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METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE USE OF LANGUAGE GAMES IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Abstract. The article examines the theoretical and practical aspects of utilizing language games as a fundamental tool for forming communicative and linguistic competencies among students of higher education institutions. In the current globalized professional environment, traditional pedagogical approaches often fall short of providing the necessary emotional engagement and practical application required for fluent communication. The author argues that gamification serves as a vital bridge between abstract linguistic theory and authentic speech practice. The research provides a detailed analysis of game classifications based on linguistic goals (lexical, grammatical, phonetic, orthographic), functional roles (introduction, consolidation, or activation of material), and organizational forms (individual, pair, group). Special attention is paid to the psychological impact of games, specifically their ability to lower the affective filter — reducing anxiety and fear of making mistakes — which is a common barrier in foreign language acquisition. By simulating real-life communicative scenarios and professional contexts through role-plays and team-based competitions, games foster intrinsic motivation, transforming the language from an object of study into a functional tool for goal achievement.

Furthermore, the article outlines the essential didactic principles for effective game implementation, emphasizing that games should not be viewed as isolated entertainment but as an integrated component of a holistic curriculum. The author explores how gaming activities stimulate cognitive functions, such as logical thinking and problem-solving, and facilitate the development of “language intuition” by embedding vocabulary and syntax within meaningful contexts. The



study concludes that the systematic and methodologically grounded application of language games in technical universities not only enhances academic performance but also prepares students for the dynamic requirements of international intercultural communication.

Keywords: gamification, communicative competence, English as a foreign language (EFL), higher education, intrinsic motivation, pedagogical methods, language games, interactive learning.

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МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНІ ПІДХОДИ ДО ВИКОРИСТАННЯ МОВНИХ ІГОР У РОЗВИТКУ ІНШОМОВНОЇ КОМУНІКАТИВНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЇ СТУДЕНТІВ ЗАКЛАДІВ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

Анотація. У статті проаналізовано теоретичні та практичні засади використання мовних ігор як засадничого інструменту формування комунікативної та лінгвістичної компетентностей студентів закладів вищої освіти. Обґрунтовано, що в умовах глобалізації професійного середовища традиційні педагогічні підходи часто не забезпечують належного рівня емоційної залученості та практичного досвіду, необхідних для вільного володіння мовою, тому гейміфікація постає дієвим механізмом поєднання теоретичних знань із автентичною мовленнєвою практикою. У роботі наведено детальний аналіз класифікацій ігор за лінгвістичною спрямованістю (лексичні, граматичні, фонетичні та орфографічні), функціональним призначенням (введення, закріплення чи активізація матеріалу) та організаційними формами (індивідуальна, парна чи групова робота).

Особливу увагу приділено психологічному аспекту ігрових методик, а саме їхній здатності знижувати афективний фільтр, що сприяє подоланню тривожності та мовного бар'єра, які зазвичай виникають під час опанування іноземної мови. Завдяки моделюванню реальних комунікативних ситуацій і професійних контекстів у межах рольових ігор та командних змагань, ігрова діяльність стимулює внутрішню мотивацію студентів, перетворюючи мову з



об'єкта вивчення на функціональний засіб досягнення цілей. Крім того, окреслено ключові дидактичні принципи впровадження ігор, де наголошено на їхній ролі як інтегрованого компонента цілісної навчальної програми, а не лише допоміжного розважального елемента. З'ясовано, що ігрова активність активізує когнітивні функції, зокрема логічне мислення та здатність до вирішення проблем, що сприяє формуванню мовного чуття. У висновках підкреслено, що системне та методологічно обґрунтоване застосування мовних ігор у технічних університетах не лише покращує академічну успішність, а й готує майбутніх фахівців до вимог міжнародної міжкультурної комунікації.

Ключові слова: гейміфікація, комунікативна компетентність, англійська як іноземна мова, вища освіта, внутрішня мотивація, педагогічні методи, мовні ігри, інтерактивне навчання.

Statement of the Problem. In today's educational environment, particularly regarding the training of technical specialists, proficiency in foreign languages and the ability to work in an international context have become increasingly important. The ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language is crucial not only for professional realization but also for academic mobility and cross-cultural communication. Despite this, traditional pedagogical methods often fail to provide sufficient emotional engagement for students, which negatively impacts motivation and the overall efficacy of the learning process. Consequently, innovative approaches, specifically the gamification of the educational process, are becoming more important, as they allow for the efficient synthesis of cognitive, communicative, and emotional components of learning.

The advantages of language games have been long substantiated in both pedagogical and psychological literature. Games establish a comfortable environment for language use, mitigate anxiety, and facilitate mnemonic retention. Empirical studies demonstrate that games enhance students' Willingness to Communicate. For instance, A. John found that gamified English language learning modules strongly help enhance the students' English language proficiency [1].

The Aim of this Research is to develop methodological approaches for the formation of linguistic competence in students of technical universities by means of language games.

Analysis of Research and Publications. Gamification refers to the application of game dynamics, mechanics, and frameworks into non-game settings [2]. An analysis of the problem of didactic games in pedagogical theory and practice has allowed for the formulation of several approaches to game classification. One of the most prevalent is the classification by linguistic goals, which distinguishes between *lexical, grammatical, phonetic, and orthographic games*. Lexical games are aimed



at vocabulary expansion and the consolidation of lexical units in context; grammatical games focus on the internalization of structures and rules; phonetic games help refine pronunciation, intonation, and prosodic characteristics; and orthographic games form skills for correct spelling [see details: 3]. This typology enables the effective integration of games with traditional exercises, transforming them into interactive activities.

Another classification criterion is the *function of the game within the educational process*. According to this principle, games are divided into those that introduce new material; consolidate what has been learnt; or activate speech skills. The first type helps students become initially familiar with new language units through contextual use. The second type assists in practicing them through repetition in various communicative situations. The third type is oriented toward the creative use of language material in spontaneous speech [4]. Under this approach, games are not viewed as an isolated form but are integrated into the educational process as an organic component.

Particular attention is paid to the classification by the *type of language activity*. In this context, games are divided into those that develop speaking, listening, reading, or writing. For instance, role-plays are effective tools for developing oral speech; puzzle-dictations and language crosswords stimulate writing and spelling; listening quizzes target listening comprehension; games involving the search for information in texts facilitate reading comprehension and analytical skills [5]. This distribution allows the teacher to focus on the specific competence that requires development.

Furthermore, an approach classifying games by *organizational form* is widely utilized. Based on this criterion, games are identified as: individual, pair, group, and whole-class. The organizational form determines the nature of interaction between participants, directly impacting engagement levels and communication types. For example, pair and group games foster cooperative speech and social skills, while individual games may be used for self-checking or independent work on vocabulary.

Methodologists (Harmer) increasingly emphasize the classification of games by the *degree of authenticity*: games that simulate real communication situations (approximating practical language use in real life) versus games focused on the artificial training of specific language structures [see 6]. The choice between these types depends on the general teaching strategy, whether it is oriented toward forming communicative competence or involves the step-by-step acquisition of the linguistic system.

Considering these classifications, the teacher selects and organizes a game that primarily meets instructional requirements and the specific objectives of the lesson.

Presentation of the Main Material. The use of games in the context of foreign language instruction promotes the spontaneous memorization of linguistic



material and the development of oral communication skills. This method stimulates emotions and emotional memory, containing the essential elements of dialogic and monologic speech for effective learning. Games serve as an efficient instrument for the introduction, reinforcement, and subsequent engaging students with the learning material.

Ensuring the necessary pedagogical conditions for the development of intrinsic motivation to study is of paramount importance for creating genuine prerequisites for learning activity. Adapting the concept of “didactic game” to the specificities of foreign language teaching, it should be noted that it can be maximally utilized in the classroom to create a favorable environment for communication in a foreign language. Without a comprehensive understanding of specific language categories and the development of lexical and grammatical competencies, students cannot achieve a high level of proficiency and they will not be able to express themselves correctly in the language they are learning. Simultaneously, the use of games must target not only linguistic components but also speech mechanisms (speaking, listening, reading, and writing).

However, not all game activities are inherently effective. Only through implementation and organization that are didactically expedient and methodologically grounded can a game be considered an effective learning tool. Every type of game-based activity must comply with established didactic and methodological principles. These include accessibility, novelty, a gradual increase in complexity, consideration of students’ individual characteristics, and the integration of game-based activities with other forms of classroom work. These principles provide a solid foundation for gaming activities.

In foreign language classes, a game acts as a form of learning that simulates real situations, phenomena, processes, and professional activities. Games always have a unifying goal of engaging participants and clearly define their socio-ethnographic sphere, covering age, gender, and the social requirements of participants. Psychologically, a game is similar to a learning task, yet it emerges from established rules and conditions. Any game involving the use of language can be used in the process of teaching a foreign language; however, the effect of this phenomenon may vary in different cases. Like any exercise or task, a game can be part of various strategies. Games can be seen as a means of acquiring language knowledge, as they aid in the memorisation of linguistic material; as a tool for developing skills related to language use, or a medium for communicative speech. In practice, games from the first and third groups are most common.

The first group consists of *linguistic games*, focusing on mastering specific linguistic material. The ability to participate in the game and the potential for success depend on mastering the game. This phenomenon is known as indirect interest. These are effective for knowledge acquisition but despite their convenience



and ease of use, they should not be overused. The second group (*conditional communicative games*) focuses on operations with language material (e.g., “Make up a sentence”, “Ask a question” etc.). Here, the focus is not on the communicative function of utterances but on phonetic, lexical, or grammatical correctness.

The foundation of the third group — *communicative games* — is activity. These games do not have a strictly linguistic focus and do not fall under the category of language games, but serve as means for speech realization. Their use triggers involuntary attention and memory processes, fostering a positive attitude toward the language as a means of communication and goal achievement [see: 7].

The competitive nature inherent in *individual games* is driven by the pursuit of personal benefit and prestige. Such games are characterized by high engagement due to the importance of the outcome. The game is a test of strength, and personal participation in it is driven by a constant desire for self-affirmation. Consequently, this mobilises efforts, stimulates students’ cognitive functions and contributes to their development. Examples include “chain games”, where students complement a phrase by adding homogeneous parts of a sentence. A prerequisite for *team games* is competition between teams, that is, between subgroups. This approach fosters a sense of teamwork and collective prestige. According to this perspective, team games can be organically integrated into the structure of foreign language teaching with the aim of developing teamwork skills. For instance, the teacher may divide the class into teams that earn points over the course of a semester, creating a persistent competitive atmosphere that facilitates the learning process.

In recent years, *role-plays* have received increasing attention. They represent a significant portion of communicative games where the student adopts the role of a representative of a certain social group or profession. Thus, role-plays are viewed as an analog to real life, offering opportunities for self-expression without violating personal boundaries. This process of transformation opens up significant educational opportunities, given that the actions of certain individuals (in this case, students) are subject to constant social evaluation. A student’s assumption and acceptance of a specific social role serves as a means of orientation and behavioural planning. A specific role seems to “encourage” students to anticipate how a person might react in a given situation. This facilitates the choice of linguistic means and makes them more responsive. In this regard, the role of the partner is a key factor, as it allows one to anticipate their utterances, thereby facilitating the communication process.

While games have a positive impact on attitudes toward the language, these should be viewed as secondary or additional effects. The primary function of games is as a means of learning, development and education. Unsystematic implementation can turn games into mere entertainment and a waste of time. Every game must fulfill a clearly defined educational function: it should be meaningful,



stimulate thinking, imagination, and perseverance, and promote initiative in problem-solving using a foreign language. From a linguistic perspective, the game must consolidate structures and vocabulary, encourage initiative in speaking, and give students the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of mastering the language.

Games are interactive, therefore, they provide a high level of student engagement in the educational process, contribute to lowering the psychological barrier to speaking, activate communicative activity, and create a favorable environment for the development of speaking skills. In turn, the emotional activation of students contributes to improved concentration, increased motivation, and reduced anxiety, which often accompanies foreign language learning [7, p. 2]. Due to this, the educational game acts not only as a means of practicing language material but also as a powerful motivational factor that contributes to increasing intrinsic motivation in learning English. Game-based activities stimulate the natural need for communication, creating situations close to authentic ones. It is through the imitation of real communicative conditions that the game provides students with the opportunity to integrate previously studied material into new speech contexts, which corresponds to the concept of the communicative approach [see 9]. This approach allows students to use the language as a means of achieving a practical goal rather than as an abstract object of study.

No less important is the role of games in the development of cognitive skills. In the process of gaming activity, students engage logical thinking, problem-solving skills, the ability to analyze language structures, and make speech decisions in dynamic conditions. The game also contributes to the development of language intuition, as language material is acquired in context rather than in isolation, which ensures stronger memorization and application in real conditions [10].

From a methodological point of view, games allow for the diversification of classes and the creation of a flexible class structure by alternating types of activity, which prevents overload and loss of interest on the part of students. They can also be an effective tool for formative assessment, as they allow the teacher to observe student progress in an informal setting. At the same time, game-based situations provide an optimal balance between receptive and productive types of speech activity, stimulating both linguistic and communicative development. Thus, the use of games in the process of teaching English to students of higher education institutions not only contributes to increasing motivation and involvement but also forms a favorable psychological environment in which the language acquires practical character. This, in turn, is a key to developing sustainable language competence that meets modern requirements of higher education and intercultural communication.



The choice of a game for teaching a foreign language requires a careful approach to various aspects that may affect the effectiveness of its use. One of the key factors is the alignment of the game with the level of knowledge and skills of the students. Games should be adapted to the age and cognitive characteristics of the participants to create conditions for the successful acquisition of language material and the development of communicative skills [11]. As researchers note, selecting a game that matches the level of students contributes not only to better information acquisition but also creates a positive emotional background for learning [12].

Equally important is the definition of clear learning objectives for the game. It should be aimed at developing specific language competencies, such as speaking, listening, or reading. Choosing a game focused on achieving specific speech goals allows not only for the reinforcement of grammatical material but also for the formation of communication skills in real-life situations. As R. Ellis (2003) notes, the effectiveness of games in language learning largely depends on how well they are integrated with other methods and practices used in the lesson [13].

Another important aspect is the connection of the game with other forms of activity in the lesson. The game should not be an isolated part of the lesson but should organically complement the overall educational process. As J. Richards (2006) states, the effective integration of games into the educational process allows for the creation of a holistic learning structure where the game is not only entertainment but also an important tool for the development of speaking skills [14].

Furthermore, when choosing a game, its social component should be taken into account. Games can contribute to the development of communication skills and create opportunities for interaction between students. They allow participants to apply language skills in real, albeit simulated, social situations, which is important for developing the ability to use the language in everyday life [15].

Conclusions: The integration of language games into the English language curriculum for university students represents a shift from passive consumption to active, experience-based learning. The research demonstrates that games are not merely supplementary activities but are powerful methodological instruments that address the three pillars of modern education: cognitive development, communicative proficiency, and emotional well-being. By diversifying the structure of the lesson and alternating between receptive and productive activities, games prevent student burnout and maintain a high level of engagement. However, the effectiveness of this approach is strictly contingent upon the teacher's ability to align game selection with the students' proficiency levels and specific learning objectives. Ultimately, when games are utilized systematically rather than sporadically, they cultivate a sustainable "linguistic resilience", allowing students to navigate real-world social and professional situations with confidence.

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