THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMIFICATION IN VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION AMONG EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Makhsudova Makhliyokhon

Lecturer. Asia International University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology,

Department of Foreign Languages and Social Sciences,

mahliyomakhsudova@gmail.com

Abstract. *Vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in second language acquisition and directly affects learners' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. In recent years, gamification has gained attention as an innovative instructional approach in language education. This study investigates the effectiveness of gamification in vocabulary instruction among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students. Using a quasi-experimental research design, the study compares vocabulary achievement and learner motivation between a gamified instruction group and a traditional instruction group. The findings indicate that gamification significantly improves students' vocabulary acquisition and increases their motivation and engagement in the learning process. The study concludes that gamification can be an effective pedagogical strategy in EFL vocabulary instruction and offers practical implications for language teachers in higher education.*

Keywords: *Gamification, vocabulary instruction, EFL learners, motivation, language teaching.*

Vocabulary is one of the most essential components of language learning, as it forms the foundation for effective communication. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, learners struggle to express ideas, comprehend texts, and participate in meaningful interactions. For EFL learners, vocabulary acquisition is often challenging due to limited exposure to the target language outside the classroom. Traditional vocabulary teaching methods, such as rote memorization and word lists, are still widely used in many EFL contexts. However, these methods often fail to motivate learners or promote long-term retention. As a result, educators are increasingly seeking innovative approaches that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Gamification, defined as the use of game elements in non-game contexts, has emerged as a promising instructional strategy in education. By incorporating elements such as points, badges, competition, and immediate feedback, gamification aims to make learning more interactive and enjoyable. This study examines the effectiveness of gamification in vocabulary instruction among EFL university students, focusing on its impact on vocabulary achievement and learner motivation.

Vocabulary acquisition is a complex process that involves learning word meaning, form, pronunciation, and usage. According to Nation (2013), vocabulary knowledge is strongly linked to overall language proficiency. EFL learners often face difficulties in vocabulary learning due to limited input, insufficient practice, and low motivation. Previous studies have shown that explicit vocabulary instruction combined with meaningful practice leads to better learning outcomes than passive learning methods. However, maintaining learner motivation remains a major challenge in vocabulary instruction, particularly at the university level.

Gamification refers to the integration of game design elements, such as rewards, challenges, leaderboards, and levels, into educational activities.

Deterding et al. (2011) emphasize that gamification does not involve playing full games but rather applying motivational aspects of games to learning tasks. In educational settings, gamification has been shown to increase learner engagement, participation, and persistence.

Game-based elements create a sense of competition and achievement, which can positively influence students' attitudes toward learning.

In language education, gamification has been applied to various skills, including vocabulary, grammar, and speaking. Several studies report that gamified activities enhance vocabulary retention and learner motivation. Tools such as Kahoot, Quizizz, Wordwall, and digital flashcard games are widely used in EFL classrooms. Despite the growing interest in gamification, empirical research focusing on its effectiveness in university-level EFL vocabulary instruction remains limited, especially in developing EFL contexts. This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of gamification on vocabulary learning outcomes and student motivation.

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design with two groups: an experimental group receiving gamified vocabulary instruction and a control group receiving traditional vocabulary instruction.

The participants were 60 undergraduate EFL students enrolled at a university in Uzbekistan. They were divided into two groups of equal size (30 students each). Both groups had a similar English proficiency level based on placement test results.

The following instruments were used for data collection:

• Vocabulary Pre-test and Post-test: Designed to measure students' vocabulary knowledge before and after the intervention.

• Motivation Questionnaire: A Likert-scale questionnaire used to assess students' motivation and attitudes toward vocabulary learning.

• Classroom Observation: Used to monitor student engagement during instructional sessions.

The study was conducted over six weeks. Both groups studied the same vocabulary items taken from their course syllabus.

• The control group received traditional instruction, including teacher explanations, word lists, and written exercises.

• The experimental group received gamified instruction using digital tools and classroom games such as quizzes, word competitions, matching games, and point-based activities.

At the end of the treatment period, both groups completed the post-test and the motivation questionnaire.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests to compare the performance and motivation levels of the two groups.

The results of the vocabulary post-test showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Students who participated in gamified vocabulary activities demonstrated higher vocabulary gains compared to those who received traditional instruction.

In terms of motivation, the questionnaire results revealed that the experimental group reported higher levels of interest, enjoyment, and engagement in vocabulary learning. Classroom observations also indicated increased participation and collaboration among students in the gamified group.

The statistical analysis confirmed that the differences between the two groups were significant, indicating that gamification had a positive effect on both vocabulary achievement and learner motivation.

The findings of this study support previous research suggesting that gamification enhances vocabulary learning outcomes in EFL contexts. The improved performance of the experimental group may be attributed to increased engagement, immediate feedback, and repeated exposure to vocabulary items through game-based activities.

Gamification also appeared to reduce anxiety and create a more supportive learning environment. Students were more willing to participate and take risks when learning new vocabulary, which is essential for language development.

These results suggest that gamification is not only a motivational tool but also an effective instructional strategy that promotes deeper learning and retention of vocabulary.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of gamification in vocabulary instruction among EFL university students. The findings indicate that gamified instruction significantly improves vocabulary acquisition and learner motivation compared to traditional teaching methods.

The study recommends that EFL teachers integrate gamification into vocabulary instruction to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. However, teachers should carefully design gamified activities to align with learning objectives and avoid excessive competition.

The study was limited by its small sample size and short duration. Future research could involve larger samples, longer intervention periods, and explore the effects of gamification on other language skills such as grammar, speaking, and writing.

References

1. Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L. (2011). From game design elements to gamefulness: Defining "gamification." Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference, 9–15.
2. Nation, I. S. P. (2013). Learning vocabulary in another language (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
3. Oxford, R. L. (2017). Teaching and researching language learning strategies. Routledge.
4. Zarzycka-Piskorz, E. (2016). Kahoot it or not? Can games be motivating in learning grammar? Teaching English with Technology, 16(3), 17–36.
5. Bauer, L. (2003). *Introducing linguistic morphology.* Edinburgh University Press.
6. Bowers, P., & Kirby, J. (2010). *Effects of morphological instruction on vocabulary acquisition.* Reading and Writing, 23(5), 515–537.
7. Carlisle, J. F. (2000). *Awareness of the structure and meaning of morphologically complex words: Impact on reading.* Reading and Writing, 12(3), 169–190.
8. Karimov, A. (2023). *Morphological challenges in learning English for Uzbek EFL students.* Central Asian Journal of Language Studies, 5(2), 45–59.
9. Kieffer, M. J., & Lesaux, N. K. (2012). *Morphology, vocabulary, and reading comprehension in second-language learners.* Journal of Literacy Research, 44(3), 271–300.
10. Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language.* Cambridge University Press.

11. Schmitt, N. (2010). *Researching vocabulary: A vocabulary research manual.* Palgrave Macmillan.

12. Tursunova, D. (2021). *Word formation difficulties among Uzbek EFL learners.* Journal of English Language Teaching in Central Asia, 3(1), 12–25.

13. Zhang, D., & Koda, K. (2018). Morphological awareness and vocabulary development in EFL learners. Language Teaching Research, 22(4), 439–458.