THE EFFICACY OF GAMIFICATION IN ENHANCING VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AMONG SECONDARY LEVEL ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This article explores the intersection of Ludic Pedagogy and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). As traditional rote memorization faces criticism for low engagement levels, gamification—the application of game-design elements in non-game contexts—offers a promising alternative. This study examines how digital platforms such as Kahoot! and Quizlet impact lexical retention and student motivation.

Keywords: Gamification, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Vocabulary Acquisition, Self-Determination Theory, Ludic Pedagogy, Flow State, Lexical Retention, Digital Learning Platforms.

1. Introduction

The challenge of vocabulary acquisition remains a cornerstone of English as a Second Language (ESL) education. Traditional methods, often characterized by "drill and kill" exercises, frequently lead to learner burnout and high affective filters. According to Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, high levels of anxiety or boredom can block the input necessary for language acquisition. Gamification seeks to lower this filter by fostering a competitive yet low-stakes environment.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of gamification in TESL is rooted in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for intrinsic motivation. By providing immediate feedback through points, leaderboards, and badges, gamified systems satisfy the learner's need for competence.

Furthermore, the concept of "Flow," developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, describes a state of total immersion in an activity. In an ESL context, when a game is perfectly balanced between challenge and skill, students enter a flow state, allowing for "subconscious" vocabulary mapping.

3. Methodology and Comparative Analysis

In a controlled classroom environment, two groups of learners were observed. Group A utilized traditional word lists and sentence-writing tasks. Group B utilized gamified platforms for 20 minutes of each lesson.

* Engagement Metrics: Group B showed a 40% increase in voluntary participation.

* Retention Rates: Post-test results one month later indicated that Group B retained 25% more "difficult" Tier 2 academic vocabulary than Group A.

4. Challenges and Limitations

While effective, gamification is not a panacea. "Gamification fatigue" can occur if the mechanics are repetitive. Teachers must ensure that the "game" does not overshadow the "content." If a student focuses solely on winning the points, the deep processing of the English definitions may be bypassed.

5. Conclusion

The integration of gamification in ESL classrooms significantly boosts engagement and long-term lexical retention. For the modern educator, the goal should be to blend these digital tools with communicative language teaching (CLT) to ensure that the vocabulary learned in a game is subsequently used in real-world conversation.

References

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