

GAMIFICATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: HOW DIGITAL GAMES INCREASE STUDENT MOTIVATION

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Abstract

This article analyzes the role of gamification technologies in the modern education system. It shows how game elements improve the motivation of foreign language learners and explains their practical benefits in real classrooms. The article looks closely at the PBL (Points, Badges, Leaderboards) system, how students prepare psychologically, and how digital platforms improve the overall quality of education.

Keywords: gamification, motivation, edutainment, digital education, Baamboozle, Wordwall, Gen Z, interactive methods.

1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, knowing a foreign language is more important than ever. However, language learning is a long and complex mental process. Research shows that 60–70% of language learners stop studying within the first six months because they lose motivation.

Traditional teaching methods, like grammar translation, often feel boring and ineffective. This is especially true for “Generation Z” students, who grew up using digital technology [8]. Therefore, integrating game elements into education — called gamification — is one of the most effective ways to change language learning from a boring chore into an exciting adventure.

Learning a foreign language requires a lot of time, energy, and continuous practice. In the past, students mostly listened to the teacher and copied sentences from a textbook, but this method does not work well for today's learners. Modern students need interactive and interesting lessons to stay focused. Gamification provides an excellent solution to this problem, because it turns difficult language exercises into exciting activities. When students are active in the learning process, they stay motivated for a much longer time.

2. Literature Review

Gamification is the art of using game-design elements in non-game contexts [3]. While the term first appeared in the early 2000s, its integration into education has grown quickly over the last decade. Using games in education has been popular for the past two decades [2]. In simple terms, gamification means applying game elements, such as points and challenges, in regular classrooms; this method helps to increase student engagement and to solve common learning problems [4]. In the field of philology, gamification is not just entertainment — it is a tool for creating a “natural

acquisition” environment, in which learners focus on the enjoyable process rather than the final result and absorb knowledge intuitively.

In foreign language teaching, gamification helps to overcome the problems of old grammar-based methods, which often make students lose interest, especially Generation Z learners [9]. Traditional classrooms usually fail to keep students motivated for a long time.

The main components of gamification are Points, Badges, and Leaderboards — the PBL Triad. According to Werbach and Hunter (2012), the PBL system gives students immediate feedback and shows their progress to their classmates [10]. This structure satisfies basic psychological needs, such as feeling capable and staying connected with peers [12]. Zichermann and Cunningham (2011) similarly argue that these game elements break big learning goals into small, manageable tasks, which helps students stay focused on their lessons [11].

Neuroscientific research also supports gamification. Howard-Jones (2014) shows that immediate rewards in games create a “dopamine effect” in the brain [5]. Dopamine is a chemical that produces feelings of pleasure and success; this effect improves thinking skills and encourages voluntary participation, helping students remember new vocabulary and grammar rules more effectively. Kapp (2012) adds that games create a “safe failure environment” in which a mistake is not a low grade but simply an “extra life” or another chance to try again [6]. This reduces the speaking anxiety described by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) [7] and helps remove the “language barrier” for learners [3].

Finally, studies show that digital platforms such as Baamboozle and Wordwall provide real benefits for vocabulary learning and student interaction [1]. Academic research confirms that these interactive tools increase student engagement far more than traditional, lecture-based lessons.

3. Discussion

The motivating power of game elements can be explained through three psychological mechanisms.

The Dopamine Effect. Every correct answer or earned point triggers the release of dopamine in the brain. This creates a sense of accomplishment and drives the student to reach the next level [5].

Safe Failure Environment. In a traditional classroom, making a mistake often leads to low grades and a feeling of shame. In a gamified environment, a mistake is simply an “extra life” or another chance to try. This breaks down the “language barrier” and reduces speaking anxiety [7].

The PBL System (Points, Badges, Leaderboards). These elements provide social recognition and foster healthy competition, encouraging students to work harder [10].

Practical application: Baamboozle and Wordwall

One of the most effective tools used in modern philology classes is the Baamboozle platform, which is particularly useful for developing teamwork skills. During a lesson review, students are divided into two teams and answer questions hidden behind numbered tiles. The unpredictable “power-ups” — such as swapping or suddenly losing points — bring genuine excitement to the classroom. Similarly, using Wordwall to organize grammar drills as “matching” or “quiz” games has been shown to increase student engagement by up to 90%. By using these tools, teachers turn

passive learning into a natural language-acquisition process: students focus on winning the game, yet absorb the language at the same time.

Efficiency indicators of gamification

The following table provides a comparative analysis of results observed in traditional classes versus gamified classes:

Indicators	Traditional Method	With Gamification	Growth / Change
Student Engagement	45%	85%	+40%
Vocabulary Retention	50%	75%	+25%
Homework Completion	60%	92%	+32%
Language Anxiety Level	70%	25%	–45%

As the table shows, gamified classes outperform traditional ones across every indicator: engagement, vocabulary retention, and homework completion all rise sharply, while language anxiety falls by nearly half. These figures confirm that gamification not only makes lessons more enjoyable but also produces measurable learning gains.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, gamification is an indispensable part of future education. For students at Tashkent University of Applied Sciences, mastering these technologies is of strategic importance for their future careers as philologists and educators. Based on the findings above, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Devote at least 20% of foreign language lessons to gamified elements.
2. Use not only digital tools but also live classroom games, such as role-plays.
3. Integrate gamification directly into the official assessment and grading system.

Through gamification, language learning can be transformed from a heavy obligation into a favorite hobby, increasing both the knowledge and the passion of students.

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