

GAMIFICATION AS AN E-LEARNING TECHNIQUE

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The English language has been and remains one of the most popular foreign languages to study providing learners with a wide range of opportunities. The opportunities include both personal ones contributing to comfortable and trouble-free international communication, travelling and professional ones which can either involve professional training (translators, interpreters, language teachers, etc.) or provide for personal career achievements with English proficiency being a certain advantage. Thus, the issue of teaching and learning the English language is still rather urgent nowadays.

Methods for teaching foreign languages, in general, and English, in particular, has been developed for a long time and are based on experience and expertise of a large number of foreign and national educators, facilitators and experts in teaching methodology. English language teachers have always had many textbooks, media, audio texts, handouts and other authentic materials to be applied when teaching.

However, under conditions of the pandemic, when most educational establishments throughout the world have to teach and learn online, both educators and students, who have found themselves in a new education and interaction environment, often feel confused or uncertain.

Obviously, online education has certain advantages which can help learners to self-improve and manage their time better. Students have more time for their self-development and various extracurricular activities. They can study at their individual learning pace being able to do it anywhere and anytime. In general, online studying gives learners and teachers flexibility to work and learn.

However, based on my personal experience, I can say that many students do not accept this type of learning because it requires perseverance and constancy, and more often than not, they turn into the passive recipients of knowledge. This may be caused by a number of reasons. First of all, these can be social and psychological problems – students cannot communicate with other peers, their tutors and groupmates in the way they used to and, therefore, they can feel frustrated and lack motivation. Other problems refer to technical issues – not everyone has the necessary learning conditions (access to the Internet, proper devices), they lack skills to use modern technologies and, sometimes, do not know how to prepare for the lesson. Every student is individual and specific, and, thus, teachers have to consider many variables working out how to support them and contribute to their success in online learning.

As for teaching foreign languages, in particular English, the issue can be especially complicated because teachers should know how to develop learners'

listening, writing and reading skills online, how to help them to overcome the difficulties of understanding phonetics in English – every single aspect which seems to involve a lot of in-person teaching.

One of the ways to encourage online learners and enhance efficiency of learning English involving and motivating students is gamification, which is about using game elements in non-game contexts [1]. Gamification is a playful learning method that forces learners to experiment and memorise information rapidly through engagement and retention. This is a very special method of assimilating information and knowledge for a long period of time. It allows using e-learning technology products, different authentic audio and video materials, etc. combining them with game-based elements, thus, contributing to fruitful collaboration of a teacher and students, introducing more communication and effective interaction. Among the peculiarities of gamification, we can single out the following:

1. fast feedback: a teacher will be able to find out the gaps in students' knowledge and how they master the information;
2. creating a story or a legend: this can quickly attract the students and make the lesson more impressive and interactive;
3. game design principles (goals/challenges, freedom to fail, narratives, personalisation) are the set of concepts underpinning specific game mechanics;
4. sense of fun when accomplishing something difficult [2].

Obviously, application of gamification can involve certain difficulties for teachers, because all students are individual and this technique may be suitable and comfortable for someone, but not for everyone. Teachers need to consider different aspects and allocate time for lectures or seminars and for gamification; otherwise students may fail to perceive the routine work and tasks which they were doing before. Games should be thoroughly considered and planned – poor dull games will hardly have any positive effect on the learners. Moreover, it is essential to take into account the latest methodology and research to make gamification efficient and high-performance.

To conclude, we would like to say that successful education and mastering of the English language depend on both teachers' expertise to motivate students, ensure relevant learning objectives and students' responsibility for efficient collaboration and participation in the process of learning.

References:

1. Catalano M. (2012). What's the difference between games and gamification? Retrieved from <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/23220/whats-the-difference-between-games-and-gamification>
2. Schwartz M. Teaching with Gamification. Retrieved from <https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/learning-teaching/teaching-resources/teach-a-course/gamification.pdf>