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GAME-BASED PRACTICES AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING MOTIVATION AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN INFORMAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Abstract. The rapid development of modern education and the growing importance of communicative competence in foreign language learning require the search for innovative pedagogical approaches. One of the promising directions is the integration of game-based practices into informal language learning environments. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of game-based technologies in increasing learners' motivation and developing communicative competence in informal foreign language learning. The research was conducted among sixth-grade students at a secondary school in Semey, Kazakhstan. The study employed a pedagogical experiment including diagnostic, formative, and control stages. The results demonstrated that the systematic use of communicative games, role-play activities, and collaborative tasks significantly increased learners' motivation, speaking activity, and confidence in using the foreign language. The findings confirm that game-based practices create favorable conditions for communicative interaction and contribute to the development of language competence in informal learning environments.

Keywords: game-based learning, informal education, foreign language learning, communicative competence, learner motivation, student engagement, communicative interaction.

Introduction

The rapid transformation of modern education and the growing role of communicative competence in global communication have intensified the search for innovative approaches to foreign language teaching. In contemporary educational research, increasing attention is being paid to learner engagement, communicative interaction, and the creation of learning environments that promote active participation and meaningful language use. Traditional approaches to language instruction, which often focus on grammar practice and controlled exercises, do not always provide sufficient opportunities for authentic communication and spontaneous language use. As a result, learners frequently demonstrate theoretical knowledge of linguistic structures while experiencing difficulties when attempting to apply them in real communicative contexts.

Recent developments in second language acquisition (SLA) research emphasize that language learning is most effective when learners are actively involved in meaningful interaction and communicative problem-solving. Sociocognitive approaches view language not merely as a system of grammatical rules but as a dynamic tool for social interaction and knowledge construction. From this perspective, language development occurs through participation in communicative practices, collaboration with peers, and engagement in authentic tasks that require the functional use of language resources. Such interaction-based learning environments encourage learners to negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and apply linguistic knowledge in real-time communication. These processes contribute to the gradual development of communicative competence, which includes not only grammatical accuracy but also pragmatic and sociocultural aspects of language use. Therefore, modern language pedagogy increasingly emphasizes interactive and learner-centered instructional approaches that support active participation and meaningful communication in the classroom.

Literature review

In addition to communicative interaction, contemporary research highlights the crucial role of motivation and emotional factors in successful language learning. According to Self-Determination Theory, sustainable learning occurs when learners' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied [1]. Educational environments that support these needs

foster intrinsic motivation and increase learners' willingness to engage in communicative activities. In foreign language learning, motivation is widely recognized as one of the most significant predictors of success, influencing persistence, effort, and learners' readiness to communicate [2].

Another important factor influencing language learning outcomes is learner engagement. Contemporary educational psychology defines engagement as a multidimensional construct that includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components [3]. Behavioral engagement is expressed through active participation in learning tasks, emotional engagement through interest and positive attitudes toward learning, and cognitive engagement through deep involvement in problem-solving and knowledge construction. Research shows that high levels of engagement are closely associated with improved academic achievement and stronger learning outcomes.

In recent years, informal learning environments have gained increasing attention as an important complement to formal language instruction. Informal foreign language learning is characterized by flexibility, voluntary participation, and opportunities for authentic communication beyond traditional classroom settings [4]. Such environments create favorable conditions for the development of communicative competence and learner autonomy, allowing students to engage with language in meaningful and socially relevant contexts.

One of the most promising approaches for increasing engagement and motivation in informal language learning is the integration of game-based technologies. Game-based learning has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical strategy that combines cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of learning. According to recent studies, game-based practices promote active participation, reduce foreign language anxiety, and create an emotionally supportive learning environment that encourages learners to experiment with language use [5].

From a psychological perspective, games activate important cognitive processes such as attention, memory, and problem-solving. Research in digital game-based learning demonstrates that interactive game environments require learners to make decisions, process information rapidly, and apply knowledge in dynamic situations [6]. These characteristics make game-based activities particularly valuable for language learning, where learners must constantly adapt linguistic resources to communicative contexts.

Game-based learning also aligns with contemporary communicative and task-based language teaching approaches. Task-based language teaching emphasizes the importance of performing meaningful communicative tasks as a central mechanism for language development [7]. Game-based activities naturally incorporate such tasks by creating goal-oriented situations in which language functions as a tool for achieving objectives rather than as an object of study.

Furthermore, game-based environments contribute to the development of learner autonomy and collaborative interaction. Studies in learner-centered education suggest that when students participate in collaborative problem-solving and interactive activities, they develop stronger communication skills and greater responsibility for their own learning [8]. Game formats often require teamwork, negotiation, and joint decision-making, which promote the development of social and communicative competencies.

Despite the growing interest in game-based learning, the pedagogical potential of game-based practices in informal foreign language learning environments requires further empirical investigation. In particular, there is a need for studies examining how systematic integration of game-based activities influences learners' motivation, engagement, and communicative competence [9].

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of game-based practices in improving learners' motivation and communicative competence in informal foreign language learning [10]. The research focuses on the implementation of a game-based learning program among middle school students and aims to evaluate its impact on language development, learner engagement, and emotional attitudes toward foreign language learning [11].

In addition, the integration of game-based practices into informal educational contexts may contribute to the development of learner-centered teaching models that emphasize interaction, creativity, and collaborative problem-solving. Such approaches reflect current trends in educational innovation, which prioritize flexible learning environments and active participation of learners in

the construction of knowledge. By combining elements of communication, motivation, and experiential learning, game-based activities can support the development of both linguistic competence and broader cognitive and social skills. Consequently, investigating the effectiveness of these approaches is particularly relevant for the modernization of foreign language education and the improvement of teaching practices in contemporary schools.

Materials and Methods

The present study employed a quasi-experimental research design aimed at examining the effectiveness of game-based practices in informal foreign language learning. The research was organized as a pedagogical experiment consisting of three consecutive stages: diagnostic (pre-experimental), formative (experimental intervention), and control (post-experimental evaluation). Such a design made it possible to compare learners' language proficiency and motivation levels before and after the implementation of the game-based learning program and to identify the dynamics of change in both the experimental and control groups.

The study followed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative methods were applied to assess learners' language proficiency and motivation levels, while qualitative methods were used to analyze behavioral changes, learner engagement, and interaction patterns observed during the learning process. The integration of these approaches ensured a more comprehensive interpretation of the results and increased the reliability of the research findings.

The research was conducted at Secondary School №32 in Semey, located in the Abai Region of Kazakhstan. The participants were 30 students from two parallel Grade 6 classes aged between 11 and 12 years. This age group was selected because middle school learners typically demonstrate increased cognitive activity, curiosity, and responsiveness to interactive learning formats, which makes them particularly suitable for participation in game-based learning activities. The participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group consisting of 15 students and a control group consisting of 15 students. When forming the groups, learners' previous foreign language proficiency, academic performance, age characteristics, and level of learning motivation were taken into account in order to ensure comparability between the groups and increase the validity of the experimental results.

To evaluate learners' language proficiency, a set of diagnostic tasks aligned with levels A1–A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was used. The diagnostic test included tasks designed to assess the main components of communicative competence, including lexical knowledge, grammatical accuracy, listening comprehension, and speaking skills. The lexical and grammatical section consisted of multiple-choice tasks, matching exercises, and sentence completion activities. Listening skills were assessed using short audio texts followed by comprehension questions aimed at identifying both general meaning and specific information. Speaking skills were evaluated through short oral tasks in which students were asked to introduce themselves, describe their daily routines, and respond to simple questions related to familiar topics. The assessment criteria included speech fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, and the ability to maintain communication.

In addition to language assessment, learners' motivation toward foreign language learning was examined using a questionnaire administered at both the initial and final stages of the experiment. The questionnaire included a series of statements aimed at identifying students' interest in language learning, their willingness to participate in communicative activities, and their attitudes toward interactive learning formats. Students' responses were categorized according to three levels of motivation: high, medium, and low. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions that allowed learners to express their preferences regarding learning activities and instructional formats.

Classroom observation was used as an additional research method in order to analyze learners' behavior and engagement during the learning process. Particular attention was given to indicators such as participation in communicative tasks, willingness to speak in the foreign language, interaction with peers, and emotional responses during classroom activities. Observational data provided qualitative insights into the dynamics of learner engagement and allowed the researcher to identify behavioral changes throughout the experimental period.

The pedagogical experiment lasted eight weeks and included three stages. During the diagnostic stage, baseline data were collected concerning learners' language proficiency and motivation levels through language testing, questionnaires, and classroom observation. These procedures made it possible to determine the initial level of communicative competence and establish the comparability of the experimental and control groups.

At the formative stage, an informal foreign language learning program based on game-based practices was implemented in the experimental group. The program consisted of weekly extracurricular sessions organized in a flexible learning environment designed to reduce psychological tension and increase learners' participation in communicative activities. The instructional process incorporated a variety of game-based practices, including communicative games, role-play simulations, information-gap tasks, team competitions, and quest-based activities. Each session followed a structured sequence that included warm-up activities aimed at activating prior knowledge and reducing language anxiety, core communicative games focused on developing speaking and listening skills, and reflective activities intended to consolidate newly acquired language material.

In contrast, the control group continued learning through traditional instructional methods such as grammar exercises, textbook-based tasks, and dialogue practice without systematic integration of game-based technologies. This methodological distinction between the two groups made it possible to compare learning outcomes and determine the influence of game-based practices on language development and learner motivation.

At the control stage, the same diagnostic procedures used at the beginning of the experiment were administered again in order to evaluate changes in learners' language proficiency and motivation levels. The comparison of pre- and post-experimental results allowed the researcher to identify improvements in communicative competence, engagement, and confidence in using the foreign language.

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis involved comparing the percentages of learners demonstrating high, medium, and low levels of language proficiency and motivation before and after the experiment. The results were presented in tables illustrating the dynamics of change in both groups. Qualitative analysis was based on classroom observations and learner responses during communicative tasks, which provided additional insights into learners' engagement, interaction patterns, and emotional attitudes toward foreign language learning. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of game-based practices in informal foreign language learning.

Results and Discussion

The results of the pedagogical experiment demonstrated noticeable improvements in the experimental group compared to the control group. First, a significant increase in learners' speaking activity was observed. Students in the experimental group became more willing to participate in communicative tasks and produced longer and more confident oral responses. The number of students demonstrating a high level of speaking skills increased considerably. During the final stage of the experiment, learners showed greater readiness to initiate dialogue, ask questions, and respond spontaneously in English. In contrast, the control group demonstrated only minor changes in speaking activity, which confirms the effectiveness of interactive and game-based learning formats in stimulating communicative interaction.

Second, vocabulary use and grammatical accuracy improved. The repeated use of language structures during game-based activities helped learners internalize new vocabulary and grammatical patterns. Game situations required students to actively apply language resources in meaningful communicative contexts, which contributed to the development of automatic language use and reduced the frequency of pauses during speech production. As a result, learners began to demonstrate greater fluency and flexibility when expressing their ideas.

Third, the level of academic motivation increased significantly. Questionnaire results showed that students in the experimental group expressed greater interest in foreign language learning and demonstrated a higher willingness to communicate in English. Many learners reported that game-

based activities made lessons more engaging and enjoyable. The presence of collaborative tasks and team-based interaction also encouraged learners to support each other during communicative activities, which strengthened the social dimension of learning.

Another important result was the reduction of foreign language anxiety. Game-based activities created a positive emotional atmosphere in which mistakes were perceived as a natural part of the learning process [12]. This contributed to increased confidence and more active participation in communicative tasks. Learners became less afraid of making errors and more willing to experiment with language use during communication.

These findings correspond with contemporary research emphasizing the role of engagement, motivation, and emotional support in effective language learning. Interactive and collaborative learning environments promote active participation and help learners develop communicative competence more effectively. Game-based practices provide opportunities for meaningful interaction, which is considered one of the key mechanisms of second language acquisition.

Overall, the experimental group demonstrated greater improvement in language proficiency, motivation, and engagement compared to the control group. The results confirm that systematic integration of game-based practices can significantly enhance the effectiveness of informal foreign language learning and create favorable conditions for developing communicative competence.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that game-based practices are an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing motivation and communicative competence in informal foreign language learning. The results of the pedagogical experiment indicate that systematic integration of communicative games, role-play activities, and collaborative tasks significantly increases learners' speaking activity, motivation, and confidence in using the foreign language.

Game-based learning environments create favorable conditions for communicative interaction, reduce language anxiety, and support active learner participation. These characteristics make game-based practices particularly valuable in informal learning contexts, where voluntary participation and learner engagement play a crucial role [13].

The study also highlights the importance of methodological integration of games into the learning process. Games should be aligned with instructional objectives, learners' language proficiency level, and communicative tasks.

The findings suggest that game-based technologies can contribute to the modernization of foreign language education and the development of more interactive and learner-centered teaching practices. Such approaches not only improve language skills but also foster learners' creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking abilities, which are essential competencies in contemporary education.

Future research may focus on exploring the integration of digital games and hybrid learning environments in foreign language education. Further studies could also investigate the long-term effects of game-based learning on students' communicative competence and motivation across different age groups and educational contexts.

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БЕЙРЕСМИ ШЕТ ТІЛІН ҮЙРЕНУДЕ МОТИВАЦИЯ МЕН КОММУНИКАТИВТІК ҚҰЗІРЕТТІЛІКТІ АРТТЫРУ ҚҰРАЛЫ РЕТІНДЕ ОЙЫНҒА НЕГІЗДЕЛГЕН ТӘЖІРИБЕЛЕР

Аңдатпа. Заманауи білім берудің қарқынды дамуы және шет тілін меңгеруде коммуникативтік құзыреттіліктің маңыздылығының артуы инновациялық педагогикалық тәсілдерді іздестіруді талап етеді. Болашағы зор бағыттардың бірі – бейресми тілдік оқыту ортасына ойынға негізделген тәжірибелерді енгізу. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – бейресми шет тілін үйрену жағдайында білім алушылардың мотивациясын арттыру мен коммуникативтік құзыреттілігін дамытуда ойын технологияларының тиімділігін зерттеу. Зерттеу Қазақстанның Семей қаласындағы жалпы орта білім беретін мектептің алтыншы сынып оқушылары арасында жүргізілді. Зерттеу барысында диагностикалық, қалыптастырушы және бақылау кезеңдерін қамтитын педагогикалық эксперимент қолданылды. Нәтижелер коммуникативтік ойындарды, рөлдік ойын әрекеттерін және бірлескен тапсырмаларды жүйелі қолдану білім алушылардың мотивациясын, сөйлеу белсенділігін және шет тілін қолданудағы сенімділігін айтарлықтай арттырғанын көрсетті. Зерттеу қорытындылары ойынға негізделген тәжірибелердің коммуникативтік өзара әрекеттестікке қолайлы жағдай жасайтынын және бейресми оқу ортасында тілдік құзыреттіліктің дамуына ықпал ететінін дәлелдейді.

Түйін сөздер: ойынға негізделген оқыту, бейресми білім беру, шет тілін оқыту, коммуникативтік құзыреттілік, оқу мотивациясы, білім алушылардың белсенділігі, коммуникативтік өзара әрекет.

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ИГРОВЫЕ ПРАКТИКИ КАК СРЕДСТВО ПОВЫШЕНИЯ МОТИВАЦИИ И КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ В НЕФОРМАЛЬНОМ ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

Аннотация. Стремительное развитие современного образования и возрастающее значение коммуникативной компетенции в обучении иностранным языкам требуют поиска инновационных педагогических подходов. Одним из перспективных направлений является интеграция игровых практик в среду неформального языкового обучения. Цель данного исследования заключается в изучении эффективности игровых технологий в повышении мотивации обучающихся и развитии коммуникативной компетенции в

условиях неформального обучения иностранному языку. Исследование проводилось среди учащихся шестых классов средней школы города Семей, Казахстан. В работе был использован педагогический эксперимент, включающий диагностический, формирующий и контрольный этапы. Результаты показали, что систематическое использование коммуникативных игр, ролевых заданий и совместных видов деятельности значительно повышает мотивацию обучающихся, их речевую активность и уверенность в использовании иностранного языка. Полученные данные подтверждают, что игровые практики создают благоприятные условия для коммуникативного взаимодействия и способствуют развитию языковой компетенции в условиях неформального обучения.

Ключевые слова: игровое обучение, неформальное образование, обучение иностранному языку, коммуникативная компетенция, учебная мотивация, вовлечённость обучающихся, коммуникативное взаимодействие.

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