Easy 4* contained more than half of the total tasks, whereas *More! 4* included ten activities where learners were given options to actively choose from. *More! 4* allowed learners to make choices primarily when it came to speaking activities. Only one of the ten tasks containing the element of choice was a writing activity. In *Easy 4*, this was slightly more distributed. Instances of learner-choice appeared in six speaking and six writing tasks, as well as in one listening and one vocabulary task.

Elements of challenge were found exclusively in *More! 4*, with a total of 29 tasks (9.2% of the book's activities) displaying this feature, while *Easy 4* did not include any activities making use of this game-based principle. Within *More! 4*, these tasks were distributed across the competences of speaking (16), writing (7), listening (2), reading (2), grammar (1) and vocabulary (1). The challenges typically involved time constraints or word limits, requiring learners to complete specific tasks under certain conditions. For example, one activity instructed students to cover up a reading text, read it for one minute, and then write down all the names of places they remembered, encouraging focused attention and memory recall within a limited timeframe.

Levels or progression were identified in a total of 22 tasks in both coursebooks, with *More! 4* containing 13 instances (4.1% of all tasks) and *Easy 4* displaying nine (1.9%). This element was coded for activities that guided learners through clearly structured stages within a single task, allowing them to advance step by step toward completing

an outcome. In most cases, these tasks followed a multi-phase format that gradually increased engagement or complexity. A typical example is a speaking activity where students are first instructed to read, then take a minute to prepare and finally talk for a certain amount of time. While speaking activities (nine in *More! 4* and seven in *Easy 4*) accounted for the majority of tasks with this principle in both books, a smaller number of cases were also found in writing (two in each book), listening (one in *More! 4*) and in reading (one in *More! 4*) tasks.

Explicit game mechanics such as points, badges, leaderboards, and competition were almost completely absent from both textbooks. A single activity in *Easy 4* incorporated a point reward design, while no other task in *More! 4* did so. Neither book made use of badges as a form to honor learners' achievements. Leaderboards could also not be identified in either of the coursebooks, while competition was found five times in *Easy 4* and once in *More! 4*.

In summary, the analysis shows that while game elements are present in both *More! 4* and *Easy 4*, they are used selectively and largely in implicit ways. Features such as collaboration, feedback, and narrative elements occur relatively frequently, whereas personalization, levels / progression, and especially challenge-based tasks appear less often and are more unevenly distributed between the two books. Notably, *More! 4* makes greater use of challenges and structured progression, while *Easy 4* places stronger emphasis on collaborative activities and learner choice. In contrast, explicit game elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards are almost entirely absent from both coursebooks. These findings form the basis for the following section, which examines the distribution of game elements across different language skill areas in more detail.

6.2.2. Distribution Across Language Skills

While the previous section outlined the overall presence of gamification elements in the two coursebooks, this section focuses on their distribution across different areas of language competence. The aim is to examine which skills incorporate game-related features most frequently and where such elements are less represented. For this purpose, all identified instances of gamification were categorized according to the skill area targeted by the activity.

Speaking tasks contained the highest concentration of game-based elements in both textbooks. In *More! 4*, more than half of the game elements identified (56.6%) were found in speaking exercises, whereas in *Easy 4*, 47% of the elements were found in this skill area. The most prevalent feature in speaking tasks is collaboration. Of a total of 99 identified game elements in speaking tasks in *More! 4*, 49 were attributed to collaboration, whereas in *Easy 4*, 66 of 92 elements were collaborative in nature. Beyond collaboration, personalization, or choice, was also a relatively common feature in speaking tasks, appearing ten times in *More! 4* and six times in *Easy 4*. In fact, speaking tasks were the only competence area in the *More! 4*, where this element was present at all. Another feature found exclusively in *More! 4* was 'challenge', appearing 16 times in 78 speaking exercises, often involving time constraints, such as presenting a dialogue within a certain timeframe. Narrative contexts, typically in the form of prompts for role-plays, were also common in speaking tasks in *More! 4*, occurring 13 times but were found only seven times in the *Easy 4*. Tasks that offered multiple stages, where learners first had to read prompts, prepare answers and then present in some way, for example, were also observed at various times in speaking activities. This element was found nine times in *More! 4*, and seven times in *Easy 4*. Lastly, instances of competition were found only once in the *More! 4* and three times in *Easy 4*.

In writing tasks, gamification elements were less frequent, but several features were identified. Across both books, 53 game features were found in a total of 94 writing activities. Although *More! 4* included significantly fewer writing tasks, with 21 in contrast to 73 in *Easy 4*, a much higher proportion of these tasks featured game elements (90.5% in *More! 4* vs. 46,5% in *Easy 4*). Among these features, narrative contexts were present in nine writing tasks in *More! 4* and twelve in *Easy 4*, typically involving creative prompts to engage students. Personalization appeared only in *Easy 4*, where seven writing activities allowed learners to choose between different prompts, whereas no tasks contained this element in the other coursebook. Collaboration was more prevalent in *Easy 4* with eleven instances found, while it appeared only once in *More! 4*. For challenge-based elements, on the other hand, findings suggest the opposite. *More! 4* implemented challenges like word limits, time constraints or restricted contents seven times, while the other coursebook did not contain any elements of this category in its writing tasks. However, *Easy 4* provided the only

competitive element found in writing tasks across both textbooks. Students were instructed to research on UNESCO World Heritage Sites and write short texts which they had to present in class after. After the presentations, the class was supposed to vote for the number one site.

Both coursebooks taken together contained 161 listening comprehension tasks, with *More! 4* including 100 activities and *Easy 4* including 61. Of these, *More! 4* featured 30 identified game elements. In contrast, in the *Easy 4* textbook 20 elements were encountered. The majority of the elements in *More! 4* were associated with feedback, which appeared in 19 listening activities, often instructing learners to double-check their answers during a second listening round or compare them to a text which provided the answers. Narrative contexts appeared five times in *More! 4*, while it was present in eighteen listening comprehension activities in *Easy 4*. While feedback and narrative contexts were the only game-based features that were found in *Easy 4*'s listening tasks, *More! 4* also included two activities with elements of challenge, three with collaboration and one task involving progression.

Reading tasks contained fewer gamification elements compared to speaking, writing, and listening activities. In 60 reading tasks in *More! 4*, ten game-based features were identified. In *Easy 4* both the number of reading tasks (101), as well as the amount of game elements found (33) was higher. The most common feature within this skill area were narrative contexts, occurring four times in *More! 4* and twenty-four times in *Easy 4*. The element of feedback was found two times in the 60 reading exercises included in *More! 4*, whereas it appeared four times in *Easy 4*. Levels or progression were only found in reading tasks in *More! 4* (1). Other elements which could be detected in both books were collaboration (one in *More! 4* and three in *Easy 4*) and challenge (two in *More! 4*). One task that stood out was a competitive reading battle (*Easy 4*, p. 59), where learners could score points for correct answers. This was the only task found in both books that included such a point based approach.

Grammar tasks showed the lowest overall integration of gamification principles, with only one instance of challenge identified in an exercise in *More! 4*, where learners needed to finish the beginning of a sentence with a maximum of four words. Although this task was not explicitly labelled as a grammar exercise, it required learners to recognize grammatical structures and continue them coherently. In *Easy 4*, narrative

context was found in four grammar tasks, all of which made use of the series' reoccurring characters, thus embedding them in the broader narrative framework of the textbook series.

In contrast, vocabulary tasks displayed a higher presence of game features, particularly in relation to feedback. In *More! 4*, the feedback element was noticed 12 times in vocabulary tasks, often asking learners to match words and meanings before checking with a text or a dictionary. Although there were more vocabulary exercises present in *Easy 4* (91 vs. 52), the feedback element was found only six times. Overall, *Easy 4* offered just eleven game elements in the context of vocabulary tasks, while 16 were identified in *More! 4*. Both books included three instances each of collaborative elements within this competence area. *More! 4* contained the only vocabulary task featuring a challenge, whereas in *Easy 4*, elements of narrative were found three times and personalization was observed in one activity inviting students to draw their own icons for natural disasters (*Easy 4*, p. 20).

In conclusion, the distribution of gamification elements across language competences shows that their integration varies considerably between the two coursebooks. Speaking tasks contained by far the highest concentration of game-based features in both books, with collaboration, narrative contexts, personalization, challenges, and levels appearing most frequently in this area. Writing tasks also demonstrated a notable presence of gamified elements, particularly in *More! 4*, where a large proportion of the activities included game features despite the lower overall number of writing tasks. Listening activities were strongly linked to feedback in *More! 4*, and to narrative contexts in *Easy 4*. Reading tasks included fewer instances of gamification overall, with narrative components being most prominent. Vocabulary tasks incorporated moderate use of game elements, mainly through feedback mechanisms and some collaborative activities, whereas grammar tasks showed almost no evidence of game-based principles at all. A more detailed interpretation of these findings will be provided in the discussion section.

6.3. Adaptations of Selected Tasks

While the previous sections focused on identifying and categorizing existing gamification features in the selected coursebooks, this section addresses the third research question: How can selected tasks be adapted using gamification principles? Drawing on the findings from the structured analysis, a number of typical tasks from *More! 4* and *Easy 4* were selected for revision. The selected tasks were chosen because they represent different skill areas, include commonly used ELT task types, and showed potential for meaningful gamification without requiring major structural changes. The main aim of these adaptations is to demonstrate how existing textbook activities can be enhanced through the inclusion of game-based elements.

All adaptations were guided by learner-centered principles and remained aligned with the curriculum. Each adaptation is presented together with a brief description of the original task, and overview of the changes made, and a short rationale explaining the choice of gamification elements and the intended learning outcomes.

6.3.1. Adaptation 1 - Vocabulary task: A Working Life (*More! 4*, Unit 4, p. 40)

The original task (see Appendix C, p. 96) introduces learners to vocabulary related to professions. A list of twenty job titles (e.g. teacher, waiter, soldier, doctor, etc.) is presented alongside corresponding images. Students are asked to match each word with the correct picture. The task is placed in the beginning of Unit 4 (“A Working Life”) and serves to activate topic-specific vocabulary in preparation of the unit’s thematic focus on jobs, interviews, and career aspirations. While the task provides useful visual context and supports vocabulary recognition, it remains a closed, individual activity with no elements of game design. In the following, an adapted version of the task will be presented:

You work at a youth employment agency. A system error has wiped all the job titles from your database, and new seekers are waiting! Your task is to match each person (photo) to their profession and restore the agency's order.

- 1. Work in pairs or small groups. You have 1 minute to match as many jobs as possible. After the time is up, answers are compared with the class. Each correct match earns your team 1 point.**
- 2. Each team member chooses one job. You have to create and present (3 minutes) a mini profile including:**
 - Name of the profession**
 - Short description of the job**

Completing the presentation earns your team 2 extra points.

- 3. Teams can challenge other teams with a clue (e.g. "This person works in an airplane"). If the other team guesses correctly, both teams earn a bonus point.**

This adapted version enhances the original vocabulary matching task by embedding it in a collaborative, time-bound, and narrative-driven context. While the original activity focuses solely on receptive vocabulary skills through image-word matching, the revised task introduces elements of competition, teamwork and framing it as a mission to restore order in an employment agency's system, to create a light narrative and offer a sense of purpose and engagement beyond a simple vocabulary task.

The integration of time constraints and a point system introduces a manageable level of challenge, which may support focus and motivation within a limited time frame. Working in small groups promotes collaborative learning, while the follow-up task, creating and presenting a job profile, gives learners a chance to make a choice and encourages active language production. The final stage of the task encourages interaction between teams and adds a layer of playful competition.

Overall, these changes demonstrate how a simple vocabulary task can be gamified with a couple of rather small changes, making it more engaging and communicative.

6.3.2. Adaptation 2 - Reading task: Shannon's story (*More! 4*, Unit 5, p. 54)

This reading activity (see Appendix C, p. 97) appears in Unit 5 of *More! 4* and features a personal story titled "Shannon", which deals with the narrator's struggle with an eating disorder and her path to recovery. Before reading the text in detail, learners are asked to quickly scan it to find the answers to two preview questions. These are followed by a detailed reading, a multiple-choice question on the main idea of the text, and a true/false exercise.

While the reading passage is rich in content and offers opportunities for reflection, the accompanying activities follow a conventional format with no evident game-based elements. None of the steps suggest that the tasks can be completed collaboratively. The following adaptation proposes an implementation of game features, while bearing in mind the sensitive topic of the reading task and its main focus on text comprehension:

You are a volunteer at a youth support center. A girl named Shannon shared her story with you and your team. Your mission is to read her testimony carefully, understand her experience, and work together to prepare supportive resources that could help other teens facing similar challenges.

- 1. In small teams (3-4 students) read one paragraph each out loud, then summarize Shannon's story by writing 3-5 sentences.**
- 2. Answer the questions below. For each correct question, your team earns 1 point. Reach 5 points to unlock a support tip card that will help you in the next stage.**
- 3. Write three support tips for Shannon.**

This adaptation version of the original task introduces a narrative-based, collaborative approach intended to support engagement and reflection. By reframing the activity as a mission at a youth support center, learners are placed in a meaningful role with a clear social purpose. The narrative context gives emotional relevance to the task and

may encourage learners to view the reading not only as a language activity but also as an opportunity to reflect on empathy and awareness.

The activity begins with a collaborative reading phase, where learners work in small groups to divide the text and read it aloud. This shared reading creates opportunities to foster interaction and helps involve all group members actively. The follow-up summary allows learners to negotiate meaning and process the most important aspects of the text, promoting comprehension through discussion and joint construction of meaning.

The point system is introduced in the comprehension phase to provide additional motivation. Teams earn one point for each correct answer, eventually unlocking a small reward. The support tip card that the students get for reaching five points is designed to assist them in completing the final stage of the task. This type of reward is designed to encourage accuracy and focus during the comprehension stage, without adding competitive pressure, which is particularly important when working with a sensitive topic such as mental health.

The final stage requires students to write three support tips for Shannon. This output-oriented activity offers learners an opportunity to reflect and come up with supportive and empathetic advice. It shifts the focus from reading comprehension to productive language output, potentially fostering agency and purpose. Moreover, it nicely rounds off the initial task in the prompt, allowing learners to complete the mission they were assigned at the beginning. By contributing supportive messages, students actively participate in resolving the scenario, which adds coherence and closure to the overall task.

6.3.3. Adaptation 3 - Grammar task: Word Formation (*More! 4*, Unit 10, p. 103)

This word formation task appears in Unit 10 of *More! 4* (see Appendix C, p. 98) and focuses on the transformation of adjectives into nouns through suffix changes. Learners are given a structured table with eight adjectives (e.g. *angry*, *annoyed*, *helpless*) and are instructed to complete the table by identifying which letters need to be removed and which suffixes are to be added in order to form the corresponding

noun (*anger, annoyance, helplessness*). While the activity offers a clear overview of morphological patterns, the format is mechanical and lacks engagement or context. The layout emphasizes accuracy but does not include any game design elements.

The following adaptation embeds several gamification features into the task in order to boost motivation and participation, while retaining the original learning objective related to word formation:

Somebody messed up their job and scrambled the school's well-being poster. Your team needs to decode the missing noun forms to reveal an important motivational message.

- 1. Complete the word formation table. For every correct noun, one word from the message is revealed to you by your teacher.**
- 2. Once you uncover the message, read it aloud to the whole class.**
- 3. Use at least three of the nouns in sentences that could go on the well-being poster.**

Your team earns 1 point for each correct noun and 2 points for each sentence. You can track team scores on the board, as everyone completes the challenges. Once the task finishes, badges will be awarded to the teams.

This modified version of the original activity introduces a gamified framework intended to increase learner engagement and collaboration. While the original task required learners to convert adjectives into nouns using a structured table, the adapted version repositions this exercise within a playful, problem-solving scenario. The added narrative context gives the task a meaningful, relevant purpose and may encourage learners to engage more deeply with the activity.

The task is designed to be completed in small groups, which promotes collaboration and shared responsibility. Learners are asked to work together to correctly form eight nouns from the given adjectives. For each correct answer, the teacher reveals a portion of a hidden message. Not only does this build anticipation, but it also allows learners to receive feedback on their progress. The adapted version also introduces a

simple point system. Teams earn one point for each correct noun and two points for each appropriate sentence using a target word. Points can be recorded on a visible leaderboard, which adds a light element of competition and aims to increase active participation from all teams.

Forming sentences is not only a way to earn points, it takes the task beyond merely recognizing words by adding a productive extension. Each team must come up with at least three example sentences using the newly formed nouns. These outputs are framed as contributions to a classroom well-being poster, linking grammar practice to meaningful tasks. This stage intends to promote deeper processing of the targeted vocabulary and may provide an opportunity for creative language use.

Finally, the task includes the awarding of badges at the end, which serve as symbolic rewards for various accomplishments (e.g. “Word Wizard” for accuracy, “Creative Communicator” for best examples, or “Team Spirit” for excellent collaboration). These badges are intended to acknowledge diverse learner contributions and both linguistic and interpersonal efforts.

Overall, this adaptation is an example of how multiple gamification principles, such as collaboration, competition, point systems, leaderboards, and badges for example, can be integrated to illustrate how a grammar exercise may be redesigned as a purposeful, interactive learning experience.

6.3.4. Adaptation 4 - Vocabulary task: Types of Traveling (*Easy 4*, p. 33)

This vocabulary matching task is featured in Unit 3 of *Easy 4* (see Appendix C, p. 98) and introduces learners to common travel-related phrases such as *to go on a safari*, *to take a city trip*, or *to book a package holiday*. The activity requires students to match a list of eight travel types to their corresponding pictorial icons. The vocabulary is functional and visually supported, which aids comprehension and allows for a range of classroom activities. However, in its original format, the task is completed individually or as a whole class matching activity with minimal opportunity for interaction, movement, or motivation beyond lexical recognition.

To increase learner engagement and add an element of excitement, the task can be adapted using a “Fly Swatter Game”, which integrates movement, competition, collaboration, and instant feedback, all of which are central gamification principles. The adapted task turns vocabulary practice into an active team-based game with visual and physical components.

The icons (A-H) from the task are displayed on the board or laid out on a table. The teacher reads aloud one of the travel phrases from the list (e.g. *to go on a safari*), and two students, one from each team, race to swat the correct icon using fly swatters.

- **Each correct swat earns the team 1 point.**
- **If a player swats the wrong image, the other team wins the point.**
- **Players rotate so everyone has a turn.**

After a couple of rounds, the teacher can add another element, where students have to form sentences with the phrases. The teacher could ask the person that swatted the correct icon a question, for example: “Do you know anyone who went on a cruise?”. If they can answer by stringing together a sentence that contains the phrase (e.g. “My brother went on a cruise”), they can earn an additional point.

This revised model of the vocabulary matching task introduces a gamified approach that blends elements like physical activity, competition, collaboration, and spontaneous language use to support vocabulary acquisition in a dynamic way. While the original activity focuses solely on matching travel phrases to pictorial representations, the adapted task aims to enhance learner motivation and involvement through movement-based gameplay and facilitates retention by using the phrases in a context of questions and answers.

The use of fly swatters to identify correct icons transforms the task into an active game that intends to promote quick thinking and aims to reinforce lexical recognition. Setting the task up as a team competition may boost excitement and learner focus, while the possibility of earning points adds accountability and a light amount of pressure. It is

important to rotate and make sure that everybody participates to keep the energy levels high throughout the activity.

A particularly valuable addition is the second phase, in which learners are asked to respond to spontaneous questions using the target phrases. This step encourages learners to move beyond recognition and into productive language use, supporting the transition from passive vocabulary knowledge to active application. Furthermore, by integrating this speaking opportunity into the game structure, the activity may also benefit the learners' oral skills.

This modified design combines vocabulary recognition and sentence production with gamified elements like competition and point systems. It creates a low-stakes rehearsal environment, where students can practice the newly acquired vocabulary. Overall, this adaptation exemplifies how a simple matching activity can be transformed into a multi-modal learning experience that incorporates multiple game elements and may increase student engagement.

6.3.5. Adaptation 5 - Reading task: Self-Love Tips (*Easy 4*, p. 93)

This reading task is located in Unit 8 of *Easy 4* (see Appendix C, p. 99) and presents a motivational text titled "Hey you! Did you know that you're unique?". The text contains ten short but impactful tips on how to build a healthier relationship with oneself and practice self-love in everyday life. The task is followed by five comprehension and reflection questions that prompt learners to engage with the meaning of the tips and reflect on their personal relevance.

While the original activity promotes reading comprehension and hopes to inspire personal growth, it follows a traditional, individual format and completely lacks interactive or playful elements. Due to the task's clear structure, memorable content, and emotionally engaging theme, it can be easily adapted and gamified. The following redesign offers a motivating and playful quiz format, fostering peer interaction and adding a little competition to the reading task.

- 1. Read the text. Afterwards, go into small teams (3-4 people) and briefly share which tips you liked most and why.**
- 2. In your team create four quiz questions (+ answers) based on the reading.**
- 3. Teams take turns answering the questions. You cannot look at the text while responding. You get 1 point for every correct answer.**

This modified version of the Self-Love Tips reading activity transforms a reflective, text-based task into a learner-driven quiz format that encourages interaction, engagement, and recall. The original task consists of a list of ten self-care suggestions and a series of comprehension and reflection questions. While the text content is rich and personally meaningful, the original design follows a rather uninspired format of individual reading and written responses. The proposed version, by contrast, introduces elements like collaboration and competition to make the activity more interactive for learners.

The task begins with a shared reflection stage, in which students first read the text individually and then form small teams to discuss which pieces of advice they found most useful or interesting. This step helps ensure that every team member has at least read the text and provides an opportunity to engage in conversations about the content.

In the next phase, each team is asked to create four quiz questions based on the reading text. This challenges the learners as they are required not only to revisit the text and identify key content, but also to evaluate what makes a good question. This meta level reflection intends to support deeper processing of the material and requires the learners to engage with the text on a different level.

Teachers should remind students that they may have to answer their own questions, encouraging them to formulate clear and reasonable prompts to ensure fairness and playability. Moreover, learners should be guided to experiment with a variety of question formats, such as multiple-choice, open questions, or true/false items. However, it would be wise to prepare them by showing the different formats in a

teaching phase beforehand. The resulting diversity could make the quiz more dynamic and can support different types of thinking and knowledge retrieval.

In the final stage, the class engages in a peer quiz with teams taking turns answering each other's questions. Texts are closed at this point to promote recall rather than recognition. Points are awarded for correct answers, adding a competitive context that may increase engagement and motivation.

Overall, this adaptation illustrates how the original reading task can be redesigned as a more interactive and communicative activity that combines comprehension, production and interaction. By involving learners in the creation of quiz questions they engage deeply with key language and ideas from the text. The collaborative nature promotes teamwork and peer learning, and the light competitive element encourages active participation from everybody.

6.3.6. Adaptation 6 - Grammar task: Passive voice (*Easy 4*, p.107)

The original task can be found in Unit 10 of *Easy 4* (see Appendix C, p. 100) and focuses on practicing the passive voice. Learners are asked to transform three sentences from the active into the passive voice and vice versa. The grammar point is scaffolded with a short explanation of passive voice construction, and learners are given example sentences. While there is an important link between the grammar exercise and the reading that learners do beforehand, the task itself remains fairly mechanical and can be improved. The following adaptation proposes a more dynamic, collaborative version that maintains the grammatical focus while adding communicative and gamified elements.

Divide the class into small teams (2-4 students).

Prepare a slideshow with sentences taken from the task or based on the reading text, written in either active or passive voice.

Use tools for real-time answer submissions during round 3.

Round 1: each team is shown a sentence in the active voice. (-> convert = 1point)

Round 2: each team is shown a sentence in the passive voice. (-> convert = 1point)

Round 3: one sentence is projected - all teams race to submit the correct transformation as fast as possible using a shared tool. (2 points)

The gamified adaptation of the original passive voice task transforms a routine grammar exercise into an interactive and collaborative activity. While the original version provides a clear and scaffolded approach to form transformation, it does not actively engage learners or make use of peer interaction. The revised version, by contrast, introduces elements of teamwork, competition, and digital tools to support grammatical accuracy and motivation.

The activity is structured in three rounds, each offering a different challenge to the students. In rounds one and two, students work in small teams to convert sentences from active to passive voice and also the other way around. This stage allows learners to consolidate grammatical structure collaboratively, supporting peer feedback and teamwork. The use of familiar sentences, from the textbook reading task, creates a coherent context for the implementation of this exercise.

The third round adds a higher level of engagement by introducing a timed, competitive element. The teams must respond as quickly as possible using a shared digital tool, where they can post their answers in real time. This element adds urgency and excitement, encouraging learners to think quickly and apply grammatical knowledge under pressure. At the same time, immediate feedback is provided, as only correct answers are awarded with points.

The team based social form of this task encourages interaction and collective problem-solving, while the point system introduces a clear goal and reward structure that may help sustain attention. Learners are not only practicing a language form, but also collaborating, making decisions, and engaging with grammar in a more playful way.

7. Discussion

The previous chapter presented a detailed analysis of gamification elements identified in the two ELT coursebooks under investigation. These findings were derived from a structured analysis process based on a framework of analysis established in Chapter 5 (see Appendix A & B). In addition, selected tasks were adapted to demonstrate how gamification can change and positively transform traditional textbook activities. The following chapter aims to interpret these results and relate them to the broader literature on gamification, foreign language didactics, and ELT materials development. Particular attention will be paid to how the findings respond to the initial research questions, and what they imply for the future design of pedagogical materials in language education. This discussion will not only evaluate the role of gamification in the selected textbooks but also critically reflect on the strengths and limitations of the applied methodology and suggest avenues for further research.

The central aim of this study was to examine the extent and nature of gamification in contemporary ELT coursebooks used in Austrian secondary schools. The two research questions guiding this investigation were:

1. To what extent are game elements present in contemporary ELT coursebooks used in Austrian schools?
2. How are game elements distributed across different areas of language competence (vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, writing, speaking)?

Based on a close reading and systematic coding of 797 tasks (314 from *More! 4* and 483 from *Easy 4*), a nuanced picture of the role of gamification in these materials has emerged. While both coursebooks contain a certain number of tasks that feature game-related elements, these elements are not distributed evenly, neither across the two coursebooks nor within the various skill domains. Moreover, the type of gamification observed was predominantly implicit - embedded in task structure, interaction modes, or motivational framing - rather than relying on overt game mechanics such as point systems, badges, or competitiveness.

The first research question can therefore be answered as follows. Game elements are present in both coursebooks, yet only to a limited extent and often in implicit forms. While isolated features such as occasional points, competition and collaboration could

be identified, they rarely appeared as part of a coherent game design. Also, the total number of tasks featuring at least one gamification related element was rather small compared to the overall number of activities across both textbooks. This outcome resonates with findings from previous research (Seaborn & Fels 2015; Boulet 2016; Stocker 2020), which has pointed out that although gamification has gained considerable attention within educational theory and digital learning environments, its systematic implementation in traditional print materials has remained relatively underdeveloped. In this sense, the coursebooks analyzed appear to reflect a broader trend within the field, where gamified features are more frequently discussed conceptually than realized in practice.

At the same time, this limited and selective presence also needs to be understood in relation to the Austrian curricular and assessment realities. The coursebooks are expected to prepare learners for standardized tests and to cover a wide range of curricular objectives within a restricted amount of time. Under these conditions, publishers may prioritize tasks that are aligned with exam characteristics over experimental design features. From this perspective, the rather conservative use of game elements is not simply a lack of innovation but can also be interpreted as a cautious response to institutional expectations that still favor traditional task types, particularly in grammar and exam preparation.

Furthermore, it has become evident that the distribution of these elements was not consistent across task types or language skill areas. Certain domains, particularly those involving a communicative approach, appeared to be naturally more accommodating of game design features. Speaking tasks, for instance, displayed the highest concentration of gamified elements, most notably in the form of collaborative designs. These activities often required learners to interact, negotiate meaning, and achieve shared goals, aligning well with the social and motivational dynamics that gamification seeks to foster. However, it should be pointed out that collaboration alone is a weak identifying characteristic of gamified design. In contrast to speaking activities, exercises that focused on grammar were largely missing game elements, relying on traditional formats such as gap-filling, transformation, or multiple choice instead. The lack of gamification in this domain suggests that authors may perceive grammatical accuracy as less compatible with playful or interactive approaches.

Other skill areas such as vocabulary, listening, and writing exhibited only moderate levels of gamification. Here, game elements tended to appear sporadically, also mostly through collaborative task designs. This uneven distribution highlights a selective application of gamification, where it is primarily confined to language areas that are inherently communicative or socially driven. The results therefore indicate that, in the context of two widely used Austrian ELT textbooks, gamification is still treated as an occasional pedagogical enhancement rather than as an underlying design principle.

This pattern is also revealing when viewed through the lens of communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL). Both pedagogical approaches emphasize interaction, negotiation of meaning, and learner agency, all of which overlap with core gamification principles such as collaboration, challenge and narrative contexts. It is therefore not surprising that speaking and certain writing tasks, which by nature are more prone to CLT-oriented design, simultaneously show a higher density of gamification elements. However, the persistence of form-focused grammar tasks that are often decontextualized suggests that many textbook sections still reflect a pre-communicative or structuralist tradition, despite decades of CLT influence. In this sense, the absence of gamification in grammar sections is symptomatic of broader tensions in ELT materials between communicative ideals and structurally driven assessment requirements.

Yet, one of the most striking patterns to emerge from the analysis was the overwhelming presence of collaboration as a recurring game design feature. Of the 140 tasks coded as collaborative, the majority were speaking activities, reflecting the common use of pair and group work to promote oral fluency and interaction. While this may not seem surprising from a pedagogical standpoint, it is worth noticing that collaboration is one of the core motivational drivers in gamification theory (Deterding et al. 2011). By fostering peer interaction and solving tasks together, collaborative task designs mirror the social mechanics of multiplayer games, which are designed to sustain engagement through cooperation. However, despite the high frequency of collaborative tasks, the gameful potential of collaboration was not fully capitalized in most cases. Many activities simply instructed learners to “work in pairs” or “discuss in groups” without embedding this collaboration in a larger challenge, quest, or shared objective that would give the interaction a clear game-like structure. This suggests that collaboration is understood primarily as a method of organizing participation, rather

than as a deliberate game mechanic that could be strengthened through clearer roles, scoring systems, or narrative framing.

Another interesting pattern emerging from the analysis concerns the use of narrative contexts across both coursebooks. Narrative elements were identified in *More! 4* (31 instances) as well as in *Easy 4* (68 instances), indicating that this feature already plays a role in contemporary ELT materials. In the case of *Easy 4*, the higher relative number (14% as opposed to 10% in *More! 4*) of narrative elements, can be partly explained by the overarching storyline centered on Mira and her friends, which provides a recurring frame across units and activities. In both textbooks, the narrative context elements were largely absent from grammar or vocabulary focused tasks. Given the role of narrative in supporting motivation and cognitive engagement, this element should be utilized more frequently. Research in both ELT and gamification highlights the potential of storytelling to foster immersion, emotional involvement, and memory retention (Fischer & Reichmuth 2020; Leiningen & Kelly 2018; Naul & Liu 2020). However, despite the relatively frequent presence of narrative context, especially in *Easy 4*, these elements are rarely connected to explicit game structures such as challenges, missions, progression systems, or learner choice. As a result, narrative functions primarily as a contextual framing device rather than as a central organizing principle for gamified task design.

For adolescent learners in particular, story-driven approaches may also support aspects such as identity construction and emotional involvement. Recurrent characters, ongoing storylines, and episodic tasks to a shared fictional world can offer a sense of continuity and belonging, similar to following a TV series or a narrative video game. While *Easy 4* introduces a cast of characters which shapes the textbook series fundamentally, this potential is only loosely integrated into task mechanics and remains underused as a means of structuring gamified learning experiences.

The analysis also drew attention to some absences in the materials. Visible progress indicators, such as levels, staged missions, or progression systems, occurred only sporadically, even though progression is considered a fundamental component of game design (Zichermann & Cunningham 2011). Both textbooks tended to rely on linear unit structures rather than framing learning as a sequence of achievements or milestones. In addition, personalization through avatars or role-based choices was

largely missing, despite extensive literature emphasizing identity investment and learner agency as powerful motivational drivers (Sailer et al. 2017; Gee 2007). Given that adolescent learners in particular benefit from opportunities to co-construct identities and express individuality in their learning process, this gap represents an underexplored avenue for textbook innovation.

Most striking, however, was the near-complete absence of explicit game mechanics such as points, badges, and leaderboards. Considering the prominence of these mechanics in mainstream understandings of gamification (as outlined in section 2.1), their lack of representation in ELT textbooks suggests two possible interpretations. First, textbook authors may be cautious about implementing overt reward systems due to critiques concerning extrinsic motivation and the risks of “pointsification” (Stocker 2020; Robertson 2010; Nicholson 2012). This aligns with recent calls in gamification research to prioritize meaningful, intrinsically motivated engagement over shallow, reward-driven systems. Second, publishers may assume that overt game mechanics are more appropriate for digital platforms than for print materials. Indeed, the *Easy* companion app illustrates precisely this shift: the majority of explicit gamification features (badges, points, progress dashboards) appear not in the print textbook but in the digital extension. This parallels broader trends identified by Gerdenitsch et al. (2020) and Johnson et al. (2016), who note that gamified systems are increasingly integrated into digital learning environments, where they can be implemented more flexibly and interactively.

This shift of explicit gamification into digital companions also raises other questions. Access to devices, stable internet connections and institutional support for using apps in class cannot be taken for granted in all Austrian schools or learner groups. If more powerful gamified features are placed exclusively in digital environments, there is a risk that they become optional “add-ons” that only some learners can benefit from, while printed textbooks, which still dominate classrooms and are provided to every student, remain comparatively traditional and less engaging. From a materials development perspective, this suggests that a more balanced distribution of gamification across print and digital formats would be desirable, ensuring that all learners have at least some access to well-designed, game-like learning opportunities.

These findings therefore suggest that the current generation of ELT textbooks partially reflects contemporary gamification theory, but only in a selective and often implicit manner. Elements that emerge from communicative pedagogy and are easy to integrate into existing classroom routines, such as collaboration, narrative, and feedback for example, appear relatively frequently. On the other hand, elements associated with structured game systems (e.g., progression, points, badges) are largely absent or deferred to digital components. This uneven distribution mirrors the debates presented in the literature about conceptual clarity and design quality in gamification. As Deterding et al. (2011) argue, identifying what counts as a game element is not straightforward, and overly superficial implementations risk becoming pedagogically ineffective. The patterns observed in the textbooks show that publishers appear to lean toward a conservative approach, integrating game-adjacent features that fit traditional ELT formats rather than experimenting with more transformative, systemic gamification.

Taken together, these results support the first hypothesis (H1): feedback, collaboration, and challenge appeared more frequently than points, badges, leaderboards, or avatars, confirming that textbooks privilege pedagogically safe and well-established techniques over explicit game mechanics. This outcome also aligns with the work of Lee & Hammer (2011), who warned that simply adding badges or rewards without thoughtful design is unlikely to produce meaningful learning outcomes. The absence of these mechanics in print materials may therefore be interpreted as a cautious, pedagogically grounded decision rather than a conceptual omission.

Similarly, the data strongly supports the second hypothesis (H2): speaking and writing tasks indeed incorporated more game-based elements than grammar or vocabulary tasks. This finding reflects the communicative, interaction-centered nature of these skills, where opportunities for collaboration, narrative framing, or staged tasks naturally arise. Grammar tasks, by contrast, tended to rely on traditional forms-focused practices, echoing Tomlinson's (2013) conclusion that many global coursebooks still follow a structuralist orientation with limited opportunities for creativity, personalization, or meaningful use. The near absence of gamification in grammar tasks highlights a structural challenge for textbook authors: how to integrate playful, interactive, and motivational features into grammar activities that are traditionally rule-oriented and

accuracy-focused. The task adaptations provided in Chapter 6.3 were intended to demonstrate how such integration is possible without compromising clarity or correctness.

The findings also lend support to the third hypothesis (H3): most game elements in the textbooks were implicit, embedded within the design of communicative tasks rather than clearly labeled as gamified features. This aligns with earlier conceptual discussions in the literature that note how many classroom activities already contain game-like characteristics (Lee & Hammer 2011), even if they are not presented as such. It also reflects the ambiguity highlighted by Deterding et al. (2011) regarding the definition and classification of game elements. The implicit nature of gamification in the textbooks may indicate that authors draw on principles aligned with gamification without framing them as part of a game system.

In relation to the third research question, how selected tasks can be adapted by using gamification principles, the adaptations showcased in Chapter 6.3. provide a small but concrete proof of concept. By redesigning vocabulary, grammar, and reading tasks as missions, challenges or collaborative quests, it was possible to integrate elements such as narrative contexts, progression, competition and feedback without overburdening lesson planning or deviating from curricular requirements. These examples illustrate that gamification in textbooks does not necessarily require complex technology or radical structural change. Instead, relatively modest design decisions, reframing prompts, adding choice, embedding tasks within a story, or visualizing progress can noticeably increase the game-resemblance and potentially impact the motivation to participate in these activities.

Of course, these adaptations were developed in an idealized design space, without the real challenges, pressures and constraints that practicing teachers face daily. Nevertheless, they point towards a feasible middle ground between traditional coursebook design and fully gamified digital systems. If publishers and teachers were to adopt similar principles on a broader scale, textbook tasks could be made more engaging and learner-centered while remaining realistic for everyday classroom use.

Overall, these findings raise important implications for ELT materials development. First, the selective integration of gamified features suggests that publishers may not yet fully recognize the strategic potential of gamification to enhance learner

engagement. While the inclusion of collaboration and narrative is promising, other elements with strong motivational value, meaningful progression systems or learner-driven choice for instance, remain underrepresented. The adaptations proposed in Chapter 6.3. demonstrate that even traditional textbook tasks can be transformed in relatively simple ways to incorporate game elements, without requiring digital tools or fundamental redesigns.

Second, the growing presence of gamification in digital companions (as seen in the *Easy* app) indicates that future ELT materials are likely to move toward hybrid models in which print textbooks maintain core content and structure, while digital platforms provide interactive, gamified extensions. This trajectory aligns with broader educational trends and supports recent scholarship advocating blended learning models that integrate traditional and digital pedagogies.

Finally, the findings highlight an important methodological and conceptual gap within current ELT materials: the absence of a coherent gamification framework guiding textbook design. Rather than embedding gamification systematically, publishers seem to implement isolated features intuitively. As a result, learners experience fragmented or inconsistent motivational structures. A more deliberate, theory-informed approach, founded on frameworks such as Sailer et al. (2017), Cugelman (2013), Nicholson (2012), or Kapp (2012) would allow future textbooks to integrate gamification more holistically, balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors while aligning with curricular and pedagogical aims. Developing such frameworks in collaboration with practising teachers could ensure that gamified materials remain theoretically grounded and practically realistic.

7.1. Limitations of the Study

Like any empirical investigation, this study is also subject to several limitations that must be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First of all, it is important to reiterate that the analysis was restricted to two coursebooks (*More! 4* and *Easy 4*) used in the Austrian lower secondary context. Although both are widely adopted and representative of mainstream ELT materials in Austria, they cannot capture the full diversity of textbooks in use across different regions, school types, publishers or proficiency levels. Coursebooks used in the upper secondary, vocational schools or

other forms may integrate game elements differently. Therefore, the results should be understood as illustrative of broader tendencies rather than as definitive statements about all ELT materials.

Secondly, the study focused exclusively on printed student's books and, in the case of Easy, its companion app. Other components of the coursebook packages, such as workbooks, teacher's guides or online platforms were not systematically analyzed. It is possible that some of these supplementary resources include additional gamified features that are not visible in the main coursebook. The present findings therefore reflect only a partial view of the entire materials ecosystem.

Thirdly, the identification and coding of game elements inevitably involved a degree of subjectivity. Despite the use of a predefined coding framework based on existing literature, decisions about whether a task contained a particular element (e.g. "challenge", "narrative context", "collaboration") required interpretative judgement. Due to the scope of the project, coding was carried out by a single researcher, and no formal inter-rater reliability checks were conducted. Although efforts were made to apply criteria consistently, the findings may still reflect the researcher's own understanding of gamification and their familiarity with the literature.

A related limitation concerns the conceptual boundaries of gamification itself. As discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, there is no universal consensus on what constitutes a game element or where to draw the line between gamification and game-based learning, for example. The decision to treat certain features (such as pair-work or story prompts) as gamification elements, even when not explicitly framed as "games" in the textbooks, inevitably shapes the results. Other researchers with different definitions might classify some tasks differently, leading to different distributions and results.

Fourth, this study examined materials only, not actual classroom use or learner outcomes. The presence of game elements in a textbook does not automatically guarantee that they will be implemented as intended, nor that they will have the anticipated motivational or learning effects. Teachers may skip certain tasks, adapt them in ways that reduce or enhance their gamification qualities, or combine them with additional resources. Similarly, learners' responses to gamified activities were not

investigated. Thus, no claims can be made about the effectiveness of the identified elements for engagement, motivation or achievement.

Finally, the task adaptations presented in Chapter 6.3 were developed as design suggestions and were not piloted in real classrooms. While they are grounded in theory that aligns with gamification principles, their actual feasibility, reception and impact in diverse classroom contexts remain untested. Future empirical studies would need to implement such adaptations in real teaching situations to evaluate their practical usefulness and refine them further.

Taken together, these limitations underline that the study offers an exploratory, materials focused perspective on gamification in Austrian ELT coursebooks. Its strength lies in systematically mapping the presence and distribution of selected game elements and illustrating concrete possibilities for adaptation. However, further research with broader samples, multiple coders, and classroom-based investigations will be necessary to build a more comprehensive understanding of how gamification can be meaningfully integrated into language teaching materials and practice.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Summary of the Study and Key Findings

This thesis set out to explore the role of gamification in contemporary ELT coursebooks used in Austrian lower secondary schools. In an “age of distractions”, where teachers increasingly compete with digital media and games for learners’ attention, the study examined whether and how widely used textbooks already incorporate game elements and how such materials might be meaningfully adapted to better support engagement and learning.

Three research questions guided the investigation:

1. To what extent are game elements present in contemporary ELT coursebooks used in Austrian schools?
2. How are game elements distributed across different areas of language competence (vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, writing, speaking)?
3. How can selected tasks be adapted using gamification principles?

To address these questions, two coursebooks, *More! 4* and *Easy 4*, were analyzed using a structured framework of game elements derived from gamification literature. A total of 797 tasks (314 from *More! 4* and 483 from *Easy 4*) were coded for the presence of specific game-related features such as narrative, points, badges, leaderboards, feedback, competition, challenge, levels and progression. In a second step, representative tasks were redesigned to illustrate how textbook activities can adapt in line with gamification principles while remaining feasible everyday teaching.

The findings show that game elements are present but limited and unevenly distributed. Both coursebooks contain tasks that can be associated with gamification, yet game features rarely form part of a coherent game system. Instead, they appear in isolated and mostly implicit ways, embedded in the structure or interaction patterns of tasks rather than being explicitly framed as games. Collaboration and feedback were the most frequently occurring elements, whereas explicit game elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, avatars and explicit progression systems were almost completely absent from the printed materials.

The second research question revealed clear differences across language skills. Speaking tasks showed the highest concentration of game elements, especially collaboration and, to a lesser extent, challenge and narrative. Writing tasks also displayed some gamified features, often linked to communicative or creative outputs. By contrast, grammar exercises were overwhelmingly traditional in design, relying on gap-fills, transformations and multiple-choice formats with virtually no gamification features. Vocabulary, reading and listening tasks occupied a middle ground, with occasional instances of narrative framing or collaborative work but little systematic use of game design.

These results confirm the three hypotheses proposed at the beginning. First (H1), elements such as feedback, collaboration and challenge occurred more frequently than overt mechanics like points, badges, or leaderboards, suggesting that textbooks tend to favor pedagogically familiar and low-risk techniques over explicit reward systems. Second (H2), speaking and writing tasks indeed incorporated more game-based than grammar and vocabulary tasks, reflecting the closer affinity between communicative skills and game-like interaction. Third (H3), most game elements were

implicit rather than explicitly labelled, indicating that textbook authors may draw on game principles without framing them as part of a gamified system.

The third research question was addressed through adaptations of selected tasks from both coursebooks. By reframing existing activities such as missions, challenges or collaborative quests and by adding features such as storylines, simple progression structures, or visible goals, the study demonstrated that even conventional textbook tasks can be made more game-like without the need for complex technology. These redesigns serve to prove that gamification can be integrated at the activity level in ways that are compatible with curricular demands and realistic classroom constraints.

Overall, the study paints a picture of cautious, partial and largely implicit gamification in Austrian ELT coursebooks. While some elements overlap with gamification principles, the materials are far from including gamification as a systematic design framework.

8.2. Implications for Practice and Materials Development

The findings have several implications for different stakeholders in ELT: textbook authors and publishers, practicing teachers, and teacher trainers. For materials writers and publishers, the analysis suggests that current coursebooks do not yet fully exploit the motivational potential of gamification. Collaboration and occasional narrative framing already provide a foundation, but other powerful elements, such as meaningful progression systems, learner choice, avatars or roles, and carefully designed challenges are mostly absent from the printed materials. Integrating these features more systematically could help create richer, more engaging learning experiences without undermining the curriculum.

At the same time, publishers increasingly channel explicit gamification into digital companions, as illustrated by the *Easy* app with its points, badges and progress dashboards. This hybrid model has clear potential but also raises accessibility issues. A more balanced approach would consider how both print and digital components can share responsibility for engagement. Textbooks may provide narrative continuity, collaborative missions and gamified challenges while digital platforms could offer features such as progress tracking and personalization through avatars, which are easier to implement in a digital context.

For teachers, the study offers two main messages. First of all, even when textbooks are not explicitly gamified, they often contain covert game-like features that can be more visible and meaningful through small adaptations. Reframing tasks as challenges, adding team roles, turning sequences into quests, or introducing simple progress tracking. Secondly, the adapted tasks in this thesis show that gamification does not have to be an “all or nothing” approach. Teachers can selectively integrate individual game elements at the activity level, adapting them to their learners’ needs, classroom dynamics and available time. This may be particularly helpful for teachers who are interested in gamification but hesitant to redesign or rely heavily on digital tools.

For teacher education and professional development, the study highlights the need to address gamification not only as a technological add-on but as a holistic framework. Teacher training at universities as well as programs for working teachers should therefore equip teachers with the skills to analyze coursebooks through a gamification lens, to identify where game elements are already present or notably absent, and to critically reflect on the potential pitfalls of overly extrinsic reward systems. At the same time, teachers should be supported in designing small-scale, meaningful adaptations that draw on game principles to enhance learners’ engagement while preserving pedagogical depth and curricular alignment.

Equipping teachers with such skills could help bridge the gap between gamification research and classroom realities, especially in contexts where textbooks dominate lesson planning.

8.3. Suggestions for Further Research

Given the scope and limitations of this study, several avenues for future research emerge. Further materials analysis studies could expand the sample to include a wider range of textbooks from different publishers, school types and proficiency levels, both within Austria and internationally. Comparative analyses could reveal whether the patterns observed here (implicit collaboration, limited narrative contexts, minimal explicit game mechanics) are characteristics of ELT materials more generally, or specific to certain national or institutional contexts.

Furthermore, future work could adopt a more comprehensive perspective, analyzing not only student books but also workbooks, teacher's guides and digital materials as an integrated package. This would provide a more complete picture of where gamification is located within a coursebook series and how different components complement each other.

Another aspect that could be investigated in more detail is how the identified game elements are actually implemented in practice and how learners respond to them. Observational studies, teacher interviews and learner questionnaires could help clarify whether gamified features in textbooks are used as intended, and how they influence motivation, engagement and learning outcomes in real teaching situations.

Moreover, the task adaptations proposed in this thesis invite empirical testing. Experimental designs could compare original and adapted versions of the same activities to investigate differences in learner engagement, perceived enjoyment and performance. Such studies would provide valuable evidence on the practical benefits and potential drawbacks of integrating gamification elements into printed ELT materials.

Finally, future research might explore learner and teacher perspectives on gamified materials more directly. Investigating how different learner groups and different learner types experience gamified textbook activities could help refine design principles. Similarly, understanding teachers' beliefs, concerns and perceived barriers regarding gamification would be crucial for developing realistic and applicable materials.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that while gamification is far from being a central organizing principle in the analyzed ELT coursebooks, there is considerable untapped potential. By making existing game features more explicit and by thoughtfully integrating additional elements at the task level, coursebooks can move closer to the goal of creating engaging, meaningful and learner centered materials for today's language classrooms.

9. References

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Use of AI tools

For reasons of transparency, I hereby indicate the use of AI-based tools during the writing process of this thesis. The author remains fully responsible for the research design, analysis, interpretation of data, and conclusions presented in this thesis. AI tools were used exclusively for language support, formatting assistance, and editorial clarification. In the following, there is a table indicating where and how AI was used.

AI tool	Purpose of use	Parts of paper affected	Remarks / Examples	Prompts	Date
ChatGPT	Stylistic refinement	1.1. Background & Rationale	Used for improving sentence flow and academic tone	Improve flow of this paragraph	10.07.25
ChatGPT	Language check	2. Gamification and Game Elements	Used to polish language	Check the language in this chapter for errors.	10.07.25
ChatGPT	Stylistic refinement	2.1.1. Gamification	Used for improving sentence flow and academic tone	Improve flow of this paragraph	11.07.25
ChatGPT	Polishing	2.1.2. Games and Play	"Growing up, we all played..."	Make it sound more academic	11.07.25
ChatGPT	Language check	2.1.4. Serious Games	Used for polishing language	Check the language in this chapter for errors.	11.07.25
ChatGPT	Structure	2.2. Game elements	"Another approach to classify game..."	Does this logically follow?	14.07.25
ChatGPT	Polishing	2.2.5. Leaderboards	"One essential aspect of leaderboards ..."	Make it sound more academic	15.07.25
ChatGPT	Language check	2.2.7. Competition	Used for polishing language	Check the language in this chapter for errors.	16.07.25
ChatGPT	Structure & Language	2.3.1. Benefits of gamification in ELT	Used for polishing structure and language	Check language and structure and suggest improvements	19.07.25

ChatGPT	Structure & Language	2.3.2. Challenges and Limitations of Gamification in ELT	Used for polishing structure and language	Check language and structure and suggest improvements	19.07.25
ChatGPT	Tone	2.4. Theoretical foundations of materials analysis	"Tomlinson (2013: 16) conducted..."	Formulate this in a more academic way	20.07.25
ChatGPT	Coherence	3. The Study	Used to check coherence of the section	Is this section coherent?	22.07.25
ChatGPT	Structure	3.1. Aim, Research Questions and Hypotheses	Used for polishing structure	Is the structure in this chapter logical?	23.07.25
ChatGPT	Stylistic refinement	4.1. Phase One - Overview of the Coursebooks	Used for improving sentence flow and academic tone	Improve flow and tone of this section	20.08.25
ChatGPT	Polishing	4.2. Phase Two - Structured Analysis of Game Elements	"To address these questions..."	Make it sound more academic	10.9.25
ChatGPT	Polishing	4.2.1. Overall Frequency of Game Elements	Used for polishing structure and language	Give me feedback on the language used in this chapter	10.9.25
ChatGPT	Coherence	4.2.2. Distribution Across Language Skills	"In writing tasks, gamification elements..."	Is this paragraph coherent?	17.9.25
ChatGPT	Stylistic refinement	4.2.2. Distribution Across Language Skills	Used for improving sentence flow and academic tone	Improve flow and tone of this section	17.9.25
ChatGPT	Formulation	4.3.1. Adaptation 1 - Vocabulary task: A Working Life	"This adapted version enhances..."	Help me formulate this paragraph	24.9.25
ChatGPT	Stylistic refinement	4.3.2. Adaptation 2 - Reading task: Shannon's story	Used for improving sentence flow and academic tone	Improve flow and tone of this section	24.9.25

ChatGPT	Structure & Language	4.3.3. Adaptation 3 - Grammar task: Word Formation Table	Used for polishing structure and language	Check language and structure and suggest improvements	27.09.25
ChatGPT	Formulation	4.3.4. Adaptation 4 - Vocabulary task: Types of Traveling	"After a couple of rounds..."	Help me formulate this paragraph	27.9.25
ChatGPT	Stylistic refinement	4.3.5. Adaptation 5 - Reading task: Self-Love Tips	Used for improving sentence flow and academic tone	Improve flow and tone of this section	28.9.25
ChatGPT	Polishing	4.3.6. Adaptation 6 - Grammar task: Passive voice	Used for polishing structure and language	Give me feedback on the language used in this chapter	28.9.25
ChatGPT	Coherence	5. Discussion	"While isolated features..."	Help me connect this with my reviewed literature	01.10.25
ChatGPT	Structure & language	5. Discussion	"Another noticeable feature..."	Are structure and language in this paragraph adequate?	01.10.25
ChatGPT	Formulation	5. Discussion	"Similarly, the data strongly..."	Help me formulate this paragraph	01.10.25
ChatGPT	Tone	5.1. Limitations of the Study	"A related limitation concerns..."	Formulate this in a more academic way	08.10.25
ChatGPT	Summarize	6. Conclusion	Used to summarize the main findings in a clear overview	Create an overview of the findings	13.12.25
ChatGPT	Polishing	6. Conclusion	Used for polishing structure and language	Give me feedback on the language used in this chapter	13.12.25
ChatGPT	Tone	6.3. Suggestions for Further Research	Used for achieving a more formal tone	Formulate this section in a more formal way	20.12.25
ChatGPT	Terminology clarification	3.1. Benefits of gamification in ELT	Used to check consistency of terminology related to	Is the term ELT used consistently in this section	02.02.26

			gamification and ELT.		
ChatGPT	Editing	3.1. Benefits of gamification in ELT	Used to integrate a new idea / source into an existing paragraph	Help me add this to the paragraph	02.02.26
ChatGPT	Editing	3.2. Challenges and Limitations of Gamification in ELT	Used to integrate a new idea / source into an existing paragraph	Help me add this to the paragraph	03.02.26
ChatGPT	Polishing	3. Benefits & Challenges of Gamification in ELT	Used for polishing structure and language	Give me feedback on the language used in this chapter	03.02.26
ChatGPT	Structure	5.2. Methodology	Used to restructure the section	Help me restructure this section to include the framework of my analysis	04.02.26
ChatGPT	Structure & Language	5.2.3. Coding Procedure	Used for polishing structure and language	Check language and structure and suggest improvements	04.02.26
ChatGPT	Formatting	References	Used for formatting reference section	Help me format my references according to APA	06.02.26
ChatGPT	Stylistic refinement	Abstract	Used for improving sentence flow and academic tone	Improve flow and tone of my abstract	07.02.26

Appendix A

Analysis Sheet – Phase One: Overview of Coursebooks

General Information

Criterion	More! 4	Easy 4
Publisher	Helbling Languages	Veritas
Year of publication	2019	2022
Target age group	12–14	12–14
CEFR level	A2–B1	A2–B1
Educational context	Austrian lower secondary	Austrian lower secondary
Number of units	13	12 + 3 Culture Spots

Structural and Design Features

Criterion	More! 4	Easy 4
Overall layout	Colorful, dense, visually dynamic	Clean, spacious, minimalist
Use of color	Bright color palette, color-coded sections	Muted palette, functional color differentiation
Space for learner writing	Limited	Extensive
Table of contents & navigation	Clearly structured, color-coded, icons	Clearly structured, more traditional
Visual style	Predominantly photographs; cartoons in grammar boxes	Illustrated characters throughout
Narrative continuity	Recurring stories (e.g. <i>The Mag</i>)	Recurring characters across series

Content and Skill Coverage

Criterion	More! 4	Easy 4
Skills covered	Reading, listening, speaking, writing	Reading, listening, speaking, writing
Grammar presentation	Explicit summaries in highlighted boxes	Color-coded grammar sections

Criterion	More! 4	Easy 4
Review sections	“Essential English”	No explicit review sections
Exam preparation	Explicit test-related tasks	Less explicit

Thematic orientation

Criterion	More! 4	Easy 4
Topic range	Traditional ELT topics (culture, food, careers, literature)	Socially relevant, contemporary topics
Curricular alignment	Yes	Yes
Cultural focus	General/global	English-speaking countries + global issues

Digital and Supplementary Components

Criterion	More! 4	Easy 4
Companion app	Yes	Yes
Website-based resources	“eZone”	Integrated app focus
Audio & video materials	Yes	No
Vocabulary practice	No	Yes
Practice tasks	Not in app, but in “eZone”	Yes

Appendix B

Data collection exemplification. The full data can be accessed here: ([Link to data](#))

Narrative / Story	Learner Choice	Feedback	Leaderboard	Competition	Collaboration	Challenge
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	1	0	0	1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	1	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Coursebook Title	Unit/ page	Task ID	Task type (V/G/R/L/S/W)	Point system	Badges / Achievements	Levels / Progression
More 4	1 / 8	1	V	0	0	0
More 4	1 / 8	2	L	0	0	0
More 4	1 / 9	3	R	0	0	0
More 4	1 / 10	4	L	0	0	0
More 4	1 / 10	5	V	0	0	0
More 4	1 / 10	6	S	0	0	0

Appendix C

(More! 4, Unit 4, p. 40)

UNIT 4 A working life

You learn

- about different job areas
- about how to do a good job interview
- how to use questions in reported speech

You can

- talk about jobs and job interviews
- do a job interview
- write about your dream job

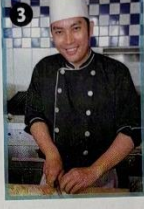
Vocabulary Professions

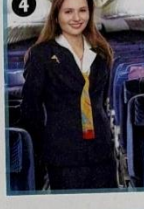
1 Match the words with the pictures.

☐ doctor ☐ cook ☐ website designer ☐ flight attendant ☐ tour guide	☐ shop assistant ☐ factory worker ☐ dentist ☐ secretary ☐ nurse	☐ soldier ☐ accountant ☐ bank clerk ☐ farmer ☐ travel agent	☐ waiter ☐ teacher ☐ receptionist ☐ mechanic ☐ electrician
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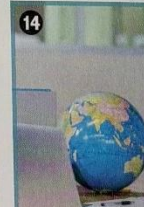






























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UNIT 4

WB p. 32

CYBERCITY 10 Revision

- BiSt** 9 Look at the text quickly to find the answers to these questions. Then read the text carefully and check.

- 1 What problem does Shannon talk about?
- 2 Does Shannon still have this problem?

Shannon



I was never really fat. Maybe I was a little overweight. When I was fourteen, I was invited to Rebecca's birthday party. When Rebecca ate the third piece of cake, I heard her sister say, "Stop eating. You'll get as fat as Shannon!" That hurt.

Most of my friends at school were thinner than me. And the girls talked about thin models all the time.

Not long after the party I started to throw up after eating. At first only once or twice a week, but then it got worse. Every time I had eaten something, I had the feeling it was too much. When I looked in the mirror I thought, "Fat, fat, fat."

When I got home from school, I stuffed myself with food. After I had stuffed myself, I ran into the bathroom.

It was a terrible time. I often felt very weak and I often felt sick. My friends knew that something was wrong, but I never talked to them.

Then one day I collapsed in the gym at school. My P.E. teacher told me to come to her room. She talked to me. I couldn't tell her about my problem. But I said I would talk to my mum.

So after I had collapsed in the gym, I wrote a letter to my mum one day. My mother was great and said, "We'll solve this problem together."

I know that I've got a serious problem and that it's going to be a long way, but I want to fight the disease.

Now I go to a group therapy every week. In my group there are only girls, but there are groups for boys as well. An eating disorder can affect anyone – no matter if you're a boy or a girl.

We talk about our problems and I feel much better afterwards.

My goal is to eat regularly and not throw up any more.

- BiSt** 10 What does the text do?

- ☐ It tells you how a girl learnt to solve her eating problems.
- ☐ It tells mothers how they can help their children with problems.
- ☐ It tries to tell young people how they can lose weight.
- ☐ It tells you how to keep fit and eat well.

- 11** Circle T (True) or F (False).

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1 Shannon's eating problem started when she was fourteen. | T / F |
| 2 Right from the beginning she threw up after every meal. | T / F |
| 3 She often felt she had very little energy. | T / F |
| 4 Her friends never knew what was going on. | T / F |
| 5 She told her P.E. teacher about her problem. | T / F |
| 6 She is happy that she can talk about her problem to others. | T / F |

(More! 4, Unit 10, p. 103)

10 Do the 'word sums' to make the noun forms of the adjectives above.

Adjective	minus (-)	add (+)	= Noun
1 angry	ry	er	anger
2 annoyed		ance	annoyance
3 frustrated		ion	frustration
4 helpless	—		helplessness
5 misunderstood	ood	anding	
6 proud		ide	pride
7 shocked	ed	—	
8 surprised		—	surprise

WB p. 81

UNIT 10 103

(Easy 4, p. 33)

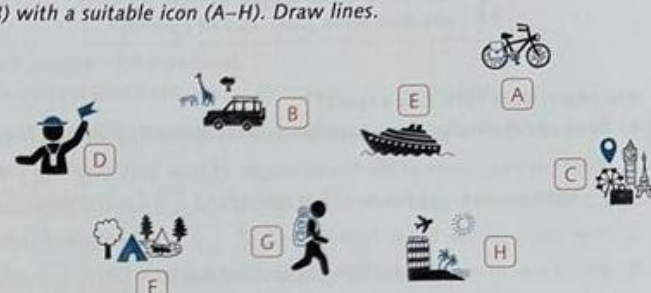
3 Topic 1

Working with words

1 Types of travelling.

Match the words/phrases (1–8) with a suitable icon (A–H). Draw lines.

- to go on a safari
- to go on a cruise
- to take a city trip
- to go on a bike tour
- to go backpacking
- to listen to a tour guide
- to book a package holiday
- to travel green



18

P 95

b) Read the text and then answer the questions below.

Hey you! Did you know that you're unique? There is no other person in this world like you.

Make sure to be loved not only by those around you but by the most important person in your life — YOU(RSELF). Practising self-love can be challenging for everybody, especially in difficult times. These ten steps give you an idea how to include self-love in your daily routines.

- 1 Start each day by telling yourself something *really positive*. How well you solved a problem or how lovely you look today.
- 2 Care for your awesome body. Fill it with healthy food and drinks, move it every single day and take some time to relax. Never forget: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.
- 3 Don't believe everything your inner critic says because this keeps you small and stops you from thinking big.
- 4 Love the things that make you *different*. This is what makes you special.
- 5 Don't expect the others to appreciate all of you. There will always be people who don't like or criticise you.
- 6 Be careful with relationships that aren't good for you! Hang out with people who love and *encourage* you.
- 7 Stop comparing yourself too often with others. You are "*perfect*" the way you are.
- 8 Follow your *passion* and your dreams and try out things. But be *patient* with yourself, not everything you really want will work immediately.
- 9 Treat others with *love* and respect, the way you hope to be treated yourself. This will make you feel good.
- 10 Ask for *help* if you have a tough time to go through and forgive yourself if something goes wrong.

So you see, loving yourself is not that difficult. There are some easy but very helpful bits and pieces which will have a great result on your well-being. However, be realistic – there's no person on this earth that is happy every single moment of every single day. This is because we are all human. We make mistakes, we have feelings (good and bad ones) and this is OK. Never forget: you are perfect the way you are. So have fun and don't listen too much to your inner critic! Get going and do the things that light your fire. Enjoy them and enjoy being you(rself)!

shortened and adapted from: <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/30-ways-practice-self-love-and-good-yourself.html>

- 1) Who do/should you have the most important relationship in life with? _____
- 2) Which of the tips mentioned might help you to improve this relationship? Why? Mark your top 5. _____
- 3) What does 'inner critic' mean? What does your 'inner critic' tell you? If you want to, share in class. _____
- 4) Why is it important to forgive yourself? _____
- 5) What are the main messages of the text? _____

(Easy 4, p.107)

4 — **Your turn: passive voice (revision).**

G 61 a) *Change these sentences from the active to the passive.*

P 106 1) The people used a raft to cross the ocean. A raft _____

2) They welcomed the refugees into their country. _____

3) We crossed the border to find safety in Lebanon. _____

b) *Now change these sentences into the active.*

1) All the houses were burnt down. People _____

2) Our village was attacked during the war. People _____

3) All our friends and family were left behind. _____

active: subject + verb + object
passive: subject + form of to be + past participle
active: They burnt the houses.
passive: The houses were burnt.

one hundred and seven **107**

