Increasing students' motivation through gamification in English lessons

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the importance of gamification in increasing students' motivation in English language classes at academic lyceums. Gamification, through the integration of game elements into the educational process, stimulates learners' interest, ensures their active participation, and enhances lesson effectiveness by combining competition and collaboration. The findings show that gamification strengthens students' intrinsic motivation, develops independent thinking and creativity skills. Furthermore, this approach helps maintain learners' attention for longer periods, improves peer interaction, and fosters a positive attitude towards learning English.

Ingliz tili darslarida oʻquvchilarning gamifikatsiya orqali motivatsiyasini oshirish

ANNOTATSIYA

Ushbu maqolada akademik litsey ingliz tili darslarida gamifikatsiyani oʻquvchilarning motivatsiyasini oshirishdagi ahamiyati tahlil qilinadi. Gamifikatsiya taʼlim jarayoniga oʻyin elementlarini kiritish orqali oʻquvchilarda qiziqish uygʻotadi, ularning faol ishtirokini taʼminlaydi hamda raqobat va hamkorlik orqali dars samaradorligini oshiradi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni koʻrsatadiki, gamifikatsiya oʻquvchilarning ichki motivatsiyasini mustahkamlaydi, mustaqil fikrlash va ijodkorlik koʻnikmalarini rivojlantiradi. Shuningdek, bu yondashuv darslarda oʻquvchilarning diqqatini uzoq muddat ushlab turishga, oʻzaro muloqotini kuchaytirishga va ingliz tilini oʻrganishga boʻlgan ijobiy munosabatni shakllantirishga xizmat qiladi.

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Повышение мотивации учащихся через геймификацию на уроках английского языка

АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье анализируется значение геймификации в повышении мотивации учащихся на уроках английского языка в академических лицеях. Интеграция игровых элементов в образовательный процесс способствует развитию интереса у обучающихся, обеспечивает их активное участие и повышает эффективность занятий за счёт сочетания конкуренции и сотрудничества. Результаты исследования показывают, что геймификация укрепляет внутреннюю мотивацию студентов, развивает навыки самостоятельного мышления и креативности. Кроме того, данный подход помогает дольше удерживать внимание учащихся, улучшает их взаимодействие со сверстниками и формирует положительное отношение к изучению английского языка.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has had a significant impact on education, leading to the development of innovative teaching methodologies aimed at increasing learner engagement. Among these innovations, gamification – defined as the use of game elements in non-game contexts – has attracted particular attention in the field of foreign language instruction. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, where learners often face challenges related to sustaining motivation over long periods of study, gamification has been viewed as a promising approach to maintaining interest and ensuring active participation. Intensive language learning programs, in particular, present both opportunities and challenges in this regard. On the one hand, they allow students to immerse themselves in the target language through extended exposure and practice. On the other hand, the demanding pace and workload of such programs can result in fatigue, decreased intrinsic motivation, and even emotional burnout if instructional methods are not sufficiently engaging. For this reason, it becomes essential to explore pedagogical strategies that not only support academic achievement but also foster motivation and resilience among learners.

The role of learner motivation in successful second language acquisition is well documented, and scholars have long emphasized its decisive influence on students' willingness to persist in the face of challenges. While traditional instructional approaches often rely heavily on extrinsic motivators such as grades and assessments, recent research has shown that intrinsic motivation – stemming from personal interest, enjoyment, and perceived relevance – is more closely associated with sustainable learning outcomes. Gamification holds particular promise in this regard because it directly addresses psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are central to intrinsic motivation. Yet, despite growing enthusiasm, the use of gamification in intensive English language programs remains underexplored, especially in relation to tasks that integrate multiple language skills. This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to the field by

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examining how gamified integrated tasks affect the motivation and engagement of academic lyceum students, who undergo 10 hours of English language instruction per week.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation is one of the most extensively studied factors in second language acquisition, and its role in shaping learning outcomes cannot be overstated. Gardner's socio-educational model (2010) has established that both integrative and instrumental types of motivation influence learner performance, while Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (2000) further highlights the importance of intrinsic motivation, which arises when learners feel autonomous, competent, and socially connected. Intensive English language programs place particularly high demands on learners, making it crucial to maintain intrinsic motivation over the long term. Without sufficient motivational support, students in such programs may experience declining engagement, reduced participation, and ultimately lower learning outcomes.

Gamification has been increasingly applied to language learning contexts as a means of addressing these challenges. Introduced by Deterding et al. (2011), the concept of gamification involves using elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, narratives, and quests to create a game-like atmosphere in non-game environments. In EFL settings, gamification has been found to increase engagement, encourage attendance, and promote active participation in classroom activities. Suh, Wagner, and Liu (2017), for example, found that gamification significantly improved student involvement in online learning environments. Similarly, Lam et al. (2020) argue that game-based approaches help reduce monotony and promote sustained interest, particularly when long-term projects and storylines are used. Nevertheless, not all findings are unambiguously positive. Hanus and Fox (2015) caution that excessive reliance on competitive elements, such as ranking systems or leaderboards, may undermine intrinsic motivation for some learners, particularly those who are less confident in their abilities. This suggests the need for a balanced approach that combines both competitive and cooperative dimensions of gamified learning.

Integrated skills instruction represents another important pedagogical development in EFL teaching. Unlike traditional approaches that often isolate skills such as reading or listening, integrated instruction combines two or more skills within a single activity, thereby fostering communicative competence and reflecting real-world language use. For example, learners may listen to an audio text and then engage in a discussion (listening + speaking), or read a passage and subsequently write a response (reading + writing). Such tasks are inherently more engaging because they require learners to apply knowledge in meaningful contexts. The integration of gamification into such tasks has the potential to further strengthen cognitive engagement, as students not only practice language skills but also participate in enjoyable, goal-oriented activities. Despite this potential, most existing research has focused on the application of gamification at beginner levels and in tasks that target individual skills. The question of whether gamification can effectively motivate advanced learners in intensive programs, particularly when applied to integrated tasks, remains relatively underexplored. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence on the feasibility and effectiveness of gamification in such contexts.

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METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measures to examine the effects of gamification on learner motivation in intensive English instruction. The participants consisted of 39 students enrolled at the academic lyceum of UrSU, aged 16–17, all of whom were at the B1 level according to the CEFR framework. The students were divided into two groups: the experimental group, consisting of 26 learners who received instruction using gamified integrated tasks, and the control group, consisting of 13 learners who received instruction in integrated skills without the use of gamification elements.

Data were collected through multiple instruments to ensure reliability and depth of analysis. A modified version of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery was administered to measure changes in learner motivation, with additional items designed specifically to capture attitudes toward gamified activities. Reflective diaries, maintained weekly by students, provided qualitative insights into their perceptions of engagement, interest, and the perceived value of lessons. In addition, classroom observations were carried out using standardized protocols to document student participation, frequency of contributions, and levels of collaboration during activities.

The intervention lasted for 18 weeks, during which four hours per week were allocated to gamified activities in the experimental group. These activities incorporated common gamification elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, story-based quests, and team missions. Integrated tasks were designed to combine listening and speaking (e.g., collaborative problem-solving based on audio inputs), reading and writing (e.g., unlocking chapters of a story through comprehension and creative writing), and mixed-skill formats such as debates, escape rooms, and project-based missions. Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Paired-samples t-tests and ANCOVA were applied to assess changes in motivation between pre- and post-test results, while reflective diaries and observation notes were thematically coded to identify recurrent patterns in learner perceptions and engagement.

RESULTS

The findings of this study indicate a clear positive impact of gamification on learner motivation and engagement. Quantitative analysis revealed that intrinsic motivation in the experimental group increased by 14% over the course of the intervention, compared to a 3% increase in the control group, a statistically significant difference ($p=0.01$). Classroom observations confirmed this trend, showing a 21% increase in the frequency of active responses, such as volunteering answers, participating in discussions, and contributing to group tasks, among students in the experimental group. By contrast, the control group displayed only minor improvements in participation.

Qualitative data from student diaries and classroom observations further enriched these findings. Three major motivational factors were consistently reported by learners. First, narrative engagement emerged as a powerful driver of motivation, with students expressing excitement about progressing through storylines and unlocking new chapters or quests. Second, teamwork was highlighted as a particularly valued aspect, as collaborative missions fostered a sense of belonging and mutual responsibility within groups. Third, the immediacy of feedback and recognition through points, badges, and visible rewards was frequently cited as a factor that sustained student interest and encouraged continued effort. While most students responded positively, a small number reported occasional anxiety about competitive elements such as leaderboards, reinforcing the need for a balanced approach.

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DISCUSSION

The results of this study lend strong support to the principles of self-determination theory, which emphasize the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation. By incorporating game elements into integrated tasks, the experimental program was able to create an environment that supported these psychological needs. Learners experienced autonomy by choosing strategies to complete tasks, competence through immediate feedback and recognition, and relatedness via teamwork and collaborative missions. These findings are consistent with the work of Suh et al. (2017), who demonstrated that gamification enhances user engagement, and they also resonate with Leeming's (2018) argument that cooperative learning fosters long-term motivation.

At the same time, this study highlights the risks associated with an overemphasis on competition, as noted in the work of Hanus and Fox (2015). While competition can energize certain students, it may discourage others, particularly those who perceive themselves as consistently falling behind. The mixed responses observed in this study underscore the need for careful balancing of competitive and cooperative mechanics in gamified instruction. Another implication relates to the design of intensive programs: because learners in such contexts face heavy workloads, gamification can serve as an effective tool for reducing monotony and preventing disengagement. However, it must be implemented thoughtfully, with consideration of learner profiles, psychological factors, and group dynamics.

CONCLUSION

The results demonstrate that gamification, when applied to integrated English language instruction in intensive programs, can significantly enhance student motivation, participation, and engagement. By combining narrative-driven activities, team-based missions, and immediate feedback mechanisms, gamified instruction offers a compelling alternative to traditional methods that may struggle to sustain learner interest over time. The findings suggest that gamification is not only feasible but also highly effective in maintaining intrinsic motivation in demanding learning contexts. Nonetheless, the study also reveals that gamification is not a one-size-fits-all solution. For optimal results, educators must strike a balance between competitive and cooperative elements, ensuring that no student feels excluded or demotivated by the mechanics of the system. Furthermore, game-based strategies should be tailored to the age, proficiency level, and psychological needs of the learners to maximize their effectiveness. Future research should expand on this study by examining the long-term impact of gamification across different proficiency levels and cultural settings, as well as exploring digital platforms that may further enhance the integration of game elements into language instruction.

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