USING ONLINE GAMES TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN FUTURE LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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Abstract. As education rapidly moves into the digital space, online games are becoming not only a source of entertainment but also an effective tool for developing the communication skills of future language teachers. This article considers how gamification and game-based learning can be used in teacher training and what differences exist between these two approaches. The work is based on the analysis of scientific literature and the modeling of a lesson with game elements. Special attention is given to online multiplayer games, as many studies show that they improve students' motivation, encourage both oral and written communication, and create conditions for intercultural interaction. A comparative table is included to show the main distinctions between gamification and game-based learning. In addition, several examples of training activities with quests, role-playing, and achievement systems are described. These examples demonstrate that the use of game mechanics helps students engage more actively in the learning process. The conclusion emphasizes the advantages of integrating online games into language teacher education and points out the need for further research, especially regarding long-term effects and the selection of the most effective game mechanics.

Key words: gamification, online games, communication skills, teaching foreign languages, teacher training.

Introduction

A modern foreign language teacher is required to have a high level of communicative competence, since the achievement of educational goals largely depends on active language interaction in the classroom. With the ongoing digitalization of education, access to a wide range of online tools and gaming technologies has expanded. These tools are increasingly applied not only to raise motivation but also to provide authentic situations for practicing communication, which is especially important in teacher training.

Research in recent years confirms that the use of digital game elements in education is positively associated with motivation, vocabulary development, and fluency in oral communication [1, 378–400]. At the same time, game-based environments are found to develop important soft skills such as cooperation, adaptability, and critical thinking, which are essential for future educators. In pedagogical science, however, the concepts of *gamification* and *game-based learning* are often mixed. Burseva and Zaretsky emphasize that gamification should be seen as «a whole system aimed at achieving a specific goal» [2, 34]. In contrast, other scholars point out that gamification usually means the introduction of certain mechanics — points, levels, or competitions — into a non-game context, while the main structure of the lesson remains unchanged.

Additional studies describe how badges, levels, and leaderboards can stimulate collaboration and make the classroom atmosphere more dynamic [3, 29]. At the same time, competitive features may discourage less confident learners. To avoid this risk, researchers recommend using narrative structures, adaptive feedback, and personalized learning paths [4, 11]. Special attention is also paid to role-playing formats: for example, the inclusion of story quests and online role-playing games significantly improves students' self-expression, vocabulary use, and willingness to communicate [5, 1–12].

The effectiveness of online multiplayer games has been repeatedly confirmed. Systematic reviews

demonstrate that adolescents and young adults develop oral and written communication skills more actively in multiplayer environments, where interaction takes place in real time [6, 101–110]. Similar results are reported by Ghaffour and Sarnou, who argue that such games help learners of English as a foreign language to strengthen their communicative competence and intercultural awareness [7, 292–298].

Table 1 summarizes the main differences between gamification and game-based learning in terms of integration level, duration, structure, objectives, and motivational impact. As the table shows, gamification primarily works to activate motivation and provide quick feedback, while game-based learning creates a complete game-like educational environment with long-term goals.

Table 1. Key differences between gamification and game-based learning

Criterion	Gamification	Game-Based Learning
Level of Integration	Fragmentary (individual game elements)	Full game system (complete immersion)
Duration of Process	Short-term game episodes (modules, tasks)	Long-term or continuous (the entire course as a game)
Structure	Existing curriculum enhanced with game mechanics	Built around a narrative game model (quest, storyline)
Objectives	Boosting motivation, increasing participation and engagement	Systematic achievement of educational goals through gameplay
Common Tools	Points, badges, rankings, levels, leaderboards, mini-games	Role-playing online games, quests, simulations, narrative scenarios
Participant Audience	All students, optionally during lessons	Formal «players» (students) engaged in an educational environment
Motivation Sustainability	Often external (rewards, grades)	Mainly intrinsic, based on immersion and narrative

As the classification shows, gamification is mainly aimed at stimulating motivation and providing quick feedback, while game-based learning creates a holistic educational space with long-term goals and deeper immersion

The problem that arises is the lack of clear practical guidelines for integrating these approaches into teacher education. While many studies highlight the general benefits of gamification, less is known about its specific role in developing communicative competence in pre-service teachers.

The purpose of this study is to analyze modern approaches to gamification and game-based learning, to identify their similarities and differences, and to model lesson examples that demonstrate how online games can support the development of communication skills in future foreign language teachers.

Materials and methods of research

This study combined theoretical analysis with the modeling of a digital learning scenario. The research relied on several methods:

1. Literature analysis and synthesis. Publications in Russian and international sources were examined to clarify how gamification and game-based learning are defined and applied in language education.

2. Comparative analysis. The concepts of gamification and game-based learning were compared, and their main differences were summarized in a classification table.

3. Pedagogical modeling. A sample lesson with game elements was designed to demonstrate possible applications in teacher education.

For the modeling part, a game-based activity was prepared using the **Eaglercraft platform** (a browser version of Minecraft). Pre-service teachers were divided into small groups and asked to complete

different communicative tasks in English within a shared virtual world. For instance, students built symbolic objects and presented them orally, solved language-based puzzles, and took part in role-play scenarios such as «asking for directions» or «tourist and guide» These activities were chosen to simulate authentic communication and encourage spontaneous use of English.

To check the potential impact, a comparative scenario was drafted. One group was imagined to follow a gamified lesson (quests, point systems, interactive quizzes), while another group learned in a traditional format. The expected outcomes were assessed using criteria often applied in pedagogy: student motivation, level of communicative engagement, and vocabulary activation.

The approach was not a full-scale experiment but rather a pilot design intended to illustrate how game mechanics can be embedded into teacher training. Similar attempts in science education have shown that when game difficulty and feedback are adjusted to learner needs, students report higher motivation, lower anxiety, and better concentration [8, 14]. This evidence suggests that adaptive gamification could also be useful in language teacher education.

Results and its discussion

The review of recent literature and the outcomes of the modeled pilot scenario indicate that online games and gamification have a clear positive effect on the communicative competence of pre-service language teachers. According to empirical findings, the introduction of game elements in language learning increases learner motivation and promotes stronger interest in the target language [9, 197–207]. Participation in structured game scenarios also supports vocabulary growth and grammar use in communicative contexts, contributing to both fluency and accuracy.

In the Eaglercraft-based lesson, students (future teachers) worked in small groups on collaborative communicative tasks. These included building symbolic objects and presenting them orally, solving English-language puzzles, and role-playing everyday situations. The modeled activities created conditions for spontaneous English use and peer-to-peer dialogue. Learners showed more active vocabulary recall, greater involvement in discussions, and lower levels of speaking anxiety.

The results are consistent with other research. For example, one study reports that up to 80% of learners in gamified classes gained confidence in oral communication, compared to only 35% in traditional lessons [2, 137]. Similar findings describe the impact of role-playing and quest-based tasks, which require collaboration, negotiation of meaning, and continuous verbal interaction. These outcomes confirm that immersive digital environments provide realistic communication challenges and can significantly enhance the communicative training of future teachers.

The results of this study show that game-based methods can create meaningful opportunities for communicative practice in teacher education. Immersive scenarios, especially those supported by role-playing and storytelling, simulate real-life interaction and help learners practice spontaneous speech, negotiation, and collaborative problem solving. This observation is consistent with evidence from teacher training programs using MinecraftEdu and World of Warcraft, where participants not only improved their English proficiency but also gained skills in designing interactive and student-centered lessons [10, 2–8].

Another important finding concerns the motivational potential of gamification. Systematic reviews highlight that learners are more engaged when point systems, leaderboards, or badges are integrated meaningfully into lesson structures [11, 3–25]. At the same time, teacher competence plays a critical role. Educators with stronger methodological and digital skills are better prepared to adapt gaming strategies to different student needs and to sustain motivation throughout the learning process [12, 691–710].

However, the effectiveness of gamification depends on its design. If game elements are added superficially, they may distract from learning objectives or even reduce intrinsic motivation [13, 3025–3030]. This underlines the importance of aligning game mechanics with pedagogical goals rather than using them as mere entertainment.

Practical recommendations suggest the use of flexible and easy-to-apply digital tools that allow instructors to design simple but effective activities - such as crosswords, memory games, or bingo - without requiring technical expertise. These tools increase learner satisfaction and allow teachers to adapt tasks to the level and goals of their students [14, 249–265]. In addition, serious games designed with clear objectives provide authentic contexts for language use, promote pragmatic competence, and strengthen intercultural awareness [15, 249–265].

Overall, the discussion highlights both the advantages and the limitations of integrating games into teacher training. The evidence suggests that online games and gamification can be powerful instruments for building communicative competence, provided that teachers are trained to use them purposefully and in harmony with educational objectives.

Conclusion

The study confirms that the integration of online games and gamification into teacher education can enhance the communicative competence of pre-service language teachers. Analysis of the literature shows that both gamification and game-based learning improve motivation, vocabulary retention, and confidence in oral interaction. The modeled lesson using the Eaglercraft platform illustrated how collaborative tasks and role-based scenarios create conditions for spontaneous English use, peer dialogue, and reduced speaking anxiety. These results suggest that digital game environments can be effective tools for preparing future teachers for authentic communication challenges.

At the same time, the effectiveness of game-based methods depends on careful design and on the teacher's digital and methodological competence. In practice, game elements must be aligned with communicative objectives rather than added as entertainment. For this reason, teacher education programs should incorporate training in digital pedagogy and game design, enabling future teachers to adapt game mechanics to learner needs and evaluate communicative outcomes effectively.

Future research should focus on identifying the most suitable game mechanics for different aspects of language competence, developing adaptive scenarios, and assessing the long-term impact of gamified instruction. Such efforts will help establish best practices for integrating games into multilingual and multicultural classrooms. By refining methods and supporting teacher preparation, gamification and online games can become a structured and valuable component of modern language teacher training.

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БОЛАШАҚ ТІЛ МҰҒАЛІМДЕРІНІҢ КОММУНИКАТИВТІК ДАҒДЫЛАРЫН ЖЕТІЛДІРУ ҮШІН ОНЛАЙН ОЙЫНДАРДЫ ПАЙДАЛАНУ

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Аңдатпа. Білім беруді цифрландыру жағдайында онлайн ойындар тек көңіл көтеру құралы ғана емес, сонымен қатар болашақ шет тілі мұғалімдерінің коммуникативтік дағдыларын дамытуға ықпал ететін тиімді әдіс болып табылады. Мақалада геймификация мен ойынға негізделген оқытудың мұғалімдерді даярлауда қолданылуы және олардың айырмашылықтары қарастырылады. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізі ретінде ғылыми еңбектерді талдау және ойын элементтері бар сабақ үлгісін модельдеу алынған. Әсіресе көпқолданушылық онлайн ойындарға назар аударылады, себебі зерттеулер олардың студенттердің уәждемесін арттыратынын, ауызша және жазбаша тілдік қарым-қатынасты дамытатынын, мәдениетаралық өзара әрекеттестікке жағдай жасайтынын көрсетеді. Мақалада геймификация мен ойын арқылы оқытудың негізгі айырмашылықтарын сипаттайтын салыстырмалы кесте ұсынылған, сондай-ақ квест, рөлдік ойын және жетістік жүйесі қолданылған тапсырмалар мысалдары берілген. Бұл мысалдар ойын механикалары студенттердің оқу процесіне белсенді қатысуына ықпал ететінін көрсетеді. Қорытындыда онлайн ойындарды мұғалімдерді даярлауға енгізудің артықшылықтары және олардың ұзақ мерзімді әсерін зерттеу қажеттілігі атап өтіледі.
Түйін сөздер: геймификация, онлайн ойындар, коммуникативтік дағдылар, шет тілдерін оқыту, мұғалімдерді даярлау.

ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ОНЛАЙН-ИГР ДЛЯ УЛУЧШЕНИЯ КОММУНИКАТИВНЫХ НАВЫКОВ БУДУЩИХ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ

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Аннотация. В условиях цифровизации образования использование онлайн-игр и игровых механизмов становится все более актуальным для развития коммуникативных навыков будущих учителей иностранного языка. В статье анализируются современные подходы к геймификации и игрофикации в обучении, рассматриваются их сходства и различия на основе определения ключевых составляющих каждого явления. Проведен обзор исследований, посвященных влиянию онлайн-игр на формирование коммуникативных навыков в процессе изучения языка. Систематические обзоры и эмпирические исследования подтверждают, что многопользовательские онлайн-игры особенно эффективны для развития устной и письменной коммуникации, мотивации к изучению языка и межкультурного взаимодействия. Представлена таблица, иллюстрирующая основные различия между геймификацией и усовершенствованием игрового процесса (глубина интеграции, продолжительность игрового процесса, масштаб игрового пространства и назначение приложения). В качестве результатов работы описаны примеры тренинговых занятий с элементами геймификации (квесты, ролевые онлайн-игры, системы начисления баллов/достижений), подтверждающие положительное влияние игрового подхода на коммуникативную вовлеченность учащихся. Сделаны выводы о преимуществах интеграции игровых технологий в подготовку преподавателей иностранных языков и даны рекомендации для дальнейших исследований.

Ключевые слова: геймификация, онлайн-игры, коммуникативные навыки, преподавание иностранных языков, подготовка учителей.