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GAMIFICATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHING LANGUAGE TO TOURISM STUDENTS

Abstract. *This article explores the impact of gamification and video games on the process of learning English among tourism students to develop language skills and increase motivation. The study was conducted at the International University of Tourism and Hospitality in Turkestan using a mixed-methods approach including questionnaires, observations, and interviews with students and teachers. A total of 18 first-year students used the Quizlet platform over four weeks to learn new vocabulary. A language learning motivation scale and a Quizlet attitude questionnaire were used to assess students' motivation and attitudes toward gamification. According to pre-test and post-test surveys and a paired-sample t-test, no statistically significant differences ($p = 0.476$) were observed in vocabulary acquisition, although slight improvement was noted. However, observations and interviews indicated that gamification fostered active participation, enhanced motivation, and made language learning more interactive and engaging. Teachers also reported improved classroom atmosphere and student engagement.*

Keywords: *tourism students, gamification, vocabulary learning, motivation, Quizlet, English as a foreign language*

Introduction

Games have been used as a method of teaching since ancient times. However, they gained particular popularity in the modern education system during the 18th and 19th centuries. In Europe and America, games were incorporated into educational practices to develop essential life skills such as mathematics, reading, and moral reasoning. These methods emphasized practical application, preparing children to solve complex real-life tasks while strengthening their social and cognitive abilities.

With the development of pedagogy in the 20th century, games began to be viewed not merely as a form of entertainment, but as a powerful educational tool for both children and adults. The work of prominent theorists such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and John Dewey significantly contributed to this shift. Piaget highlighted the role of play in cognitive development; Vygotsky

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emphasized its importance in socialization and the acquisition of cultural skills; and Dewey saw games as a way to engage students actively in the learning process [1], [2].

By the mid-20th century, games were increasingly included in educational programs to make learning more enjoyable and effective. This included board games, role-playing activities, and simulation exercises that allowed students to practice complex concepts in real-life scenarios. Such methods were used not only in primary schools but also in secondary and higher education.

Since the late 20th century, educational games have become even more significant due to the rise of computer technologies and digital platforms. Interactive games and simulations are now an integral part of many educational programs worldwide. They are used to teach subjects such as languages, mathematics, and science, while also fostering critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. Modern research highlights the effectiveness of game-based learning: it enhances concentration, boosts motivation, and facilitates deeper understanding. In the era of distance education and online courses, gaming approaches have evolved alongside technologies like virtual and augmented reality, as well as artificial intelligence, offering exciting new possibilities in education.

Recent studies show that gamification can significantly enhance students' language proficiency by promoting active engagement and improving learning outcomes through repetition and feedback [10]. Incorporating game elements not only makes learning more enjoyable but also meets the diverse needs of learners—particularly in travel or study-abroad programs, where multilingualism and intercultural communication are essential. Research by Anderson and Dill confirms that gamification can increase motivation and academic performance in educational settings [9].

Khamrakhodzhayeva and colleagues emphasize that “games are a method of pedagogical activity that serve as a form of recreation and entertainment during subject learning. The role of play in foreign language lessons is immense, as it makes the learning process appealing and engaging for every student” [5]. Moreover, when students communicate in a foreign language during games, additional learning opportunities arise. Games positively impact attention, memory, thinking, and imagination, often requiring significant emotional and cognitive effort. They should be tailored to students' proficiency levels and address specific grammatical or lexical material. Games help practice pronunciation, activate vocabulary and grammar, and develop listening and speaking skills. They can also be used to relieve psychological fatigue, mobilize mental effort, foster organizational and self-discipline skills, and create a joyful classroom atmosphere.

The multifaceted benefits of games in language learning lie in their ability to simultaneously engage cognitive, emotional, and linguistic skills. According to Khamrakhodzhayeva et al., games are especially effective in developing attention, memory, thinking, and imagination. These activities demand active student participation and deepen their engagement with the learning content [5].

Moreover, games can be adapted to suit different levels of student readiness and focus on specific language areas. This is particularly beneficial for university students in tourism programs, who must develop pronunciation, expand their vocabulary, and strengthen their listening and speaking abilities—skills that are vital for future tourism professionals. Games also help combat psychological fatigue and maintain concentration throughout a lesson. In addition, they stimulate cognitive activity, foster organizational skills, and instill discipline, all of which are important qualities in the tourism industry.

One of gamification's key strengths is its adaptability to individual learning needs. For instance, in educational travel programs, students often need to quickly acquire functional language

skills. Role-playing and simulation-based activities can immerse learners in realistic situations such as navigating airports, checking into hotels, or engaging in intercultural conversations. These skills are critical in the tourism sector, where professional success hinges on effective communication. Motivation, a key factor in language acquisition, links education to career opportunities and professional growth. Future tourism professionals must be able to represent themselves and communicate clearly in scientific, business, and international contexts to attract potential clients.

By integrating game mechanics such as points, leaderboards, and rewards into language education, gamification fosters higher engagement and motivation while creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Proficiency in foreign languages is especially important in tourism, which revolves around social interaction and the ability to communicate across languages.

Effective language use is impossible without a sufficient vocabulary [7]. Learners often find vocabulary acquisition tedious and difficult, especially when trying to use new words in context [12]. Thus, foreign language teachers should adopt effective and engaging approaches to vocabulary learning. As a result, game-based language learning is gaining momentum.

Recent developments in information technology have led to the emergence of innovative web tools tailored to the needs of Generation Z, who are inherently digital natives. The integration of ICT tools into foreign language instruction has become a vital aspect of modern language teaching, as it significantly boosts learners' interest and accelerates language development [8].

This article has explored the role of gamification and educational games in language learning, with a particular focus on tourism students. It has examined the impact of game-based learning on skill development, vocabulary acquisition, and grammar application in real-life scenarios. Gamification not only makes learning more engaging but also equips students with the linguistic and interpersonal skills necessary for success in the tourism industry.

Methodology

To assess the effectiveness of gamification in language learning, the researchers employed a mixed-methods approach. A group of 18 first-year students from the International University of Tourism and Hospitality in Turkestan participated in the study during the 2023–2024 academic year. The aim was to explore students' perceptions of gamified language learning and measure its impact on their progress.

Several four-week learning sessions were conducted, during which gamification strategies were integrated into language lessons. To evaluate students' progress, both pre-tests and post-tests were administered. The researchers analyzed the differences between the results to assess changes in language proficiency and engagement levels before, during, and after the implementation of gamified instruction.

Data collection tools included:

- A Motivation Scale for Language Learning, consisting of 24 items designed to assess students' motivation to learn English through gamification [13].
- A Quizlet-based questionnaire developed by Dizon [14], comprising 23 items. The first six questions addressed students' general preferences in language learning, while the remaining items focused on the integration of game-based methods based on Davis' framework.

Students responded to both questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

In addition to surveys, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with both students and teachers were conducted throughout the study. These qualitative methods helped to

provide a deeper understanding of how gamification influenced learning outcomes and classroom dynamics.

For four weeks, students were introduced to new vocabulary using Quizlet, which incorporated game-based learning techniques. Teachers led the lessons using gamified strategies, and students received links to flashcard sets aligned with the course content. Observations and interviews were conducted after each session to capture ongoing changes in engagement and attitudes.

At the end of the course, students completed the post-test and filled out follow-up questionnaires. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated, and a paired-samples t-test was used to determine whether the differences between the pre-test and post-test scores were statistically significant.

This methodology allowed the researchers to assess the learning progress of the experimental group and evaluate the impact of gamification on their academic performance in language learning.

Results and discussion

The results of the study demonstrate that, although the use of gamification through the Quizlet platform led to a slight improvement in students' vocabulary test scores, the difference was not statistically significant. As shown in Table 1, the mean score increased modestly from 3.63 (SD = 0.34) in the pre-test to 3.74 (SD = 0.37) in the post-test. A paired-sample t-test indicated that this improvement was not statistically significant, $t(17) = -0.733$, $p = 0.476$. Therefore, while quantitative data do not confirm a significant impact of gamification on vocabulary acquisition, they suggest a potential positive trend.

Table 1 – The results of pre-test and post-test

		Mean	N	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean	t	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-test	3.63	18	0,34	0,07922		
	Post-test	3,74	18	0,37	0,087	-0,733	0,476

In contrast, qualitative data obtained from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with both students and instructors revealed important insights into the benefits of gamification. Students were observed actively participating in classroom activities, enthusiastically engaging with the Quizlet flashcards, and often collaborating with peers. They responded positively to the interactive nature of the learning process, frequently describing the experience as “fun,” “motivating,” and “less stressful” compared to traditional methods.

The bar chart in Figure 1 shows how much time students reported spending on learning new material using games in class. The majority of students (8 out of 18) spent between 20 and 40 minutes per week engaging with gamified learning activities, such as Quizlet-based vocabulary games. This was followed by 5 students who reported spending less than 20 minutes, 3 students who spent 40–60 minutes, and only 2 students who invested more than 60 minutes per week.

These findings support the observational data indicating moderate but consistent engagement. The fact that nearly half the students spent at least 20–40 minutes per week suggests that gamified learning tools were successfully integrated into students' weekly study routines. Although some students engaged less frequently, the overall trend highlights that the majority were actively involved, which aligns with their self-reported motivation and enthusiasm noted in the interviews

and questionnaire responses.

Figure1 – Amount of spent time to learn new material with the help of gamification.



These results indicate a moderate but consistent level of engagement with the gamified learning tools. The fact that most students regularly dedicated time to vocabulary acquisition outside standard classwork suggests that gamification positively influenced their study habits.

Further support comes from questionnaire responses, summarized in Table 2. The mean score was 4.12 out of 5, indicating a generally positive attitude toward gamified learning methods.

Table 2 – Average values and standard deviation according to the questionnaire data.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Total	18	3.00	5.00	4.1222	0.47856

In interviews, students highlighted the value of interactive features such as flashcards, timed quizzes, and leaderboards. These elements not only maintained their motivation but also helped them to break down complex vocabulary into more manageable components. Students also appreciated the sense of progress and competition, which enhanced their intrinsic motivation and interest in learning.

Teachers echoed these positive observations, noting improved classroom atmosphere, increased participation, and enhanced student cooperation. One teacher specifically pointed out that the competitive and playful nature of the activities encouraged more effective peer communication and collaboration. Moreover, teachers reported better vocabulary retention compared to previous semesters that relied solely on traditional instruction.

Gamification also proved adaptable to students' varying levels of preparedness. Tourism students, in particular, benefitted from role-playing and situational exercises that helped them connect language learning with real-life professional contexts—such as working at hotels, handling customer service, or managing tourist interactions.

These outcomes are consistent with previous studies, including research by Khamrakhodzhayeva et al., which emphasized that gamified approaches enhance not only engagement but also cognitive abilities such as memory, problem-solving, and attention. Teachers in this study also observed greater resilience and persistence among students in learning new vocabulary, as well as improved organization and time management skills.

Although the improvement in vocabulary test scores was not statistically significant, the increase in motivation, participation, and strategic learning behaviors suggests that gamification can contribute meaningfully to long-term language development. These findings underline the value of

integrating platforms like Quizlet into EFL instruction—not only to support academic goals but also to foster soft skills essential for tourism professionals, such as teamwork, adaptability, and confident communication in multilingual contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that while the improvement in students' vocabulary test scores was not statistically significant, the use of gamification—specifically through the Quizlet platform—had a notably positive impact on student motivation, engagement, and participation. In the field of tourism, where communication skills and language fluency are essential, the ability to actively use vocabulary in real-life scenarios is more valuable than passive memorization. Gamification supports this need by making the learning process more interactive, personalized, and enjoyable.

Interviews and classroom observations revealed that game-based features—such as flashcards, timed quizzes, and leaderboards—fostered a positive classroom atmosphere, encouraged collaboration, and helped students stay motivated. These elements also contributed to reducing anxiety and cognitive fatigue, which are common among first-year university students adapting to a new academic environment.

Based on the results of this study, the following practical recommendations can be made:

1. Integrate gamified tools into regular instruction. Platforms like Quizlet should be consistently incorporated into the language curriculum, especially for teaching vocabulary and reinforcing speaking skills.
2. Adapt games to reflect professional contexts. For tourism students, it is beneficial to include real-life scenarios such as hotel check-ins, customer service interactions, and guided tours. This enhances the relevance and applicability of language learning.
3. Encourage independent learning. Gamified activities can also be assigned as homework, promoting regular practice and improving students' self-discipline and time management skills.
4. Use diverse game formats. While Quizlet was effective, introducing additional formats like role-plays, simulations, or virtual quests can accommodate different learning styles and prevent monotony.
5. Support teacher training in digital tools. For gamification to be successfully implemented, teachers must be equipped with the necessary digital literacy and methodological skills.
6. Continue monitoring student progress. Although the immediate vocabulary gains were limited, long-term tracking of language competence and engagement levels is essential to fully understand the impact of gamified learning.

In conclusion, gamification is not a universal solution, but it is a powerful supplementary tool in foreign language instruction. When thoughtfully applied, it enriches the educational experience and supports the development of essential linguistic and interpersonal skills—particularly for students preparing for careers in the global tourism industry.

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**ТІЛ ҮЙРЕНУДЕГІ ГЕЙМИФИКАЦИЯ: ТУРИЗМ СТУДЕНТТЕРІНЕ ТІЛДІ
ОҚЫТУДЫҢ ПРАКТИКАЛЫҚ МЫСАЛЫ**

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада туризм мамандығында оқитын студенттердің ағылшын тілін үйрену процесінде геймификация мен бейнеойындардың тілдік дағдыларды дамыту және мотивацияны арттырудағы әсері зерттеледі. Зерттеу Түркістан қаласындағы Халықаралық туризм және қонақжайлылық университетінде аралас әдіс (сауалнама, бақылау және сұхбаттар) негізінде жүргізілді. Экспериментке 18 бірінші курс студенті қатысты, олар төрт апта бойы жаңа сөздерді үйрену үшін Quizlet платформасын пайдаланды. Студенттердің мотивациясы мен геймификацияға деген көзқарасын бағалау үшін тілді үйренуге арналған мотивация шкаласы және Quizlet қолдану сауалнамасы қолданылды. Алдын ала және қорытынды тест нәтижелері мен жұпталған t-тестке сәйкес, сөздік қорының өсуінде статистикалық жағынан маңызды айырмашылық байқалмады ($p = 0.476$), дегенмен аздаған оң өзгеріс болды. Дегенмен, бақылау мен сұхбат нәтижелері геймификацияның студенттердің белсенділігін арттырғанын, олардың ынтасын күшейтіп, тіл үйрену процесін тартымды әрі интерактивті еткенін көрсетті. Мұғалімдер де аудиториядағы атмосфера мен студенттердің сабаққа қатысу деңгейінің жақсарғанын атап өтті.

Кілт сөздер: туризм студенттері, геймификация, сөз үйрену, мотивация, Quizlet, шет тілі ретінде ағылшын тілі

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**ГЕЙМИФИКАЦИЯ В ИЗУЧЕНИИ ЯЗЫКА: ПРАКТИЧЕСКИЙ ПРИМЕР
ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ ЯЗЫКА СТУДЕНТАМ ТУРИСТИЧЕСКИХ СПЕЦИАЛЬНОСТЕЙ**

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается влияние геймификации и видеоигр на процесс изучения английского языка среди студентов туристических специальностей с целью развития языковых навыков и повышения мотивации. Исследование проводилось в Международном университете туризма и гостеприимства в Туркестане с использованием смешанного метода, включающего анкетирование, наблюдение и интервью со студентами и преподавателями. В эксперименте приняли участие 18 первокурсников, которые в течение четырёх недель использовали платформу Quizlet для изучения новой лексики. Для оценки мотивации и отношения к геймифицированному обучению были применены шкала мотивации к изучению языка и анкета по использованию Quizlet. Согласно результатам предтестов и посттестов, а также *t*-критерию для связанных выборок, статистически значимых изменений в усвоении лексики не было зафиксировано ($p = 0.476$), хотя наблюдалось незначительное улучшение. Тем не менее, наблюдения и интервью показали, что геймификация способствовала активному участию студентов, повысила их мотивацию и сделала процесс изучения языка более увлекательным и интерактивным. Преподаватели также отметили улучшение атмосферы в аудитории и вовлечённости студентов.

Ключевые слова: студенты туризма, геймификация, изучение словарного запаса, мотивация, Quizlet, английский как иностранный язык