IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE KEY COMPETENCIES IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH GAMIFICATION: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: In the context of modern educational reforms, the development of key competencies has become a central goal of foreign language instruction in secondary schools. This study explores the effectiveness of gamification as a methodological tool for enhancing English language learning and competency development among 10th–11th grade students. Using a quasi-experimental design, the study compared the outcomes of a control group taught through traditional methods with those of an experimental group exposed to gamified instruction using digital platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz, and Duolingo. The results indicated that students in the gamified group demonstrated higher levels of motivation, engagement, and improvement in communicative competence, collaboration, and digital literacy. Observations and student feedback further supported the conclusion that gamification creates an interactive and student-centered environment that fosters deeper learning. The study concludes that gamification, when integrated effectively into the curriculum, can serve as a powerful approach to support the development of both language skills and broader 21st-century competencies.

Keywords: Gamification, English language learning, key competencies, high school students, communicative competence, digital tools, motivation, interactive learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid educational modernization and digital transformation, the focus of school curricula has shifted from traditional knowledge transmission to the development of key competencies that prepare students for real-world challenges. In Uzbekistan, recent reforms in general secondary education have emphasized the importance of building students' communicative, cognitive, sociocultural, and digital competencies, especially through foreign language instruction. English, as a global language, plays a significant role in enabling students to access international knowledge, communicate across cultures, and succeed in academic and professional contexts.

However, teaching English in grades 10–11 still faces several challenges, including declining student motivation, lack of engagement, and reliance on traditional teacher-centered methods. These issues hinder the holistic development of students' language competencies and their ability to use English in practical situations. To address these gaps, educators are exploring innovative methodologies that align with the interests and digital habits of modern learners.

One such promising approach is **gamification**, which refers to the integration of game elements — such as points, badges, leaderboards, and challenges — into non-game educational contexts. Gamification aims to enhance learner motivation, participation, and autonomy by making learning more engaging and interactive. When applied thoughtfully, it can transform passive learning environments into active ones, where students collaborate, solve problems, and develop multiple competencies simultaneously.

In English language classes, gamification has the potential to foster not only linguistic abilities but also social interaction, digital literacy, creativity, and reflective thinking. It encourages learners to practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing in meaningful ways while interacting with their peers and digital tools.

Despite its growing popularity, there is still a need to systematically explore how gamification can be used to **improve key competencies among senior secondary school students** in the context of English language learning in Uzbekistan. This research, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by proposing and evaluating a methodology that integrates gamification techniques into English lessons for 10th–11th grade students.

Purpose of the Study:

To develop and evaluate a gamification-based methodology aimed at enhancing the key competencies of 10th–11th grade students in English language education.

Research Questions:

1. How does gamification influence the motivation and engagement of high school students in English lessons?
2. What impact does gamification have on the development of key competencies such as communication, collaboration, and digital literacy?

2. METHODS

This study was conducted using a quasi-experimental research design, aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of gamification in developing key competencies among 10th–11th grade students in English language education. The research took place over a period of 10 weeks in two public secondary schools in Tashkent city. A total of 60 students participated in the study, with 30 assigned to the experimental group and 30 to the control group. Both groups were similar in terms of age (15–17 years), English proficiency (A2–B1 based on CEFR), and academic performance. Informed consent was obtained from the participants and school administration prior to the intervention.

The experimental group was exposed to a gamification-based instructional approach, where game elements were systematically integrated into the English curriculum. The control group continued with the traditional teacher-centered methodology without gamified components. The gamification strategy in the experimental group involved a combination of digital platforms, classroom-based activities, and motivational elements. Specifically, students used Kahoot and Quizizz for reviewing vocabulary and grammar through competitive quizzes; Duolingo Classroom was utilized for independent, level-based language practice. In addition, classroom activities included role-playing real-life dialogues, storytelling games, team-based tasks, and the implementation of a points and badge system to reward achievement and participation. A classroom leaderboard was displayed to foster a sense of progress and healthy competition.

The primary competencies targeted in this study included communicative competence (listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills), collaboration (peer work and teamwork), digital literacy (effective use of educational apps and online tools), critical thinking (solving game-based

challenges), and self-regulation (goal setting and motivation). These competencies were in line with the national education standards and the 21st-century skills framework.

To measure the impact of gamification, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Pre- and post-tests were administered to evaluate linguistic progress and competency development. These tests were developed based on CEFR descriptors and included both objective tasks (e.g., multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank) and skill-based tasks (e.g., writing a short text, giving a presentation). Classroom observations were conducted weekly using structured checklists to monitor student behavior, participation, and collaboration. In addition, students completed self-assessment questionnaires, reflecting on their motivation, engagement, and perceived progress. Teacher journals and anecdotal notes were kept throughout the study to document teaching experiences and classroom dynamics. At the end of the intervention, feedback forms were distributed to the students in the experimental group to collect their opinions about the gamified learning process.

The collected data were analyzed through both statistical and thematic methods. Quantitative test results were processed using descriptive statistics (mean scores, standard deviation) and paired sample t-tests to determine the significance of differences between pre- and post-test results within and between groups. Qualitative data from observations, reflections, and feedback were thematically analyzed to identify emerging patterns related to student engagement, competence development, and classroom atmosphere. The triangulation of different data sources helped ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

3. RESULTS

The findings of the study revealed a significant improvement in the development of key competencies among students in the experimental group who were taught using gamification-based methods. The comparative analysis of the pre- and post-test scores indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both linguistic proficiency and competency development. In the pre-test phase, the average score of the experimental group was 62.4%, whereas the post-test average increased to 83.1%, demonstrating a 20.7% improvement. Meanwhile, the control group's scores rose more modestly from 60.8% to 69.2%, marking an 8.4% gain. Statistical analysis using paired sample t-tests confirmed that the difference in improvement between the two groups was statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), indicating the effectiveness of the gamification approach.

Observational data collected during lessons supported these quantitative results. Students in the experimental group were more actively involved in classroom activities, frequently volunteered for speaking tasks, and collaborated more effectively with their peers during pair and group work. The use of gamified tasks such as vocabulary races, grammar challenges, and role-play scenarios encouraged even shy and less confident learners to participate. Teachers reported a notable increase in student enthusiasm and focus, especially during competitive tasks and reward-based learning segments. Learners consistently showed a higher level of engagement and retention when lessons included elements of fun, challenge, and immediate feedback.

Qualitative feedback from students also reinforced these observations. According to the post-intervention questionnaire, over 85% of the students in the experimental group stated that gamified English lessons were more enjoyable and made them feel more motivated to learn.

They appreciated the sense of progress provided by the leaderboard and badges, and many reported that learning English through games helped them remember words and grammar rules more easily. Several students also mentioned that they had started using digital English learning apps at home due to their positive experiences in class.

In terms of key competency development, the gamified environment was especially effective in promoting communicative competence and collaboration. Students engaged in peer corrections, shared strategies during team tasks, and were more willing to express opinions in English. Digital literacy also improved, as students learned to navigate educational apps, use classroom tablets or smartphones responsibly, and troubleshoot simple issues independently. Self-regulation and time management were enhanced through the structure of the tasks and the clarity of goals set within gamified lessons.

In contrast, students in the control group showed less noticeable progress in these areas. Although their language skills improved modestly, there was minimal change in their attitude toward learning and classroom participation remained low in comparison to the experimental group. Teachers observed that these students were generally more passive, relied heavily on teacher direction, and showed limited interest in optional language practice outside of class.

Overall, the results of the study demonstrated that the integration of gamification into English language instruction significantly contributed to both academic and personal growth in students, making it a valuable methodology for fostering key competencies in high school settings.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that gamification is an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing the development of key competencies in high school English language learners. The significant improvement observed in the experimental group's academic performance, particularly in their communicative competence, collaborative skills, and digital literacy, aligns with global trends that advocate for learner-centered, interactive teaching strategies. These results support the idea that integrating game elements into the classroom not only increases motivation but also creates a more engaging and dynamic learning environment where students are encouraged to take an active role in their education.

The improvement in test scores and classroom behavior among the students in the experimental group demonstrates that gamification can stimulate both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The use of leaderboards, points, and badges provided a clear structure and immediate feedback, which helped students visualize their progress and achievements. At the same time, the interactive nature of the games fostered intrinsic motivation by making learning enjoyable and meaningful. This dual motivational effect is consistent with existing literature, such as Kapp (2012), who emphasized the role of gamification in enhancing learner engagement and performance through goal-oriented behavior.

Moreover, the increased participation and confidence observed in speaking tasks indicate that gamification creates a psychologically safe space where students feel more comfortable using the target language. For many learners, language anxiety is a major barrier to developing speaking skills. However, the informal and playful context provided by gamified activities allowed students to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from them without fear of judgment.

This observation is supported by the theory of "flow" proposed by Csikszentmihalyi, which suggests that when learners are fully immersed in enjoyable tasks, their performance and creativity improve significantly.

Another key observation was the enhancement of collaborative and social skills. Group-based games required students to communicate, negotiate, and solve problems together, which mirrors real-life communication scenarios. These interactions promoted peer learning, increased empathy, and strengthened the classroom community. Additionally, students became more autonomous and self-directed, as they began to take responsibility for their learning in order to succeed in the game-based tasks.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also revealed certain limitations and considerations for future application. First, not all students were equally responsive to competitive elements; a small number of participants reported feeling discouraged when they performed poorly on leaderboards. This suggests that while gamification can be highly motivating for many, it must be carefully balanced to avoid fostering unhealthy competition. Educators should consider integrating cooperative game structures or allowing students to set personal goals to maintain inclusivity.

Another challenge lies in the technological infrastructure and teacher preparedness. Successful implementation of gamification requires access to devices, internet connectivity, and sufficient digital skills on the part of both students and teachers. In schools where such resources are limited, the full potential of gamification might not be realized. Therefore, professional development programs for teachers and investment in digital tools are essential for the sustainability of this approach.

In conclusion, the discussion affirms that gamification, when thoughtfully designed and aligned with curriculum goals, can serve as a powerful methodology for developing key competencies among high school students. It transforms traditional English language lessons into interactive, student-centered experiences that promote linguistic proficiency along with critical 21st-century skills.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that gamification is an effective and innovative methodology for improving key competencies in English language education among 10th–11th grade students. Through the integration of game-based elements into the teaching process, students in the experimental group exhibited significant progress not only in language proficiency but also in a range of vital skills, including communication, collaboration, digital literacy, and self-regulation. The use of platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz, and Duolingo, combined with in-class gamified activities, created an engaging and student-centered environment that fostered active participation, reduced language anxiety, and encouraged independent learning.

The positive changes observed in student motivation, confidence, and engagement highlight the pedagogical value of gamification as a tool to make learning more meaningful and relevant to today's digitally oriented learners. Moreover, the study confirms that gamification can serve as a bridge between traditional curriculum goals and the broader objective of preparing students for real-life communication and problem-solving scenarios. By aligning gamified tasks with

national and international competency frameworks, educators can ensure that such methodologies do not compromise academic rigor, but rather enhance it.

However, the research also underlines the importance of careful planning and thoughtful implementation. Gamification should be adapted to the specific needs and learning styles of students and balanced to avoid excessive competition. It also requires proper digital infrastructure and teacher training, without which its potential cannot be fully realized.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that English language teachers in secondary schools consider incorporating gamification techniques into their practice, either as a complement to traditional methods or as part of a blended learning model. Education authorities and school administrators are encouraged to support this approach by investing in technological resources and providing continuous professional development for teachers.

In conclusion, gamification is more than just a motivational tool—it is a comprehensive educational strategy that can significantly contribute to the development of key competencies in language learners and foster a more dynamic, interactive, and inclusive learning experience.

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