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Research article

Game Technologies and Gamification Techniques in Teaching English: An Analysis of Pedagogical Experience

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Abstract. Game technologies (including computer-based ones) applied for teaching English have long occupied an important and permanent place in the structure of the lesson. They are very helpful in developing intercultural communicative competences as well as increasing motivation and self-organization. The purpose of this study is to objectively show how game methods of work and gamification techniques are actually implemented by modern teachers in English classes in both full-time and distance education. The theoretical significance of the study lies in the analysis of empirical psychological and pedagogical research on the problems of teaching English by both domestic and foreign scientists, on the basis of which the authors have compiled a questionnaire to summarize the experience of English teachers, classify electronic games and gamification techniques in the classroom. The study sample consisted of 48 English teachers with teaching experience from 1 to 13 years, the age range of their students being from 3 to 60 years old. The teachers used the questionnaire to analyze their experience in using gamification techniques and game technologies both in face-to-face and online lessons. All the teachers used game methods of work and gamification techniques in their classes regardless of the students' age. The games that the teachers included in their lessons could be conveniently classified into didactic games (used by two-thirds of the teachers), multiplayer cooperation games (included by every fifth teacher) and hidden object games with a non-linear plot (used in class by a quarter of the teachers in the sample). Most of the teachers who used the gamification techniques noted a steady increase in students' motivation in the classroom. The practical significance of the research results lies in the possibility of building an individual trajectory of self-education and professional development of English language teachers both in basic and in supplementary education. The generalized practical experience of the teachers who participated in the study can be used as the basis for methodological and pedagogical recommendations for improving informational and communicational competences and pedagogical skills of English language teachers.

Key words: English language teaching, English language teachers, professional development, game technologies, computer technologies, gamification, information technologies, communication technologies

Introduction

The introduction of the latest teaching computer technologies and the principle of individualization into the education system against the background of intensive development and involvement of distance learning forms sets the task for modern English teachers to quickly improve their professional self-education and master new teaching technologies. The spread of digital and hybrid reality in education leads to changes in educational tasks. For the quality of education to remain at a high level and the knowledge received by students to be systemic and capable of forming their competitive professional competences and intercultural communicative competencies, it is necessary to properly build methodological support for future teachers of in-demand international languages.

In this research we shall examine game technologies (including computer-based ones) as the most effective and quickly implemented in the process of teaching English.

The analysis of international psychological, educational and interdisciplinary studies allows us to speak about active dynamics of the introduction of computer games into the educational process. For example, the PlayWorld conceptual games used in teaching Chinese children allow students to gain some degree of freedom in the classroom and agree on the rules of scientific activities in a game environment, which promotes children's initiative and thus increases their motivation in educational activities (Ma et al., 2022). Some Norwegian educators build the curriculum around the concept of transformative games (De Sousa et al., 2018), when students play video games together and teachers lead classroom and small group discussions to relate the game story to the curriculum. In our opinion, such a total integration of computer games into the educational process can interfere with comprehensive and systematic learning of information, whereas the formation of critical thinking in this approach remains a question. At the same time, Texas researchers have found a rather significant positive effect of computer video games on students learning English compared to those who do not play such games (Thompson, Gillern, 2020). We consider it quite acceptable to modify some topics or improve language skills with the help of computer games but, while drawing up the curriculum, rely on federal educational and professional standards.

A number of domestic authors, studying the problem of introducing game technologies into the process of teaching English and using the Internet in the classroom, regard them as non-traditional ones (Kechkina, 2021; Urazova, 2020). However, the practice of teaching in the modern educational organization of different levels of education has long been not limited to the grammar-translation and natural method. However, the teaching practice in modern educational organizations of different levels has not been limited only to the grammar-translation and natural methods for a long while. For example, when organizing an English class in kindergarten, the teacher can use only gaming techniques and methods of work; this is due to individual age capabilities and needs of students: preschoolers learn information through playing (Lopukhova, 2021; Tkach, Mineeva, 2016). Croatian scientists have found that children aged 5–7 enjoy second language learning techniques such as listening to an interlocutor and repeating in a pattern. They learn a second language better through rhyming in poems and songs, films and cartoons, establishing contact with a native speaker (Sanja et al., 2021). In junior, middle and senior school, children show better results in learning English if

the teacher actively uses audiovisual and gaming teaching methods in class (Berezhnaya, 2021; Kudrina, Chudinov, 2017; Wiwik, Yi, 2019). At the same time, almost all modern schools are adequately equipped to apply such methods. In secondary specialized and higher education, teachers around the world have long and successfully used computer technologies in teaching English (Maksudov, 2019; Smirnova, 2022; Chen, Hsu, 2020), and the system of supplementary education had been transferred to a distance format long before the pandemic caused by COVID-19. Thus, it is not entirely correct to talk about the introduction of gaming technologies as an innovation; in our opinion, it is more important to pay attention to the methodological component of this process, to identify useful and effective technologies and techniques in the experience of modern teachers in order to formulate, on their basis, systematic and competent methodological recommendations for training and professional development of future teachers.

Using game technologies in English lessons, it is possible: to form the intercultural competence of students (Kudrina, Chudinov, 2017); to increase their motivation to learn (Terekhina, 2016; Lin et al., 2020); to develop vocabulary skills of students, including those with special needs (Stepanova, 2015); to increase the level of student self-organization and personal responsibility for learning outcomes (Kulakovich, Bespalova, 2020; Chen, 2018); to use game control methods, which significantly increase the responsibility of students for doing homework and the quality of tasks performed in the classroom (Maslieva, 2021; Hwang et al., 2017); etc.

The use of gamification techniques in the classroom should be discussed separately. In a broad sense, this phenomenon reflects a new approach to “using gaming technologies to solve non-game tasks” (Ovezova, Wagner, 2020; Yunanto et al., 2019) or, in other words, transferring real tasks and ways of coping with them into the gaming environment. In the game, not only assessment is possible (as the main function transferred from the game to life, e.g., collecting points, stickers, etc.) but also the sublimation of real actions in the game context. This allows students to unlock their full creative and cognitive potential in a safe educational environment. The safety of the educational environment is achieved by transferring assessment, roles and some part of responsibility from the students to their game characters. The transition from assessing students on the traditional five-point scale to a system of their accumulating diverse and less categorical assessment criteria (e.g., collecting bonuses and rewards in their personal “piggy bank”) increases the students’ motivation. Rejecting the “two” as a bad grade (which may be perceived by students as underestimation of their personal abilities and qualities) in favor of accumulating points and bonuses changes the vector from avoiding failure (getting a “two”) to striving to achieve a result, at least a minimal one. This encourages students to take responsibility for completing the task and thus increases their motivation and cognitive interest.

In international literature, gamification is also defined as a general term for active learning, a new educational trend aimed at student involvement and preference for application rather than acquisition of knowledge (Sandrone, Carlson, 2021). This trend in the understanding and implementation of gamification techniques, in our opinion, can lead to a decrease in the quality of teaching English. The ultimate goal of teaching a foreign language is always specific- to master competent oral and written speech in a foreign language that is not a native one (or a second native language for bilinguals). The ultimate goal of teaching a foreign language is always specific:

to become proficient in literate oral and written speech of the language that is not native (or is the second native for bilinguals). The use of gamification techniques in learning English only for the sake of the process but not for the result will undoubtedly raise the motivation of students and the authority of the teacher in the classroom, but can result in unsystematic and incomplete knowledge. Milestones in the application of gaming computer technologies, media technologies and gamification techniques are very important for drawing up both general and individual curricula. Thus, *the purpose* of our study is to show how game methods of work and gamification techniques (including computer-based ones) are actually implemented by modern teachers in English classes in both full-time and distance education.

Materials and methods

The methodological basis of our study included: (1) a survey of English language teachers and linguistic students who had practice in teaching English; and (2) an analysis of empirical psychological and pedagogical research on the problems of teaching English, introducing innovative educational methods in English lessons, and using gaming, information and communication technologies.

The sample of our study consisted of 48 English language teachers, including 10 students of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia who were starting their teaching practice or had 1–2 years of teaching experience. The rest of the teachers had teaching experience from 3 to 13 years. All the respondents were female. Among them, 30 people worked only with children (of which 12 worked only with teenagers), and, accordingly, 18 people worked with children and adults. None of the respondents worked only with preschoolers. The age range of their students was wide enough (3–60 years) to reflect the variety of teaching methods and techniques for students of different age groups.

The questionnaire was compiled on the basis of an approximate classification of games that teachers use in the classroom: didactic games, multiplayer cooperation games, hidden object games with a non-linear plot. In addition, the questionnaire included a question about the use of non-game computer technologies. The questions to identify the specifics of the use of gamification techniques in the classroom included the teachers' subjective assessment by teachers of the results of such activities. The questionnaire is presented in the appendix.

The questionnaire consists of 10 questions, three of which are closed, two are semi-closed with a choice option and the ability to complete the answer, the remaining questions are open. Questioning of teachers was conducted online using a Google form.

Results and discussion

The results of the survey of the English language teachers are presented in Table.

All the teachers in the sample used gaming technologies and gamification techniques in class: 100% of the respondents.

Among them, 25% of teachers were found to have their own teaching methods. The remaining 75% used ready-made methods and included additional games and gamification techniques in their lessons. It can be noted that the introduction of computer games and gamification techniques did not depend on the level of pedagogical training or work experience; however, a qualitative analysis shows that the teachers with a longer experience used a more diverse arsenal of games (com-

puter and board ones) and more actively implemented gamification methods. For example, the teachers who had developed their own teaching methods included elements of gamification, linguistic games with words and cards, board games with grammar and vocabulary training in their English classes. These teachers reflected their methodological experience in publications.

The results of the survey of the English language teachers

Questionnaire categories	Responses, %
1. The availability of one's own teaching methodology	25
2. The use of gaming technologies, including:	100
– board didactic games	75
– electronic didactic games	62.5
– multiplayer cooperation electronic games	12.5
– hidden object games with a non-linear plot	25
3. Maintaining an electronic dictionary	87.5
4. The impact of gamification implementation:	
– helps overcome the language barrier	37.5
– helps improve self-control over homework	50
– helps increase vocabulary	50
– reduces concentration due to the competitive effect	12.5
– increases motivation to gain new knowledge	87.5
– positively affects the socialization of children in group classes	25
– negatively affects the socialization of children in group classes	12.5
5. The number of teachers who want to learn additional skills and methods of work	87.5

Thus, the board didactic games (for offline learning) were used by 75% of the teachers; the electronic didactic games as an analogue of the board games were included in the lesson by 62.5% of the teachers; the multiplayer cooperation games were used by teachers who worked with adults and schoolchildren, i.e., 12.5%; and the hidden object games with a non-linear plot were offered to students by 25% of the teachers. The last two types of games were introduced by teachers who had a fairly long experience in teaching English (from 10 years or more), and some of them had their own teaching methods. It can be noted that the introduction of computer games and gamification techniques did not depend on the level of pedagogical training and work experience, however, a qualitative analysis showed that teachers with a longer experience used a more diverse arsenal of games (computer and board ones) and more actively implemented gamification. For example, teachers who had developed their own teaching methods included elements of gamification, linguistic games with words and cards, and board games with grammar and vocabulary training in their English lessons. These teachers reflected their methodological experience in publications.

In addition to game technologies, almost all the teachers used other computer technologies in their practice, for example, maintaining an electronic dictionary (87.5%).

According to the results of the survey in our sample, the introduction of gamification techniques and methods:

- increases motivation to gain new knowledge (87.5%);
- helps improve self-control over homework (50%);
- helps increase vocabulary (50%);
- helps overcome the language barrier (37.5%);
- positively affects the socialization of children in group classes (25%).

However, according to some respondents (12.5%), gamification in the classroom also has an effect that is contrary to educational goals: firstly, it negatively

affects the socialization of children in group classes (e.g., less successful students may begin to envy more successful ones); secondly, it reduces concentration due to the competitive effect (students strive to get good grades at any cost, for the sake of the grade itself but not for the sake of gaining new knowledge) (12.5%).

Of interest are the wishes of the English language teachers (87.5%) regarding the formation of new skills and competences in the process of professional development and self-education. Thus, the majority of the respondents noted that they preferred to work on improving their own pronunciation, communication skills, understanding of the peculiarities of working with small groups of students and the ability to control the attention of students in them. A small number of the respondents (12.5%) wished to improve the skills of mastering applications and games with online gamification elements. Interestingly, these were teachers who had their own teaching methods and working experience of more than 10 years. Based on these data, it can be concluded that an increase in the experience of teaching English can develop in the teachers themselves the desire for professional self-improvement in the field of gamification of education. It can also be assumed that the teachers with up to 10 years of teaching experience quite effectively master the gamification methods and technique. For example, the teachers in our sample, who are still receiving a linguistic education but are already teaching English, themselves spend a long time in the educational digital environment. Therefore, these respondents can more actively and fully implement elements of online games in their teaching practice. Thus, we are witnessing a new generation of educators who feel as comfortable as possible in the digital educational environment.

Teachers working on the methods of teaching English with preschoolers use game teaching methods: this is directly related to the leading activity of students, i.e., the game. Moreover, modern programs for teaching English to preschool children already include computer teaching methods and techniques. For example, the most famous English language teaching program for preschool children in Russia, “I LOVE ENGLISH” (Meshcheryakova, 2011), is used by more than 3000 teachers; they actively incorporate work on the online platforms like PIKIMONI, MirGorovit, etc., into their lessons. Teachers working on other, less known programs for teaching English to preschoolers also include elements of information and communication technologies in their classes, for example, audio recordings with songs to develop listening skills (Komarova, 2016).

Let us now combine the description of the methodological aspects of the work of teachers of primary, secondary and higher schools, since game technologies and gamification techniques are actively used in these groups of students both in full-time and online learning.

Using game technologies teachers most often include didactic board games or their equivalents in electronic form in the structure of a lesson in online learning. Thus, using game technologies, teachers most often include board didactic games or their electronic equivalents in online classes. These are such games as Memory, Truth or Lie, Story tales, Associations, etc.

The inclusion of multiplayer cooperation games and hidden object games with a non-linear plot in the English language teaching system encourages teachers to prepare more comprehensively for their classes and, accordingly, develop more competences. Thus, for example, the preparation of non-standard homework or

the use in the conversation club of such popular games among students as *Minecraft*, *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments*, etc., included in the structure of the lesson, require that the teacher should have a sufficient number of gaming and editing applications, if only a fragment of the game is used.

Unlike a large number of various games that teachers include in their classes, gamification techniques are approximately the same: introducing a game character, limiting the time to complete a task, assigning stickers, stars or points for completed tasks, and maintaining a development scale. Many teachers use the intensive English learning portal, *LinguaLeo*, where certain topics or program stages are developed with account of the individual pace and rhythm of students' activities, while their motivation to learn is significantly increased.

The generalized practical experience of foreign language teachers can be used as the basis for methodological and pedagogical recommendations for improving informational and communicational competences and pedagogical skills of English language teachers as well as for developing intercultural communicative competences among students.

Conclusion

A comprehensive analysis of the obtained empirical data allowed us to draw several conclusions, which are outlined below.

Firstly, all the English teachers, one way or another, use game methods of work and gamification techniques in the classroom. The English teachers who have their own teaching methodology build it on the basis of gaming and information and communication methods, including gamification techniques. The teachers, who do not have their own methodology, relying on ready-made teaching methods, include gaming (including information and communication and media) methods and gamification techniques into their work with students aged 3–60 years. This indicates a sufficiently formed information and communication competence of these teachers.

Secondly, the diversity and variability of games and game technologies is limited only by the teacher's level of competence in the field of communication and information technologies and his or her imagination. Games which teachers include in their lessons can be approximately divided into didactic, multiplayer cooperation games and hidden object games with a nonlinear plot.

Thirdly, the gamification techniques used by teachers are rather monotonous, but they help to solve one of the most important tasks in learning, namely increasing students' motivation to learn. These techniques include maintaining a development scale using non-standard assessment tools (bonuses, points, etc.), introducing a game character, limiting time for completing a task, and working with *LinguaLeo*. At the same time, most of the teachers using gamification techniques note a steady increase in students' motivation in class.

Fourthly, every fifth teacher has a negative attitude to some gamification techniques. The teachers note a negative impact on the socialization of children in group classes and a decrease in concentration on the task due to the competitive effect.

In addition to the main conclusions, the study raises a number of questions, the answers to which determine the prospects for further theoretical and empirical research:

1. Is it necessary to classify some information technologies for teaching English as a non-traditional method, such as maintaining an electronic dictionary,

using audiovisual technologies in classes with preschoolers, if many teachers have been using this for a relatively long time?

2. Can the existing negative factors of game technologies and gamification techniques damage the quality of learning English or can they be leveled by the pedagogical skills of a particular teacher?

In the future, we also plan to improve the questionnaire for English language teachers and include questions related to specifying the gamification methods and techniques for certain age groups.

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Questionnaire “The use of games and gamification techniques in the classroom” for English language teachers

No	Question	
1	Specify the age of your students (age range)	
2	Indicate your teaching experience in teaching English	
3	Do you have your own teaching method? Yes No	
4	If you are the author of your own teaching methodology, briefly describe its features and advantages over other methods.	
5	Do you use gaming technologies in the classroom? Yes No	
6	What games and activities do you prefer to include in your lessons?	Board didactic games (for offline learning)
		Electronic didactic games (similar to board games, only for online learning)
		Multiplayer cooperation games (e.g., Minecraft, etc.)
		Hidden object games with a non-linear story (e.g. Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments)
		Maintaining an electronic dictionary
7	What gamification techniques (using elements of computer games in non-game situations) do you use in class?	
8	What impact does gamification have on your students in the classroom?	Helps overcome the language barrier
		Helps improve self-control over homework
		Helps increase vocabulary
		It reduces focus on the task due to the competitive effect (students strive to get good grades at any cost, for the sake of the grade itself but not for the sake of gaining new knowledge)
		Increases motivation to gain new knowledge
		Positively affects the socialization of children in group classes
		Negatively affects the socialization of children in group classes (for example, less successful students envy more successful ones)
9	What pedagogical skills would you like to acquire in the process of self-education, professional development, etc., to use gaming technologies in language teaching?	
10	Do you consent to the analysis and publication of the study data? The results of the study will be analyzed with anonymity and all the requirements for scientific research by COPE. Yes / No	

* When choosing the “Other” option, teachers can add their answers to the form.

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Исследовательская статья

Игровые технологий и приемы геймификации в преподавании английского языка: анализ педагогического опыта

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Аннотация. Игровые технологии (в том числе компьютерные) в преподавании английского языка уже давно занимают важное и постоянное место в структуре занятия. Они помогают формированию межкультурных коммуникативных компетенций, повышению мотивации

и самоорганизации. Цель исследования – выявить актуальное состояние внедрения игровых методов работы и приемов геймификации на уроках английского языка современными педагогами в условиях как очного, так и дистанционного образования. Теоретическая значимость работы заключается в анализе эмпирических психолого-педагогических исследований по проблемам преподавания английского языка отечественных и зарубежных ученых, что позволило составить анкету для обобщения опыта педагогов английского языка, классифицировать электронные игры и приемы геймификации на занятиях. Выборка составила 48 педагогов английского языка со стажем преподавания от 1 до 13 лет, возрастной диапазон их учеников от 3 до 60 лет. Педагоги с помощью анкеты проанализировали свой опыт использования игровых технологий и приемов геймификации на очных и дистанционных занятиях. Все педагоги английского языка применяют игровые методы работы и приемы геймификации на занятиях вне зависимости от возраста обучающихся. Игры, которые они включают в свои занятия, можно условно разделить на дидактические (используют две трети педагогов), многопользовательские игры на кооперацию (включает в занятие каждый пятый педагог), игры на поиск предметов с нелинейным сюжетом (используют на занятии четверть педагогов нашей выборки). Большинство преподавателей, применяющих приемы геймификации, отмечают устойчивое повышение мотивации учеников на занятиях. Практическая значимость результатов исследования заключается в возможности построения индивидуальной траектории самообразования, повышения квалификации педагогов английского языка как в основном, так и в дополнительном образовании. Обобщение практического опыта работы педагогов может быть положено в основу методических и педагогических рекомендаций по повышению информационно-коммуникационной компетентности и педагогического мастерства учителей английского языка.

Ключевые слова: преподавание английского языка, педагоги английского языка, повышение квалификации, игровые технологии, компьютерные технологии, геймификация, информационно-коммуникационные технологии

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