



THE IMPACT OF GAME-BASED LEARNING ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AND LEARNER AUTONOMY IN EFL CLASSROOMS



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Abstract : *The integration of interactive technologies into language education has increased interest in game-based learning as an instructional approach in EFL classrooms. Vocabulary acquisition remains a challenging aspect of language learning, often requiring sustained engagement and effective learning strategies. This study investigates the impact of game-based learning on vocabulary acquisition and learner autonomy. A mixed-method research design was employed, combining experimental instruction, vocabulary testing, questionnaires, and classroom observation. The findings reveal that game-based learning significantly improves vocabulary retention, contextual word use, and learners' ability to manage their own learning process. The scientific novelty of the study lies in its combined analysis of lexical development and learner autonomy within a formal academic context. The results provide empirical support for the pedagogical value of game-based learning in EFL instruction.*

Keywords: *game-based learning, vocabulary acquisition, learner autonomy, EFL teaching, applied linguistics*



Annotatsiya: *Mazkur tadqiqot ingliz tilini xorijiy til sifatida o'qitishda o'yin asosidagi ta'limning lug'at o'zlashtirish va o'quvchilarning mustaqil o'rganish qobiliyatiga ta'sirini aniqlashga qaratilgan. Tadqiqot aralash metodologiya asosida olib borilib, eksperimental ta'lim, lug'at testlari, so'rovnomalar va dars jarayonini kuzatish usullari qo'llanildi. Natijalar o'yin asosidagi ta'lim o'quvchilarning lug'at boyligini mustahkamlash, so'zlarni kontekstda qo'llash hamda mustaqil o'rganish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishda samarali ekanini ko'rsatdi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *o'yin asosidagi ta'lim, lug'at o'zlashtirish, o'quvchi mustaqilligi, EFL, til o'qitish*

Аннотация: *В статье рассматривается влияние обучения на основе игр на усвоение лексики и формирование учебной автономии обучающихся при обучении английскому языку как иностранному. Исследование основано на смешанном методологическом подходе, включающем экспериментальное обучение, тестирование и наблюдение. Результаты подтверждают, что игровое обучение способствует более прочному усвоению лексики и развитию самостоятельности обучающихся.*

Ключевые слова: *игровое обучение, усвоение лексики, учебная автономия, EFL, методика преподавания*

Introduction

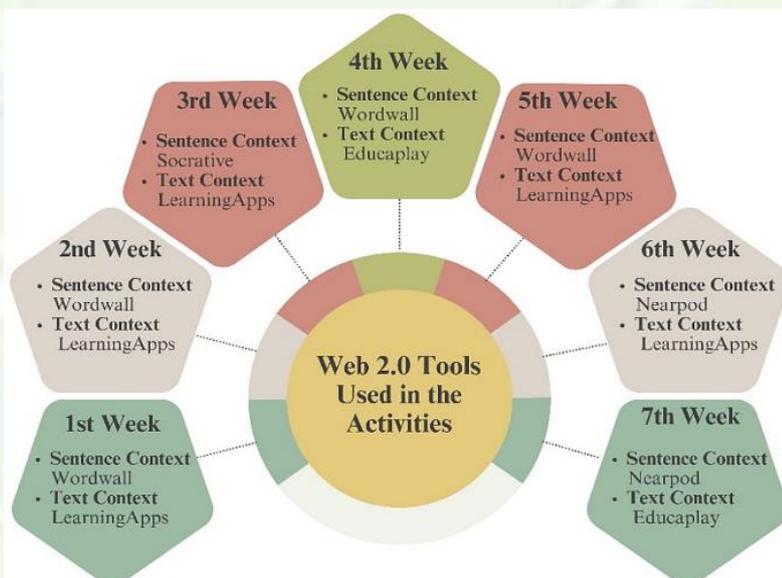
Vocabulary knowledge is widely recognised as a fundamental component of language proficiency, directly influencing learners' abilities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In EFL contexts, vocabulary acquisition presents persistent challenges due to limited exposure to authentic language input and restricted opportunities for meaningful use of new lexical items. Traditional vocabulary instruction often relies on memorisation techniques and decontextualised practice, which may result in short-term gains but limited long-term retention. In recent years, language education has increasingly adopted learner-centred approaches that emphasise engagement, interaction, and autonomy. Learner autonomy, understood as the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning, has been identified as a

key factor in successful language acquisition. However, fostering autonomy within formal instructional settings remains a complex pedagogical task, particularly in contexts where learners are accustomed to teacher-centred instruction.

Game-based learning has emerged as a promising pedagogical approach capable of addressing both vocabulary acquisition and learner autonomy. By incorporating elements such as challenges, feedback, collaboration, and problem-solving, game-based learning encourages active participation and repeated exposure to target vocabulary. While previous research highlights the motivational benefits of game-based learning, its combined impact on vocabulary development and autonomous learning behaviour has not been sufficiently examined in higher education EFL classrooms.

The present study aims to fill this research gap by investigating the effects of game-based learning on vocabulary acquisition and learner autonomy. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does game-based learning affect vocabulary acquisition in EFL classrooms?
2. To what extent does game-based learning contribute to the development of learner autonomy?
3. How do learners perceive game-based vocabulary instruction in a formal academic context?



Methods

The study employed a mixed-method research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive analysis of learning outcomes. The participants were 68



undergraduate students enrolled in an English language programme at a higher education institution. All participants demonstrated an intermediate level of English proficiency. The sample was divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received vocabulary instruction through game-based learning activities, including digital word games, collaborative challenges, role-based scenarios, and problem-solving tasks. The control group followed traditional vocabulary instruction methods based on textbook exercises and teacher-led explanations. Both groups were exposed to the same lexical content over a twelve-week instructional period.

Data collection instruments included pre- and post-tests measuring vocabulary recognition and productive use, learner autonomy questionnaires, and structured classroom observations. Quantitative data were analyzed using comparative statistical methods to identify differences between groups, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Reliability was ensured through consistent instructional procedures and standardized assessment tools. Validity was strengthened through triangulation of data sources and alignment between instructional objectives and assessment tasks.

Results

The analysis of quantitative data revealed significant differences between the experimental and control groups following the instructional intervention. Pre-test results confirmed that both groups demonstrated comparable levels of vocabulary knowledge at the beginning of the study. However, post-test results showed a substantial improvement in vocabulary acquisition among learners exposed to game-based learning. The experimental group achieved higher scores in vocabulary recognition, recall, and contextual usage tasks. Delayed post-tests administered four weeks after the intervention indicated stronger long-term retention of lexical items among learners in the experimental group. These findings suggest that game-based learning facilitates deeper cognitive processing through repeated exposure and meaningful use of vocabulary in varied contexts.

Productive vocabulary use also improved in the experimental group. Learners demonstrated greater lexical variety and accuracy in speaking and writing tasks, particularly when engaged in collaborative game-based activities. Classroom observations revealed increased learner participation, peer interaction, and willingness to experiment with newly acquired vocabulary. Questionnaire data further indicated higher levels of learner autonomy in the experimental group. Learners reported greater confidence in selecting learning strategies, monitoring their progress, and engaging in independent vocabulary practice. These results highlight the dual impact of game-based learning on both lexical development and autonomous learning behaviour.



Discussion

The findings of the study provide strong support for the effectiveness of game-based learning in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and learner autonomy in EFL classrooms. From a cognitive perspective, game-based activities promote deeper lexical processing by encouraging repeated exposure, contextualised use, and active engagement. This aligns with contemporary views in applied linguistics that emphasise meaningful interaction as a prerequisite for durable language learning. From a pedagogical standpoint, the results resonate with communicative and learner-centred approaches to language teaching. Unlike traditional vocabulary instruction, which often positions learners as passive recipients of information, game-based learning places learners at the centre of the learning process. This shift supports the development of learner autonomy by encouraging decision-making, self-monitoring, and responsibility for learning outcomes.

The findings also correspond with functional perspectives on language learning, particularly those emphasising the social nature of language use. Game-based tasks create interactive environments in which learners negotiate meaning,



collaborate with peers, and use language for purposeful communication. Compared to previous studies focusing primarily on motivation, the present research extends existing literature by demonstrating measurable gains in both vocabulary acquisition and autonomous learning behaviour.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that game-based learning constitutes an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing vocabulary acquisition and fostering learner autonomy in EFL classrooms. The scientific novelty of the research lies in its integrated analysis of lexical development and autonomous learning within a formal higher education context. Despite limitations related to sample size and instructional duration, the findings provide valuable implications for applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Future research should explore the long-term effects of game-based learning and examine its applicability across different proficiency levels and educational contexts.

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