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GAMIFICATION AS A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN ENGLISH LEARNING: A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

This paper explores the application of gamification as a pedagogical strategy to enhance student engagement in foreign language learning. By incorporating game elements and design techniques into educational contexts, gamification leverages both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors to foster active participation and persistent interest among learners. Based on established frameworks, such as the Five-Step Model of Gamified Learning, this study examines the theoretical foundation, practical implementation, and potential mistakes of gamification. Particular emphasis is placed on understanding the students' needs, defining clear learning objectives, structuring the learning experience, identifying resources, and applying appropriate gamification elements. The unique characteristics of modern learners, including Generation Z and Alpha, are considered to adapt gamified interventions effectively.

Contemporary scholarship expands the theoretical grounding of gamification by integrating digital, personalized, and socially interactive dimensions. Empirical studies confirm the continued relevance of Self-Determination Theory, showing that gamified environments effectively support autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Research on digital tools used in hybrid and online learning demonstrates that gamification increases interactivity and motivation among learners of various ages.

A cutting-edge development is the integration of artificial intelligence, which enables adaptive feedback, real-time personalization, and dynamic task adjustment, while raising concerns about cognitive overload and overreliance on automated systems. Overall, the paper underscores the effectiveness of gamification in promoting engagement and curiosity while highlighting the theoretical and practical considerations required for successful application in contemporary educational outcomes.

Keywords: gamification, pedagogical strategy, foreign language learning, integration, educational context, students.

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ГЕЙМІФІКАЦІЯ ЯК СТРАТЕГІЯ ПІДВИЩЕННЯ ЗАЦІКАВЛЕНОСТІ СТУДЕНТІВ У ВИВЧЕННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ: ПЕДАГОГІЧНИЙ ПІДХІД

У статті досліджено застосування гейміфікації як педагогічної стратегії задля підвищення залученості студентів у вивченні іноземної мови. Через включення ігрових елементів та створення технік в навчальному процесі, гейміфікація застосовує як внутрішні так і зовнішні мотиваційні чинники, аби стимулювати активну участь і постійну зацікавленість учасників навчального процесу. На основі встановлених концепцій, таких як п'ятиступенева модель ігрового навчання, дане дослідження аналізує теоретичні засади, практичне застосування й потенційні помилки гейміфікації. На особливу увагу заслуговує дослідження потреб студентів, визначення чітких навчальних цілей, структурування навчального досвіду, визначення ресурсів і застосування доцільних ігрових елементів. Унікальні характеристики сучасних студентів, включаючи покоління Z і Альфа, враховуються з метою ефективного адаптування ігрових методів навчання.

Сучасні науковці розширюють теоретичні основи гейміфікації, інтегруючи цифрові, персоналізовані й соціально-інтерактивні виміри. Емпіричні дослідження підтверджують актуальність теорії самовираження, показуючи, що ігрові середовища ефективно підтримують автономію, компетентність і взаємозв'язок, а дослідження цифрових інструментів, використаних у гібридному й онлайн навчанні, демонструють, що гейміфікація підвищує інтерактивність і мотивацію учасників навчального процесу різного віку.

Новітньою розробкою є інтеграція штучного інтелекту, що забезпечує адаптивний зворотній зв'язок, персоналізацію в реальному часі та динамічне коригування завдань, у той самий час викликаючи занепокоєння щодо когнітивного перевантаження й надмірної залежності від автоматизованих систем. У цілому стаття підкреслює ефективність гейміфікації в сприянні залученості й зацікавленості студентів, водночас висвітлюючи теоретичні та практичні аспекти, необхідні для її успішного застосування в сучасній освіті.

Ключові слова: гейміфікація, педагогічна стратегія, вивчення іноземної мови, інтеграція, навчальний контекст, студенти.

Changes in the landscape of foreign language learning over the years transformed how people learn a second language from traditional rote memorization to current, student-centric practices. They were caused by the surveys, showing the disengagement experience by many students who were bored in the classrooms (Collins, 2009: 131). As A. Collins and R. Harvelson claimed, "In order to produce a generation of people who seek out learning, learners need to be given more control over their learning. Learner control can be fostered by giving students the tools to support their own learning, such as access to the web and computer-based games that foster deep knowledge and entrepreneurial skills" (Collins, 2009: 132). Of those, gamification has become a beneficial alternative to improve student engagement due to the utilization of game dynamics in non-game environments (Werbach, 2012). It's applicable for all ages and has become a practical pedagogical tool, not a trend. Gamification motivates learners, enhances learning focus, and ensures the achievement of the educational goals.

The theoretical grounding of gamification in education continues to evolve, especially as newer research integrates digital, personalized, and socially interactive dimensions. Alongside the classic motivational and cognitive frameworks (Self-Determination Theory, Behaviourism, Flow), contemporary studies highlight AI-driven adaptation, digital tool efficacy, teacher perception, and autonomy development as crucial aspects of modern gamification.

Recent empirical studies confirm that satisfying the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness remains central to the power of gamification. For example, Chyzykova found that gamified learning environments in higher education promote student autonomy by improving their self-organization and responsibility for completing learning tasks. Moreover, the author claims that gamification increases students' motivation for educational and cognitive activities, increases productivity, and encourages learning. (Chyzykova, 2023: 58).

The transition to hybrid and fully online learning has stimulated research into how specific digital gamification tools (e.g., Storyboard, MinecraftEdu, EdPuzzle) affect motivation, especially among younger students (Pobryzhaieva, 2024).

A cutting-edge development is the integration of AI with gamification in language learning. Salmanova explores how AI-based gamification systems provide adaptive feedback, dynamically adjust tasks to students' levels, and maintain high engagement. The researcher proves that "through well-structured gamification, AI ensures that language learners remain actively engaged, intrinsically motivated, and committed to their learning journey" (Salmanova, 2025: 263). Although she also cautions against potential overreliance on AI and the risk of cognitive overload, and some data privacy issues. Teachers' views on this issue are increasingly becoming the subject of research. A 2023 study of foreign language teachers found that while many consider gamification to be motivating and conducive to collaboration, there are challenges in maintaining narrative gamified practices and integrating them meaningfully into curricula (Battle, 2023).

Continued studies in Ukraine and other countries have shown that gamification is positioned as a strategic innovation in higher education and professional training. For example, N. Folomieva et al. analyzed the structural elements and stages of gamification implementation in higher education institutions and identified both advantages and potential negative side effects (Folomieva et al., 2024). As the authors noticed, "we are constantly and continuously affected by a huge flow of information that can be modified, and this allows teachers to use game elements as a potential incentive for the self-development of each individual" (Folomieva et al., 2024: 332).

Gamification is defined as an activity that follows a defined set of rules, goals, feedback systems, and voluntary participation theories (Huang, 2013) to borrow the motivational psychology principles and help learning through an interactive and rewarding form. Karl Kapp describes gamification as use of game-based methodology, thinking and aesthetics to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems, however, this must be a thoughtful and deliberate game methodology using game elements appropriate to the situation and studying goals (Kapp, 2012).

This study explores the utilisation of gamification as a generalised framework in designing learning systems for foreign language acquisition, to address the concerns on student engagement among digital-native learners (e.g., Generations Z & Alpha). Using the Five-Step Model of Gamified Learning (Huang, 2013) as a methodological framework, this work presents a structured process for designing and implementing gamified educational experiences, with a focus on the role and coaching behavior. We also share the opinion of the researcher S. Dreimane, who suggests the adjustment and adaptation of the strategy to contemporary realms by adding the sixth step "Feedback" to the existing model, grounding that in the educational process, it's necessary to evaluate and understand successes and failures (Dreimane, 2024).

The novelty of the article lies in its structured and targeted approach to the use of gamification as a pedagogical strategy in foreign language teaching and learning, especially taking into account the needs of modern students. In our study, we not only examine the theoretical basis and practical implementation of gamification, but also focus on common implementation challenges. This allows for the development of effective and sustainable gamified interventions, avoiding common mistakes such as gamification for the sake of gamification or overly complex game mechanics. Transformational potential highlights the potential of gamification to revolutionize foreign language learning by promoting engagement and motivation among students.

Gamification is based on motivational theories, distinguishing between intrinsic motivation, driven by internal satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, influenced by external rewards (Sailer et al., 2013). In educational settings, educators use gamification to tap into these motivational drivers, encouraging students to engage in activities that support their learning goals. The dopamine release associated with rewarding activities, such as achieving goals or earning badges, reinforces student engagement (Sailer et al., 2013). The introduction of gamification is particularly important for today's students (Generation Z and Alpha), as they are digital natives and tech-savvy. These learners have shorter attention spans and rely on instant feedback. Gamification acts as an innovative strategy necessary to overcome the problem of disengagement observed in traditional classrooms. Thus, gamification uses both types of motivation: external incentives (points, badges, rewards, scores) engage students in completing tasks, while internal incentives (sense of progress, mastery, individual choice) maintain sustained interest and long-term participation in the learning process.

The Five-Step Model of Gamified Learning, proposed by Huang and Soman (2013), provides a practical framework for implementing gamification: (1) Understanding the target audience and context. (2) Defining clear learning objectives.

(3) Structuring the learning experience into milestones. (4) Identifying available resources. (5) Applying gamification elements strategically.

This model highlights the importance of understanding each learner as an individual. By personalizing gamified activities to reflect students' unique needs, interests, and backgrounds, educators can create experiences that feel meaningful and relevant. This thoughtful approach helps students connect more deeply with the material while ensuring that learning goals are met.

The example of such an approach might be the game "**Story Starter Hot Potato**", which could be suitable for any Unit/Topic lookback to practice and recall the vocabulary and grammar patterns from the Unit. Students play in small groups of around five members. They are recommended to arrange their seats in a circle. Give them a story starter at the beginning of the round. Starting with the person whose birthday is closest to today and then moving around the circle, each person gives their group one sentence of the story. After one person is done, the person sitting to his left adds a line where the first person left off. Students continue around the circle, adding one sentence at a time, until the music stops or until you give another signal. Whoever is in the middle of his sentence

or is struggling to think of a sentence when the music stops is out. He must leave the circle. Then students play a second round, either continuing the story or with a new story starter. When you stop the music, whoever's turn it is, he is eliminated. Play continues until the final round, when the person not speak when the music stops is the winner.

Modern learners, particularly Generation Z and Alpha, are digital natives characterized by short attention spans, reliance on instant feedback, and fluency with social networks and digital communication (Collins, 2009). They often prioritize experiential learning over traditional memorization, using acronyms, emojis, and interactive platforms to process information. In an ideal educational setting, intrinsic curiosity would drive engagement; however, the reality of diverse learner motivations necessitates innovative strategies like gamification. By aligning educational content with the pReferences of digital-native students, gamification fosters an environment where learning is both engaging and empowering.

They are struggling to do tasks like the following: read the introduction of a new gadget with the emojis instead of adjectives, describing it.

Introducing the new "Chrono-Ring"! 🕒 This little gadget is so ✨. It's a 💎 piece of tech that's also incredibly 🌀. The battery life is 🔋, so you can wear it all day and all night. The screen is so 😊 and the colors are just so 🌈. It's truly a game-changer for anyone who wants to stay connected without being glued to their phone. Get yours today! 🛒

The second step can be the creation of their description of a favourite technology, using emojis, and sharing them in the students' online classroom to guess the vocabulary.

We used to practice the emojis list of emotional smiles to ask our students to choose the smile corresponding to their moods, and explain the reason for such a choice.

Effective gamification focuses on specific, measurable learning objectives rather than gamifying the entire curriculum. For foreign language learning, objectives may include mastering vocabulary, improving pronunciation, or enhancing conversational fluency. By targeting specific components of the learning process, educators can design gamified activities that align with pedagogical goals, ensuring that game elements serve educational purposes rather than mere entertainment (Collins, 2009).

To review specific questions, for instance, the game **"This is how we roll"** may be used. All you need is one standard die and six questions – ones that elicit opinions, experience, or other personal thoughts. Give students a list of the questions, and make sure they are numbered on the paper. Then, have students take turns rolling the die. Whatever number they roll, that is the question they must answer.

As researched and implemented earlier by the author, "Gamification elements (the six thinking hats method or guessing the context based on: keywords; reading the first sentence; reading the last paragraph, etc.) transform routine reading into an exciting, motivating process while developing critical thinking, analytical skills, data collection and processing, teamwork, and cooperation" (Stepanechko, 2025: 107).

A well-designed gamified experience breaks the learning process down into milestones, giving students a sense of advancement that encourages them to keep going. Common game elements, such as points, badges, leaderboards, progress bars, quests, levels, rewards, avatars, and social interactions, can be integrated to enhance engagement (Salmanova, 2024: 262). The engagement loop – motivation, action, feedback, and renewed motivation – reinforces continuous participation. Progression charts, for example, provide visual feedback on performance, encouraging self-evaluation and sustained effort toward achieving learning goals. Even a simple wordsearch game activates encouragement and a sense of victory for the student who finds all the words first.

Gamification in education can be supported by a variety of resources, including online platforms, printed materials, and mobile applications. Popular gamified tools, such as Quizlet, Quizizz, Kahoot, Baamboozle, and ClassDojo, offer user-friendly interfaces that integrate game elements into classroom activities without requiring extensive setup (Collins, 2009). These tools enable educators to create interactive quizzes, collaborative challenges, and reward systems that align with learning objectives, making gamification accessible and scalable.

The strategic application of gamification elements is critical to achieving desired educational outcomes. Self-elements, such as levels, content unlocking, avatars, progress bars, rewards, badges, time restrictions, and learner choice, promote individual engagement. Social elements, including teamwork, leaderboards, and collaborative projects, foster a sense of community and healthy competition (Huang, 2013). Teachers must carefully select elements that align with learning objectives and the target audience's pReferences to maximize impact.

The fulfillment of gamification elements can be presented in online practices presented by Oxford University Press, Pearson, Macmillan, etc., where the material is thoroughly assorted according to the academic needs and learning topics. The advantages of these resources are suitable for contemporary students as they see clear instructions for achieving goals, challenging tasks, expansion, and opening of access to educational goals. Moreover, students get quick feedback (the sixth step) and room for improvement.

While gamification offers significant benefits, its implementation is not without challenges. Nine common mistakes include: 1. Gamifying for its own sake without clear educational goals. 2. Overcomplicating the game mechanism leads to confusion. 3. Neglecting aesthetic appeal can result in a reduction of engagement. 4. Fostering excessive competition may discourage some learners. 5. Overlooking opportunities for social learning. 6. Prioritizing rewards over meaningful results. 7. Offering rewards misaligned with tasks. 8. Lacking clear criteria for earning rewards. 9. Starting with overly ambitious implementations.

By anticipating these pitfalls, educators can design effective and sustainable gamified interventions (Collins, 2009).

Gamification represents a transformative approach to foreign language learning, leveraging the motivational power of game elements to enhance student engagement. By aligning gamified strategies with the characteristics of modern learners and adhering to structured frameworks like the Five-Step Model, educators can create dynamic, student-centered learning environments. However, the success of gamification depends on careful planning, clear objectives, and the strategic use of resources and game elements. Avoiding common pitfalls ensures that gamification remains a tool for meaningful learning rather than a superficial gimmick. Future research should explore the long-term impact of gamification on language acquisition and its scalability across diverse educational contexts.

To sum up, this article underscores the potential of gamification to revolutionize foreign language learning by fostering engagement and motivation among digital-native students. By applying the Five-Step Model of Gamified Learning and addressing

implementation challenges, educators can leverage the power of game elements to create rewarding and effective learning programs. As educational paradigms continue to evolve, gamification offers promising opportunities to empower, engage, and enrich the learning journey of students worldwide. The role of gamification is expected to grow in all areas of education, including the corporate environment.

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