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THE IMPACT OF GAMIFICATION ON VOCABULARY LEARNING THROUGH MOBILE APPLICATIONS AND ONLINE PLATFORMS

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Abstract. The effectiveness of mobile gamification in enhancing students' memory and vocabulary acquisition has made it a significant research topic. Traditional vocabulary learning methods often rely on the rote memorization of words and drills, while gamified approaches employ interactive components such as leaderboards, quizzes, rewards and points to heighten the efficiency of learning. This research aims to examine advantages and disadvantages of mobile learning channels and evaluate how gamified vocabulary development techniques stack up against traditional methods of vocabulary learning, as well as identify the most impactful gamification elements.

The study conducted a survey among 50 students using an online survey platform (Google Forms). Quantitative data collection techniques and comparison methods were used to investigate the effects of different platforms and game mechanics on vocabulary learning and motivation in students. To find out how various platforms and game mechanics impact vocabulary acquisition and student motivation, quantitative data collection and comparative analysis techniques were employed. A comparison of gamification platforms revealed that Quizlet works well because it uses competitive elements and repeated learning, Duolingo and Memrise use artificial intelligence to implement adaptive learning, Kahoot! and Word Wall are easy to use in the classroom, and LingQ, while focusing on contextual vocabulary learning, lacks gamification features.

By demonstrating how game mechanics impact vocabulary acquisition, this study advances the fields of educational technologies and gamification. The study's findings recommend the best approach, which balances interest and in-depth language comprehension, by combining gamification and structured learning.

Keywords: mobile tools, digital platforms, MALL, gamification, mobile learning, vocabulary acquisition, artificial intelligence, motivation

Introduction

Mobile technology has quickly changed the game with its cheap

access everywhere and flexibility. Using Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), learners can study vocabulary at any time and from any location, which accommodates adding MALL technology to conventional classes [1]. In Kazakhstan, the government encourages digitalization of education with the "Digital Kazakhstan" program, which promotes the introduction of mobile technologies into the educational process (Government of Kazakhstan, 2017).

Information and communication technology has made it possible to conduct a wide range of vocabulary exercises, including games that require students to construct sentences (such as automatic dictionaries or programs that choose synonyms and antonyms); fill-in-the-blank exercises, in which a student who answers incorrectly moves on to the next task or sentence while the correct answer is shown on the screen; and crossword exercises, in which the wrong letter is highlighted in a different color when writing a word.

Most of the scientific works on mobile technologies in learning are theoretical and focused on didactic properties and functions, typology of mobile technologies, theoretical substantiation of the application possibilities in different learning cases, as well as successful integration of mobile applications and their description in the learning process, which is stated in the literature.

The proliferation of mobile applications and online platforms has opened a realm of unprecedented access to innovative and participatory vocabulary learning tools, rendering vocabulary acquisition both exciting and effective for learners. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of gamification in vocabulary learning through online and mobile platforms. The study specifically seeks to understand how gamified aspects could enhance vocabulary retention and acquisition, as well as how this can affect learner motivation and engagement.

In order to fulfil this objective, the study will be guided with the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the vital gamification characteristics for enhancing mobile applications and online platforms in vocabulary learning?

RQ2: What are the comparative effectiveness and user engagement of mobile assisted gamification vocabulary learning experiences versus traditional learning experiences?

RQ3: Which mobile-assisted gamification platform (Quizlet, Duolingo, Memrise, Kahoot etc.) is most effective for vocabulary retention?

By answering these questions, this study intends to add to the growing literature on gamification in education, while also offering guidance on implementing these strategies to improve vocabulary learning in digital contexts.

The practical implications of research work are helping educators and curriculum and educational technology developers to create more efficient, personalized, and engaging learning experiences for students.

The term "gamification" originated in the digital media sphere [2]. According to Yusuf in 2016, the term began to be used in 2002, introduced by

Nick Pelling in the context of a presentation at the TED conference. Gamification is a concept where systems and techniques are used to augment educational processes with concepts found in games to enhance the effectiveness of learning, motivation and engagement of students.

Gamification has piqued the interest of numerous scholars and educators because it increases student motivation and engagement while learning. Some reports showed that ESL learning through using games is more effective than ESL learning without using games [3]. Gamification adds game-like elements - points, levels, challenges, and rewards, for instance, to the educational environment to increase student motivation and engagement.

Recent research has shown the effect of gamification on students vocabulary learning and how it could contribute enhancing vocabulary achievement in EFL environment. These studies have indicated that the use of mobile tools can aid the learning of EFL vocabulary among students more effectively than traditional learning. The study results reveal that students' motivation via smartphone applications correlates with their elevated motivation levels; hence, more motivation enhances language acquisition [4], p.8,9].

A recent research by Hossain (2025) has highlighted the transformational impact of new technology on language instruction and acquisition. The researcher discovered that more than 85% of Japanese foreign language educators employ mobile learning applications, while about 90% utilize LMS systems, both enhancing student engagement, motivation, and language acquisition. And more crucially, the gamification aspects and the AI-feedback systems implemented in these applications have been demonstrated to enhance the students' motivation and have helped them to accomplish demonstrable advances in vocabulary, speaking, and listening abilities. These results solidify the assumption that computer-based settings offer more participatory, self-directed, and task - oriented possibilities available to students than conventional ones, leading to a successful learning process [5], p.401].

Different studies have discovered that in vocabulary learning, certain gamification elements advance such acquisition. Mahmud et al. (2023), the most critical component of language is its vocabulary. Having inadequate vocabulary impedes students' understanding of the text, expression of their ideas, and proficiency development in listening, speaking, reading and writing [6]. Due to Harmer (2005), teachers play a determinant role in learning vocabulary; there are four basic facets. First is meaning, where words must be properly associated with their objects or contexts. Second one is usage, which is the knowledge of how vocabulary is used in communication. Third, word formation, meaning the capacity to spell and pronounce words properly. The grammar, meaning, and using the words in a grammatically proper way given a context [7]. These factors significantly contribute to assisting students in establishing a solid vocabulary foundation, subsequently allowing them to understand and articulate better in a

foreign language.

The study highlights how adding gamification to vocabulary instruction via online and mobile platforms can improve student retention and engagement. This has been previously supported in studies investigating the effect of vocabulary learning through mobile apps and online platforms via gamifications. According to research, students prefer mobile learning to traditional learning methods and find gamified vocabulary learning more effective [8], [9]. Research sheds some light on the effects of mobile-assisted gamification even more, as one study suggests that it enhances vocabulary learning outcomes and entertainment and motivation of EFL learners [8].

On the other hand, according to some studies, students have a preference for an online platform toward mobile apps and their awareness of game-based learning concepts is limited, indicating the demand for an explicit use of mobile technology for learning purposes within the domains of language [9].

According to Mukhamedzhanova et al., the introduction of mobile technologies in foreign language teaching in 1968-1969, using new technologies such as LOGO and Turtle programs, provided an opportunity to close the educational quality gap. This approach viewed teaching as the active participation of students as a teacher [10]. The principles of mobile learning, as illustrated in Figure 1, which serve as the foundation for contemporary foreign language teaching methods.

Figure 1 – Basic principles of mobile learning

Materials and Methods

Different research articles reviewed as published during 2020 to 2025, and investigations were based on the research questions, objectives and selection of documents, arrangement of the details.

The study was conducted by collecting the data through Google Scholar, Scopus Articles, Springer Link and Research Gate. The study followed on how Gamification can help in learning English vocabulary through mobile apps. The key terms included “gamification”, “mobile learning”, “Gamification components”, and “vocabulary acquisition”.

The use of a structured survey questionnaire was the primary tool for data collection in this study, as it allowed students to offer detailed responses on how they felt about the mobile app in relation to more traditional classroom-based vocabulary learning methods. The questionnaire involved no more than multiple-answer/multiple-choice questions or Likert-style questions and was designed to be completed only by participants with limited technological skills or English proficiency. In this study, we examine if and how often people use mobile apps for vocabulary learning, for how long, how effective they think these ways compare with traditional ways of learning, what kind of ways they like, and how people view the mobile device used in the classroom.

Results and discussion

The study included (n=50) students from institutes of higher education. They were subsequently filtered down to 48 valid responses, as 2 responses had missing or conflicting answers. Demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Demographic characteristics of respondents

	Category	Frequency (n=48)	Percentage %
Gender	Male	18	37,50%
	Female	30	62,50%
Field of Study	Engineering	10	21%
	Social sciences	13	27%
	Language Teaching	15	31%
	Humanities	10	21%

Due to the first research question participants were asked what elements of game-like interactions they enjoyed most in apps for vocabulary learning. A shown in Figure 2 the most often chosen aspects were points and rewards (40%), then challenges and quizzes (25%) and leaderboards (25%). The least engaging elements were avatars and story-based learning (10%). These results are consistent with prior research (Deterding et al., 2011), emphasizing the motivational influence competitive and reward-based mechanisms of gamified learning provide.

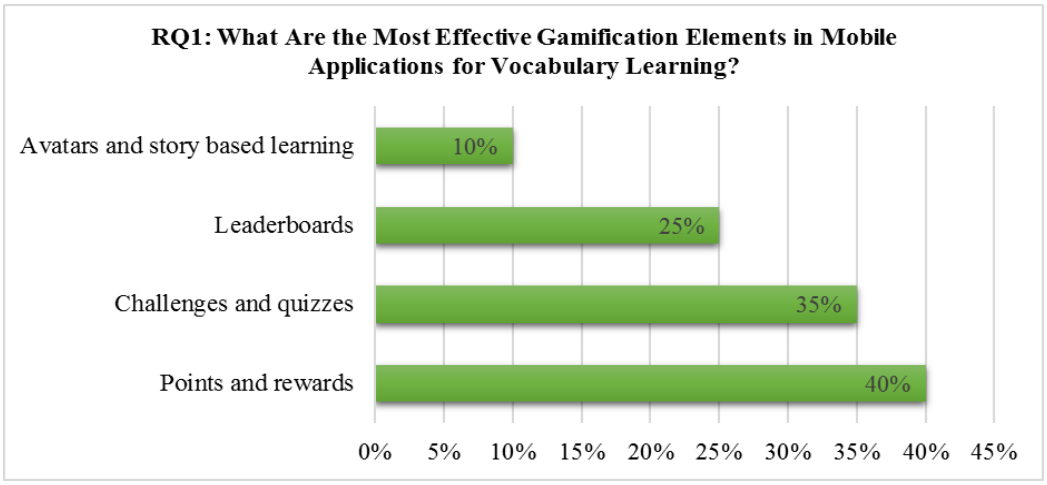

Figure 2 – The most effective gamification elements

The results examined the role of gamification in vocabulary learning and identified which elements work best at engaging students and increasing retention. Design components such as leaderboards and avatars, tests and quizzes, points and rewards, as well as story-based learning significantly enhance language acquisition.

The first element is that the only motivation for students to engage is points and rewards. These components correspond to research conducted by Kingsley and Grabner-Hagen (2018) which found that reward-based systems are effective motivators [11].

The second is that tests and quizzes promote retrieval-based learning, which enhances long-term memory and retention. Gamified platforms, such as Quizlet, helped low-achieving students retain vocabulary much better [12].

The third is leaderboards, which create engagement, motivation, and a sense of competition. Although leaderboards can be helpful for some students, Hamari et al. (2014) caution, these events can also be distressing for some people. According to research, using gamification concepts such as leaderboards, quizzes, points, and rewards to enhance vocabulary learning may have a very positive effect by increasing motivation and memory retention, as well as making learning more enjoyable [13]. Leaderboards, for example, promote a spirit of competition and social interaction between people, encouraging students to familiarize themselves more with the material and become involved [14]. Likewise, incentivizing users with points and rewards keeps the brain in its primitive reward system and releases dopamine, which keeps users hooked and motivated and encourages user retention. Moreover, engaging in quizzes and tests provides instant feedback [15], enhancing the learning experience and facilitating vocab retention. Each one of these gamification techniques contributes

to a full immersive and effective learning environment for vocabulary learning.

And while avatars and story-based learning elements do not have a direct effect on vocabulary retention, they do create a more personalized experience, one that ultimately enhances student interest. In addition, gamification techniques enhance student involvement and make learning more fun. By teaching words in context, they facilitate the retention of vocabulary. According to Castro Granda (2023) while integrative contextual learning allows students to understand concepts at a deeper level [12], some students can get distracted by the story-based learning.

Due to the results the best gamification components for vocabulary learning are leaderboards, tests, points and rewards. These elements increase motivation, improve memory, and make learning fun.

RQ2: What are the comparative effectiveness and user engagement of mobile assisted gamification vocabulary learning experiences & traditional learning experiences?

Mobile-assisted vocabulary learning becomes an increasingly trendy focus of research the ongoing studies revealed the effectiveness of the integration of gamification in mobile-assisted vocabulary learning in improving students' engagement, motivation, and retention. A survey of 48 participants was conducted to compare the effectiveness of gamified and traditional vocabulary learning techniques.

The results are shown in Figure 3, assessing how effective, engaging, and frequently compared the former to the latter. The students' responses provided insight into their preferences, motivations, and challenges associated with each method.

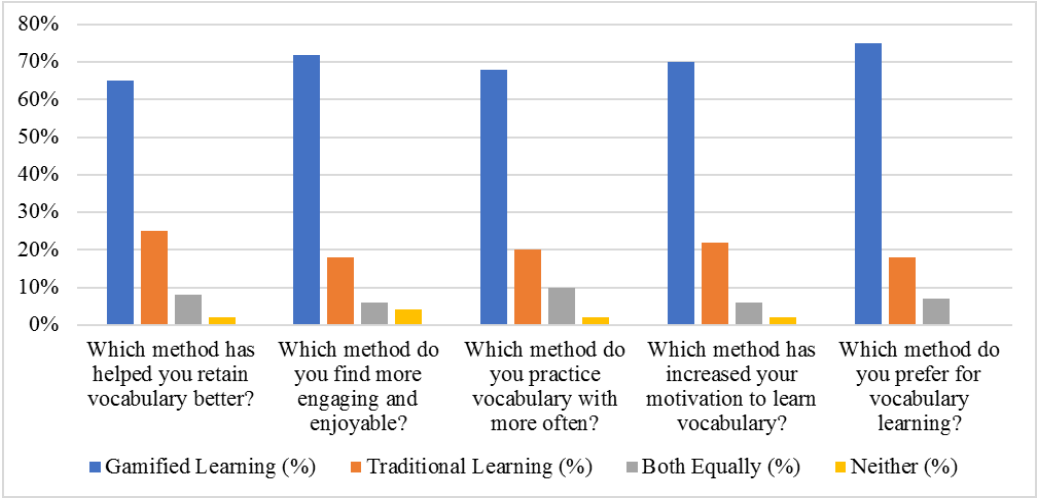

Figure 3 - Comparative Effectiveness of Gamified vs. Traditional Vocabulary Learning

These results indicated that the majority of students found these gamified learning methods to be more effective, engaging, and motivating than traditional methods. Most respondents (70%) preferred gamified learning, with only 20,6% preferring traditional learning, and 7,4% preferred both of them and only 2% of respondents answered as neither one.

The study results have shown that gamification with mobile assistance is a very effective approach for vocabulary learning, particularly when it comes to practice frequency, motivation, and engagement. The most creative element gamified platforms offer is the interactive features that make learning fun and encourage students to perform vocabulary exercises more frequently than they would through traditional teaching methodologies. Consistent with previous studies regarding the benefits of extrinsic motivation in online learning environments, the introduction of points, rewards, and challenges generally increases students' motivation to practice more frequently.

Gamification has drawbacks in addition to its benefits. According to some students, game-like features like leaderboards and animations may be distracting and take focus away from the learning goals. This highlights the importance of designing gamified learning environments that balance cognitive load and engagement.

There's also a need for strategies that combine gamification with more thorough contextual learning, as highlighted by concerns about shallowness of learning in some gamified applications. While traditional teaching practices were viewed as comprehensive and organized, they lacked the real-time engagement that many learners found useful on gamified platforms.

A hybrid approach that integrates gamified aspects with more traditional language teaching methods could enhance the effectiveness of gamification in vocabulary acquisition. This would allow students to benefit from the depths of classical learning approaches alongside the motivational aspects of gamification. Future researchers could explore how these adaptive learning technologies (e.g., augmented reality and artificial intelligence) may help to close the objective approach to gamification used today.

RQ3: Which mobile-assisted gamification platform (Quizlet, Duolingo, Memrise, Kahoot!, etc.) is the most effective for vocabulary retention?

Table 2 - Mobile-Assisted Gamification Platforms and Features

Platform	Points & Rewards	Challenges & Quizzes	Leaderboards	Personalization (AI, Adaptive Learning)	Spaced Repetition
Quizlet	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Duolingo	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Memrise	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓

Kahoot!	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Wordwall	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
LingQ	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓

Respondents said some mobile-assisted gamification platforms were better than others for vocabulary learning, but each had its unique advantages and limitations.

Quizlet's points, quizzes, and leaderboards encourage competitive learning, resulting in student success. Several respondents said they liked its system of spaced repetition, which kept the learned words in their mind longer. On the other hand, students still said Quizlet does not use AI to personalize content to each student, so it cannot track individual progress in learning.

For Duolingo, respondents stressed its highly personalized nature as the platform uses AI and adaptive learning to customize exercises based on the user's performance. Several students said they were motivated to practice daily by Duolingo's streaks, points and rewards. But several respondents said they found the app to be entertaining but not interactive quizzes like other services had when they were dealing with translation-based material instead of a more in-depth approach to vocabulary.

Because of that, students that used Memrise said it is highly effective for helping them retain vocabulary as it combines AI-driven personalization with spaced repetition. Several respondents liked the fact, that the platform was helping them build their vocabulary through mnemonics and association. But some students commented that Memrise lacks competitive elements they found motivating in other apps, such as leaderboards and head-to-head challenges.

For Kahoot! respondents described engaging and competitive platform and how real-time quizzes and leaderboards made vocabulary learning fun and interactive. Students reported Kahoot! was best for use in the classroom but had limited applications for learning on one's own time as it lacked spaced repetition and AI-driven personalization.

Students liked using Word Wall because the customizable quizzes and interactive activities could be led by the teacher. Still, several who responded said that they didn't think it was engaging enough for independent study compared to other gamified platforms, as it lacks points, leaderboards and adaptive learning.

Finally, LingQ users were very enthusiastic about their unique vocabulary learning approach which matches the reading and listening to the learners themselves. The platform made vocabulary acquisition more contextualized and meaningful because it recommended content based on the students' interests and progress, which many of them liked. But to some users, the absence of points, quizzes, and leaderboards made it seem less like a gamified way to learn and more like a reading-oriented language app.

In general, students preferred sites that balance engagement and effective learning strategies, noting spaced repetition, extremely accurate adaptive learning, and competitive elements as major contributors to their vocabulary growth. However, others had highlighted the requirement of more disciplined learning methods and less distraction in some gamification-based applications.

Conclusion

This study showed that using gamification through mobile technologies is effective for vocabulary learning. The results of the questionnaire based on the three main research questions showed that employing gamification tools through mobile applications were helpful in that it produced better learning outcomes, a more enjoyable environment, and improved motivation for learning. Furthermore, points, quizzes, and leaderboards were found to be the most successful gamification elements because they provided motivation, encouraged frequent practice, and helped retention of vocabulary.

In addition, the study underscores the importance of finding the right balance between meaningful and gamification of learning experiences. Leaderboards and prizes can be a great extrinsic motivation, but they shouldn't add unnecessary stress to your students. Even though avatars and story-based learning do little to enhance vocabulary retention, they do improve engagement in the learning process by making it more entertaining and interactive. Finally, students' beliefs in the positive effect of MAG usage for vocabulary acquisition positively correlated with its effectiveness.

Moreover, in terms of motivation, engagement, and retention, gamification greatly outperforms traditional approaches in mobile-assisted vocabulary learning. The survey's findings showed how popular interactive and incentive-based features are in online learning settings. In line with earlier research on extrinsic motivation and retrieval-based learning, adding points, leaderboards, and quizzes to other websites, Quizlet, Duolingo, and Kahoot! made students more willing to practice vocabulary more often.

But for some students, gamification elements were distracting, especially when leaderboards or animations came to dominate educational goals.

Furthermore, some students thought that the lack of competitive elements made the experience less interesting, even though spaced repetition and AI-driven personalization helped improve vocabulary retention in programs like Memrise and Duolingo.

Future research should also investigate the types of learners to whom gamified vocabulary learning is more effective and how the techniques of gamification can be enhanced by adaptive learning technologies such as artificial intelligence and personalized feedback. Gamification and context-based learning can result in improved long-term vocabulary retention and increased general language competency, too. Moreover, it should explore augmented realities

(AR) and artificial intelligence (AI) as future technologies in gamified learning experiences to enhance flexibility, engagement, and usefulness in vocabulary acquisition.

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МОБИЛЬДІ ҚОСЫМШАЛАР ЖӘНЕ ОНЛАЙН ПЛАТФОРМАЛАР АРҚЫЛЫ ГЕЙМИФИКАЦИЯНЫҢ СӨЗДІК ҮЙРЕНУГЕ ӘСЕРІ

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Аңдатпа. Мобильді геймификацияның оқушылардың есте сақтау және сөздік қорын молайтудағы тиімділігі оны маңызды зерттеу тақырыбына айналдырды. Дәстүрлі лексиканы оқыту әдістері көбінесе сөздерді және жаттығуларды есте сақтауға негізделеді, ал геймификацияланған тәсілдер оқу тиімділігін арттыру үшін көшбасшылар тақтасы, викториналар, марапаттар және ұпайлар сияқты интерактивті компоненттерді пайдаланады. Бұл зерттеу мобильді оқыту арналарының артықшылықтары мен кемшіліктерін зерттеуге және геймификацияланған сөздік дамыту әдістерінің сөздік оқытудың дәстүрлі әдістеріне қалай сәйкес келетінін бағалауға, сондай-ақ ең әсерлі геймификация элементтерін анықтауға бағытталған.

Зерттеуде онлайн сауалнама платформасын (Google Forms) пайдалана отырып, 50 студент арасында сауалнама жүргізді. Әртүрлі платформалар мен ойын механикасының сөздік оқуға және студенттердің мотивациясына әсерін зерттеу үшін сандық деректерді жинау әдістері мен салыстыру әдістері қолданылды.

Әртүрлі платформалар мен ойын механикасының сөздік қорын меңгеруіне және оқушылардың мотивациясына қалай әсер ететінін анықтау үшін сандық деректерді жинау және салыстырмалы талдау әдістері қолданылды.

Геймификация платформаларын салыстыруда Quizlet жақсы жұмыс атқаратындығын көрсетті, себебі ол бәсекеге қабілетті элементтерді және

қайталанатын оқытуды пайдаланады, Duolingo және Memrise бейімделген оқытуды жүзеге асыру үшін жасанды интеллектті пайдаланады, Kahoot! және Wordwall сыныпта пайдалану оңай, ал LingQ контекстік лексиканы оқытуға назар аударғанымен, геймификация мүмкіндіктері жоқ.

Ойын механикасы сөздік қорды меңгеруге қалай әсер ететінін көрсете отырып, бұл зерттеу білім беру технологиялары мен геймификация салаларын алға жылжытады. Зерттеу нәтижелері геймификация мен құрылымдық оқытуды біріктіру арқылы қызығушылық пен тілді терең түсінуді теңестіретін ең жақсы тәсілді ұсынады.

Тірек сөздер: мобильді құралдар, цифрлық платформалар, MALL, геймификация, мобильді оқыту, сөздік қорын меңгеру, жасанды интеллект, мотивация

ВЛИЯНИЕ ГЕЙМИФИКАЦИИ НА ИЗУЧЕНИЕ ЛЕКСИКИ С ПОМОЩЬЮ МОБИЛЬНЫХ ПРИЛОЖЕНИЙ И ОНЛАЙН-ПЛАТФОРМ

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Аннотация. Эффективность мобильной геймификации в улучшении памяти и приобретении словарного запаса учащихся сделала ее важной темой исследования. Традиционные методы изучения лексики часто полагаются на механическое запоминание слов и упражнения, в то время как игровые подходы используют интерактивные компоненты, такие как таблицы лидеров, тесты, награды и баллы, для повышения эффективности обучения. Целью этого исследования является изучение преимуществ и недостатков каналов мобильного обучения и оценка того, как игровые методы развития словарного запаса сочетаются с традиционными методами изучения лексики, а также выявление наиболее эффективных элементов геймификации.

В ходе исследования был проведен опрос среди 50 учащихся с использованием платформы онлайн-опросов (Google Forms). Количественные методы сбора данных и методы сравнения использовались для изучения влияния различных платформ и игровых механик на изучение лексики и мотивацию учащихся.

Чтобы выяснить, как различные платформы и игровые механики влияют на приобретение словарного запаса и мотивацию учащихся, использовались количественные методы сбора данных и сравнительный анализ.

Сравнение платформ геймификации показало, что Quizlet работает хорошо, поскольку использует соревновательные элементы и повторное обучение, Duolingo и Memrise используют искусственный интеллект для реализации адаптивного обучения, Kahoot! и Word Wall просты в использовании в классе, а LingQ, хотя и фокусируется на контекстном изучении лексики, не имеет функций геймификации. Демонстрируя, как игровая механика влияет на приобретение словарного запаса, это исследование продвигает области образовательных технологий и геймификации. Результаты исследования рекомендуют наилучший подход, который уравновешивает интерес и глубокое понимание языка, объединяя геймификацию и структурированное обучение.

Ключевые слова: мобильные инструменты, цифровые платформы, MALL, геймификация, мобильное обучение, приобретение словарного запаса, искусственный интеллект, мотивация

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