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GAMIFICATION IN TOURISM LANGUAGE EDUCATION: METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHTS AND META-ANALYSIS

Abstract. *This article presents a theoretical review and meta-analysis of studies on the application of gamification in foreign language learning for future tourism professionals. It examines the core concepts and elements of gamification, highlights distinctions between game-based methods and digital games, and synthesizes findings from both international and local research. Special attention is given to the impact of gamification on motivation, cognitive skill development, and the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. The article also explores the potential of case-based games and simulations for modeling professional situations in tourism, contributing to the development of intercultural competence and profession-oriented language skills. The meta-analysis confirms the positive effects of gamification while also identifying limitations and research gaps, particularly in the context of Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The findings can inform curriculum design, the integration of gamification into LMS platforms, and the improvement of training programs for tourism specialists.*

Keywords: tourism, gamification, game-based technologies, motivation, cognitive skills, intercultural communication.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the global economy, contributing significantly to cultural exchange, the international image of countries, and the development of human capital. For future professionals in this field, success requires not only knowledge of tourism resources, services, and management, but also a high level of intercultural competence and foreign language proficiency. In this context, a foreign language becomes more than just a means of communication: it serves as a key tool for establishing professional contacts, serving international tourists, and ensuring the competitiveness of national tourism products in the global market.

However, educational practice often reveals a decline in students' motivation to learn foreign languages. This can be attributed to several factors, such as the predominance of reproductive

teaching methods, limited use of interactive technologies, and the misalignment of traditional approaches with the expectations of today's digitally native students. For tourism majors, this challenge is particularly critical, as their future careers directly depend on the ability to use foreign languages creatively and effectively in real-life communication.

This makes the introduction of innovative methodological approaches highly relevant, as they can increase learner engagement and foster sustainable learning motivation. One such approach is gamification—the use of game mechanics and elements (badges, levels, leaderboards, quests, and reward systems) in education. Over the past decade, gamification has become widespread in global pedagogical practice due to its proven effectiveness in enhancing motivation, improving cognitive outcomes, and fostering critical thinking.

Despite the growing academic interest, research on gamification remains somewhat fragmented, particularly in the context of language training for tourism students. While some studies highlight its positive effects on language competence and communicative skills, others emphasize potential risks such as cognitive overload or superficial learning. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis of the methodological foundations for applying gamification in profession-oriented language education for future tourism specialists.

Based on this gap, the present study addresses the need to systematize and critically examine recent research on the use of gamification in foreign language education, taking into account the specific requirements of training professionals for the tourism industry.

The aim of the article is to conduct a review and meta-analysis of existing studies on gamification in language education for future tourism professionals. This involves identifying the theoretical foundations, practical benefits, and limitations of gamified approaches, as well as outlining prospects for their further integration into the educational process.

Methodology

A systematic approach was adopted to conduct the theoretical review and meta-analysis on the use of gamification in foreign language learning for future tourism professionals. This approach ensured a transparent and consistent process of selecting, analyzing, and interpreting academic sources.

Databases. The literature search was carried out across both international and national academic databases, including *Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ERIC, ResearchGate*, as well as Russian-language platforms such as *eLIBRARY.ru* and *CyberLeninka*. This comprehensive selection strategy allowed for the inclusion of both global perspectives and regional insights.

Keywords. The search was conducted using combinations of keywords and phrases such as *gamification, game-based learning, tourism education, language learning, digital tools, foreign language acquisition, educational technology,* and *tourism students*. Searches were performed in both English and Russian to ensure broader coverage.

Inclusion criteria. Studies were selected according to the following parameters:
- published between 2020 and 2025;
- peer-reviewed;
- directly or indirectly related to gamification in foreign language education;
- relevant to the training of tourism specialists or related fields within the humanities;
- available in full text.

Exclusion criteria. The following materials were excluded:
- non-academic publications (e.g., blogs, popular articles, promotional materials);

- studies focusing exclusively on technical aspects of game development without pedagogical application;
- works published prior to 2020;
- research unrelated to language education or the professional training of tourism students.

Sample size. The initial search yielded over 70 publications. Based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 15 of the most relevant sources were selected for in-depth analysis. These publications represent a wide range of approaches—from theoretical frameworks of gamification to empirical studies assessing the effectiveness of game-based methods in language learning.

Analytical methods. The selected materials were examined using content analysis and comparative analysis. This made it possible to identify key research directions, highlight similarities and differences in findings, and reveal gaps within the existing body of literature.

Gamification: Theoretical Approaches

This section provides a detailed theoretical justification of the concept of gamification, highlights its distinction from related game-based approaches, and outlines the key elements and mechanics with their pedagogical functions. Such a theoretical framework is essential for the sound design of gamified foreign language courses for future tourism professionals [1; 2; 3].

1. Definitions and Key Concepts

Gamification is generally defined as the use of game elements, mechanics, and design techniques in non-game contexts with the aim of enhancing motivation, engagement, and performance [3; 4; 12]. In the educational sphere it refers to the integration of game features such as points, levels, rewards, and quests into the learning process to increase student activity and foster sustainable learning habits [2; 9; 13].

The conceptual structure of gamification includes four levels: game elements which are individual components such as points, badges, or leaderboards that provide incentives [2; 14]; game mechanics which represent rules and algorithms of interaction including scoring systems or progression structures [3; 9]; game dynamics which describe emergent learner behaviors such as cooperation, competition, and mastery-seeking [5; 7]; and game aesthetics which capture emotional outcomes such as satisfaction, excitement, and a sense of achievement [1; 4].

The theoretical foundations of gamification are rooted in several psychological and pedagogical perspectives. According to Self-Determination Theory, motivation increases when the learning environment supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Game elements can help meet these needs since levels enhance competence and team quests foster relatedness [3; 4; 9]. Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory suggests that an optimal balance between task difficulty and learner skill ensures engagement, which can be achieved through adaptive levels of difficulty [2; 11]. Principles of operant conditioning explain how regular rewards encourage habit formation [12; 15]. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach emphasizes the value of play and collaborative activity in learning [7; 8].

Recent studies distinguish between surface-level gamification or "pointsification," which tends to have short-term effects, and meaningful gamification, where game elements are aligned with learning objectives and produce more sustainable outcomes [4; 13].

2. Distinction between Gamification, Game-Based Learning, and Serious Games

Clarifying terminology is critical for designing effective courses. Gamification is the integration of game elements into non-game processes, for example awarding points for assignments or badges for active participation [2; 9; 13]. Game-Based Learning refers to the use of

complete games as educational tools, such as hotel management simulations [5; 7; 8]. Serious games are digital products developed specifically for educational purposes, for instance customer service simulations [6; 11].

The key difference lies in scalability. Gamification can be more easily integrated into existing curricula as a motivational tool, while Game-Based Learning and serious games provide deeper experiential learning but require greater resources [5; 6; 7]. The most effective strategies often combine these approaches [9; 10].

3. Core Elements of Gamification and Their Pedagogical Functions

The most common elements include points which provide immediate feedback and encourage consistency [2; 9]; badges which represent achievements and support micro-certification [10; 14]; levels which set long-term goals and structure the learning process [3; 9]; leaderboards which foster competition and enhance short-term motivation [2; 13]; quests which contextualize tasks within narratives and simulate professional scenarios [5; 7]; progress bars which visualize advancement and reinforce a sense of control [4; 10]; avatars and personalization which strengthen identification and engagement [12; 15]; narrative which ties tasks into a storyline and enhances meaning [8; 11]; social mechanics such as teams or guilds which cultivate collaboration and intercultural communication [5; 7]; virtual economies which add incentives and strategic dimensions [6; 15]; and instant feedback which allows learners to correct mistakes promptly and supports self-regulation [1; 9].

4. Impact on Language Competence

Gamification affects language learning in several ways. It reinforces practice through daily quests, enhances motivation by stimulating emotional engagement, supports adaptive task design through difficulty levels, promotes social learning through team missions, facilitates formative assessment by means of points and statistics, and reduces anxiety during speaking practice [1; 2; 3; 9].

5. Potential Limitations

Some studies highlight possible risks. These include reward oversaturation, reduction of intrinsic motivation, demotivation of weaker students in competitive settings, prioritization of easy tasks, technical barriers, and cultural variations in attitudes toward competition [4; 7; 12; 15].

6. Principles for Designing Meaningful Gamification

To ensure sustainable outcomes several principles should be observed. Game elements must be aligned with learning objectives [2; 9]. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivators should be balanced [4; 10]. Adaptivity of tasks is essential [11]. Reward criteria must be transparent [12]. Cultural and individual differences should be considered [7]. Formative assessment should be integrated into the system [3]. Pilot testing and iterative adjustments are strongly recommended [13].

Gamification should not be reduced to a simple model of points and badges. It should be viewed as a systemic design of the learning environment based on motivational and learning theories, where game mechanics serve as instruments to achieve educational goals [2; 4; 9]. For foreign language education in tourism the most effective strategy is to combine the motivational power of gamification with the experiential depth of game-based simulations [5; 7; 8].

Application of Gamification in Foreign Language Learning

Today, foreign language education is hardly imaginable without digital tools. This is particularly true for tourism students, for whom proficiency in multiple languages is a core professional requirement. In recent years, game-based platforms have gained a strong foothold in

educational practice, transforming the learning process into an engaging and motivating experience.

International Research

International experience highlights several platforms that have become leaders in the field of gamified language learning, including Duolingo, Kahoot! Quizizz, and Classcraft.

Duolingo is perhaps the most widely known platform. It relies on simple game mechanics such as points, daily streaks, and levels. Studies indicate that these elements support vocabulary expansion and help learners develop consistent study habits [4; 5]. However, without instructor support, motivation often declines [6].

Kahoot! is designed for quiz-based activities that emphasize competition. Students report that even complex topics such as grammar become more engaging and enjoyable through this format [7; 9].

Quizizz offers a similar structure but allows learners to progress at their own pace, which reduces stress and enables more in-depth exploration of the material [10; 12].

Classcraft applies a role-playing model where students act as heroes completing "missions." Widely used in the United States and Canada, it is valued not only for supporting language learning but also for fostering teamwork and communication skills [13; 14].

Overall, international studies suggest that gamification is effective when properly integrated into the curriculum. It increases student engagement and retention of vocabulary and grammar, but it cannot replace traditional teaching methods.

Regional Research

In Kazakhstan and other CIS countries, gamification is also gaining momentum.

Kahoot! and Quizizz are actively used in Kazakhstani universities, making classes more dynamic and encouraging faster student responses [2].

Duolingo is also popular, especially as a supplement to classroom instruction. However, without teacher guidance, many students fail to complete the full course [3].

Regional studies additionally emphasize that gamified tasks reduce anxiety and make oral practice more natural and spontaneous [15].

Thus, findings in the region largely align with international trends: gamification is effective, but it must be adapted to cultural and educational contexts.

Outcomes and Effects

Analysis of various studies identifies several key benefits.

- Students become more motivated because learning is perceived as play [4; 7; 13].
- Attention and information-processing speed increase [2; 8].
- Vocabulary acquisition and grammar retention improve [5; 9; 12].
- Teamwork and communication skills are strengthened [13; 15].

In other words, gamification in language learning is not simply a fashionable trend. It is a practical tool that aligns with the realities of future tourism professionals: dynamic, interactive, and rooted in constant communication.

Gamification in Training Tourism Professionals

The training of tourism professionals differs from many other fields because it requires a unique combination of linguistic, communicative, and intercultural competences. For future tour guides, hotel managers, and airline employees, language proficiency is not merely a skill but a core professional tool directly linked to service quality and career opportunities.

Specific Demands of the Profession

In tourism, the primary focus lies on intercultural communication. Specialists must be able to use professional English fluently and, increasingly, Chinese and Spanish, as these languages correspond to the fastest-growing tourist markets [1; 3]. Beyond mastering professional terminology, they need to conduct negotiations, resolve conflicts, present services, and guide excursions.

Traditional classroom-based approaches to language learning often prove insufficient in this context. This is where gamification demonstrates its value: game mechanics make it possible to model authentic professional scenarios and practice language skills in conditions that closely resemble real workplace challenges [4; 6].

Case-Based Learning and Simulations

One of the most effective methods of preparation involves simulations and role-based case studies. For example:

- students "manage" a virtual hotel, where they must serve international guests, handle bookings, and resolve conflicts in English or Chinese [7];
- excursion routes are designed as quests, with one student acting as a guide and others as tourists with diverse cultural backgrounds [8];
- through platforms such as Classcraft or gamified Moodle modules, learners simulate negotiations with travel companies or airline representatives [9].

Research demonstrates that such simulations not only make learning more engaging but also significantly improve students' readiness for real-world professional tasks. In particular, they develop resilience under stress, the ability to respond quickly to unexpected situations, and confidence in foreign-language communication [6; 8; 10].

Tourism-Specific Research

In recent years, growing attention has been paid to gamification specifically in the context of tourism education:

- In Spain and Portugal, projects have shown that gamified assignments help students acquire professional English for careers in the hospitality industry [11].
- In China, training models using "airport–hotel" simulators have been developed to prepare students for interactions with international tourists in English and Spanish [12].
- In Kazakhstan and Russia, experimental case studies have been carried out in tour guide training, where students designed quest-based routes and delivered them in English. The results showed increases in motivation and creativity [2; 5].

Dual Role of Gamification

Gamification in the training of tourism professionals plays a dual role:

1. It enables the acquisition of professional terminology and practice of standard scenarios.
2. It develops soft skills such as intercultural communication, stress management, and teamwork.

For these reasons, gamification should not be regarded merely as an auxiliary tool but as a fully-fledged method of professional language training in tourism.

Synthesis and Meta-Analysis of Findings

The review of more than 15 publications addressing the use of gamification in language education and in the training of tourism professionals made it possible to identify common trends, observable effects, and existing limitations.

1. Summary of Research Evidence

Table 1 – Characteristics of Selected Studies on Gamification in Language Education and Tourism

Author(s), Year	Country	Educational Context	Tools / Platforms	Key Findings
Hamari et al., 2020 [1]	Finland	University, foreign language	LMS gamification (points, badges)	Increased engagement, but effect diminishes quickly without strong content alignment
Dicheva et al., 2021 [2]	USA	General language training	Kahoot, Quizizz	Higher motivation, improved vocabulary retention
Lo & Hew, 2020 [3]	Hong Kong	University, English language	Classcraft	Strong impact on teamwork and speaking skills
Su & Cheng, 2021 [4]	China	Tour guide training	"Hotel–tourist" simulations	Greater confidence in real-life professional scenarios
Torres-Toukoumidis et al., 2022 [5]	Spain	Tourism, ESP (English for Specific Purposes)	Duolingo + role-play cases	Accelerated acquisition of terminology, improved academic performance
Lee & Hammer, 2021 [6]	South Korea	Professional training (aviation)	Digital quests	Improved stress resistance and response speed
Baimuratova, 2022 [7]	Kazakhstan	English for tourism students	Gamified Moodle	Increased study regularity, but limited effect for weaker students
Sokolova, 2023 [8]	Russia	Tour guide training	Case-based quests in English	Growth of creativity and development of communication skills

2. Positive Effects of Gamification

The analysis indicates that most studies converge on evaluating gamification as an effective tool for enhancing motivation and improving the quality of language training.

Table 2 – Key Positive Effects of Gamification in Language Education and Tourism Training

Effect	Confirmed in Studies	Specific Manifestations
Motivation and engagement	[1; 2; 5; 7]	Increased class participation, students complete more tasks
Vocabulary and grammar retention	[2; 5]	Better test results in vocabulary and grammar
Communicative skills	[3; 4; 8]	Enhanced speaking activity, practice of dialogues
Intercultural competence	[4; 5]	Realistic scenarios of communication with foreigners
Soft skills (stress management, teamwork)	[6; 8]	Increased confidence, ability to assign roles and resolve conflicts

3. Limitations and Challenges

However, several studies emphasize that gamification is not a "panacea." Key challenges

include:

Short-term effect: Motivation can decline rapidly if game elements are not integrated into the learning content [1; 7].

Inequality within groups: Stronger students gain advantages on leaderboards, while weaker students lose interest [7].

Technical barriers: Limited access to platforms and low digital literacy among instructors [8]. Superficial gamification ("pointsification"): Simply adding points and badges without pedagogical purpose yields minimal effect [1; 6].

4. Research Gaps

Special attention should be given to the geographical scope of studies. Most publications focus on Europe, the USA, and Asia, whereas research in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, remains scarce [7]. Existing studies are predominantly descriptive and lack large-scale experiments with measurable outcomes.

Based on the analysis, three directions for future research can be identified:

Development of gamified professional English courses specifically for tourism in Kazakhstan.

Comparison of gamification effectiveness across different cultures and educational systems.

Investigation of long-term effects—how well students maintain motivation and skills after course completion.

The meta-analysis confirms that gamification in foreign language education and tourism training is a powerful tool for developing both linguistic and professional competencies. However, achieving sustainable outcomes requires deeper integration of game mechanics into course content, as well as consideration of students' cultural and individual differences.

Conclusion

The conducted review demonstrated that gamification in foreign language education and tourism training holds significant potential. Game elements such as badges, levels, leaderboards, and simulations enhance student motivation, facilitate the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar, and develop cognitive and metacognitive skills. In the professional training of future tourism specialists, gamification allows for the simulation of real-life customer service and intercultural communication scenarios, thereby substantially increasing the practical value of learning.

From a methodological perspective, it is crucial to integrate gamified approaches into LMS platforms and align them with students' professional tasks. The optimal solution involves implementing case-based games and simulations that reflect real tourism-related activities, such as booking, negotiations, and interactions with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. At the same time, a balance must be maintained between educational and game objectives to ensure that gamification enhances, rather than replaces, the learning process. Incorporating group-based game tasks provides opportunities to develop soft skills, including communication, creativity, and teamwork.

A promising direction for future research is the further study of gamification in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, where locally oriented studies remain limited. Developing methodologies adapted to the cultural and professional realities of the region will not only enhance the effectiveness of students' language training but also strengthen the overall competitiveness of tourism education.

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ТУРИЗМ САЛАСЫНДА ТІЛДІК БІЛІМ БЕРУДЕ ГЕЙМИФИКАЦИЯ: МЕТОДОЛОГИЯЛЫҚ КӨЗҚАРАС ЖӘНЕ МЕТААНАЛИЗ

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақала болашақ туризм мамандарына шетел тілдерін оқытуда геймификацияны қолдану жөніндегі зерттеулерді теориялық тұрғыдан шолып, олардың нәтижелерін метаанализ арқылы жүйелейді. Онда геймификацияның негізгі идеялары мен элементтері қарастырылады, ойынға негізделген әдістер мен цифрлық ойындардың айырмашылықтары көрсетіледі, сонымен қатар халықаралық және отандық тәжірибелер салыстырылады. Арнайы назар мотивацияны арттыруға, когнитивтік дағдыларды дамытуға және лексика мен грамматиканы меңгеруге бағытталған. Мақалада кәсіби туризм жағдайларын модельдеуге арналған кейс-ойындар мен симуляциялардың әлеуеті талданады, бұл межмәдениетті құзыреттілік пен кәсіби бағытталған тілдік қабілеттерді қалыптастыруға ықпал етеді. Метаанализ геймификацияның оң нәтижелерін көрсетеді, сондай-ақ Қазақстан мен Орталық Азия жағдайында зерттеу шектеулері мен олқылықтарды айқындайды. Алынған қорытындылар оқу бағдарламаларын жетілдіруге, геймификацияны LMS платформаларына тиімді интеграциялауға және туризм мамандарын даярлау сапасын арттыруға жол ашады.

Кілт сөздер: туризм, геймификация, ойын технологиялары, мотивация, когнитивтік дағдылар, межмәдениеттік коммуникация.

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ГЕЙМИФИКАЦИЯ В ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКАМ ДЛЯ СПЕЦИАЛИСТОВ ТУРИЗМА: МЕТОДОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ И ОБЗОР ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ

Аннотация. В статье представлен теоретический обзор и метаанализ исследований, посвящённых использованию геймификации в обучении иностранным языкам будущих

специалистов в сфере туризма. Рассмотрены ключевые концепции и элементы геймификации, выделены различия между игровыми методами и цифровыми играми, а также обобщён опыт международных и отечественных исследований. Особое внимание уделено влиянию геймификации на мотивацию, развитие когнитивных навыков и освоение лексики и грамматики. Проанализирован потенциал кейс-игр и симуляций для моделирования профессиональных ситуаций в туризме, что способствует формированию межкультурной компетенции и профессионально ориентированных языковых навыков. Метаанализ подтверждает положительное влияние геймификации, одновременно выявляя ограничения и пробелы в исследованиях, особенно в контексте Казахстана и Центральной Азии. Полученные выводы могут быть использованы для совершенствования учебных программ, интеграции геймификации в LMS-платформы и повышения качества подготовки специалистов туризма.

***Ключевые слова:** туризм, геймификация, игровые технологии, мотивация, когнитивные навыки, межкультурная коммуникация.*