



**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMIFICATION ON LANGUAGE LEARNING IN
HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT**

D. Raiymkulova

Suleyman Demirel University, Kaskelen, Kazakhstan



Abstract

The higher education system is currently facing outdated methods of language teaching. It is well established that today's students are technology-oriented and prone to mixing game elements with learning subjects. Gamification is a practical method in language teaching and other areas of education. The goal of this study is to determine the effects of using appropriate gamification methods in language learning in a higher education context and find out the students' perception toward gamifying the language disciplines. In this context, appropriate gamification methods mean suitable and modern game tools for students of the growing generation. To explore the existing study, an online questionnaire survey with several open-ended questions was distributed to undergraduate third-year students of a language specialty. The participants were selected according to their language disciplines, understanding of gamification, and experience in specific subjects. The results showed a positive perception and impact on changing and variation of the gamification method. Based on the qualitative analysis, it concluded that using meaningful and practical game elements are important factors to consider when designing the lesson plan for higher education students of a language specialty. Teachers' perception of gamification language disciplines should be taken into account for further development of the study.

Keywords: Gamification, higher education, language learning

Introduction

Technology has a strong impact on people. Large amounts of information that people receive through the Internet decrease the attention span and lead to short-term memory. In education, the purpose of any study is to consolidate the educational material for the long term. Especially, teaching a language needs different creative tasks to fix the knowledge for a long time. Consequently, the current education needs to find a modern method such as gamification to teach in an attractive way. As the new generation of students grows, teaching subjects in a traditional way is no longer relevant. Learning foreign language requires complex tasks and cognitive processes, a high level of engagement and motivation which is difficult to achieve without differentiation of teaching methods.

The term Gamification was first used in 1896 and became widespread in 2010. The term is not new, but this approach which was created a long time ago, is not suitable for today's learners. According to Deterding, Dixon, and Nacke (2011) this method gained popularity after the



Foursquare application. Deterding et al. (2011) determined gamification as “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts”. Gamification establishes game-like behavior and is used to attract motivation, interest of learners, promotes the process of critical thinking process and problem solving skills, which is extremely important for the training of competitive specialists. The significance of this study is expected to contribute to further development of gamification method in language teaching and learning at a higher education level.

The main objectives of the research is to find out the higher education students’ perception toward gamification in language classes and determine the effects of gamification to higher education students in language learning classes for further development of gamification in higher education context. The research was conducted by a qualitative method through using questionnaire surveys of undergraduate students of a language speciality. These research questions will help in finding answers for this study:

What are the higher education students' perceptions towards using gamification in language classes?

What are the effects of the application of gamification on higher education students?

In addition, the study provides an overview of existing gamification methods at the present time and suggests for future teachers, current students of language speciality to use appropriate game elements for teaching learners.

Materials and methods

The research was conducted to identify effects of teaching language by gamification methods to students at higher education level and perception of students towards the traditional and gamified methods of learning language. The research approach was chosen as qualitative research. The instrument that was used in this study is a questionnaire survey through Google Forms which conducted both types of qualitative and quantitative questions. The research applied a descriptive qualitative method. The research was conducted at the specific university of Kazakhstan among the third year bachelor degree students of the faculty “Two Foreign Languages”(TFL), as the students of this faculty are already familiar with the teaching methods and in several languages. The format of the conducting survey was online. The research was aimed to collect opinions of 52 undergraduate students towards gamification of language subjects. During the stage of primary research, the survey included multiple choice, ratings and open-ended questions. The participants were selected according to their language disciplines, understanding of

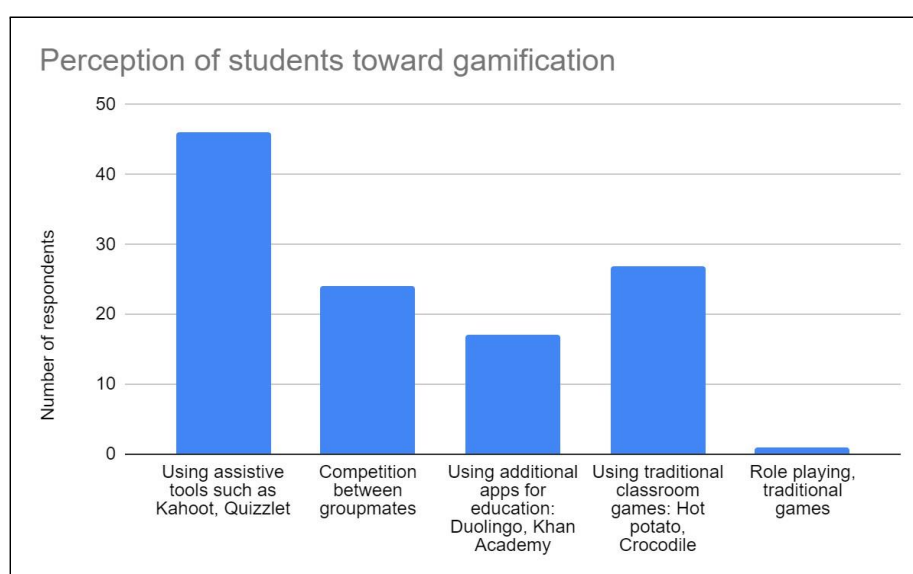


gamification and experience in using it. Participation was voluntary, a link for survey was sent individually via emails and to groups in WhatsApp chats of third-year students of TFL which consist of 100 users. The questionnaire was analyzed as the main data source for obtaining answers to research questions. The Google Forms interpreted a graphic collection of answers and represented it. It was taken for summarizing the overall statistics of participants. All sections of the questionnaire were summarized and a collection of the open-ended questions' responses were made in a spreadsheet.

Results and Discussion

The aim of the questionnaire was to understand the perceptions of students toward gamification of language classes and identify the benefits of gamification from results of the questionnaire survey. All 52 participants studied at a specific university in the third-year of bachelor degree. 47 of them are females and 5 of them are males. Age of participants varies from 17-19 (24 participants) and 20-25 (28 participants). The students of different language classes were asked to participate. From 52 participants, 18 from French, 6 Chinese, 13 German, 6 Korean, 5 Spanish, 3 Turkish and one of them from Italian language class.

Chart 1



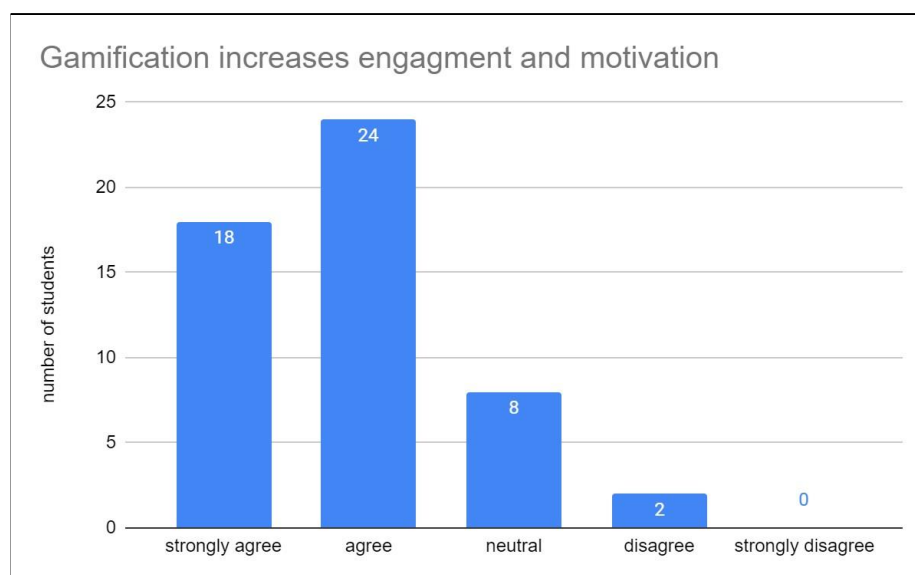
Source: compiled by the author

The students were asked to respond how they see the gamification in real-life context. Chart 1 shows that all participants 88.5 % see the gamification as using in class assistive tools such as Kahoot and Quizzlet. While 51.9% see the gamification in language classes as using traditional



games such as “Crocodile” or “Hot potato”. 46.2% preferred to choose competition as the gamification and 32.7% see the gamification as only using apps such as “Duolingo” and “Khan Academy”. The last one participant sees that role-playing is a gamification.

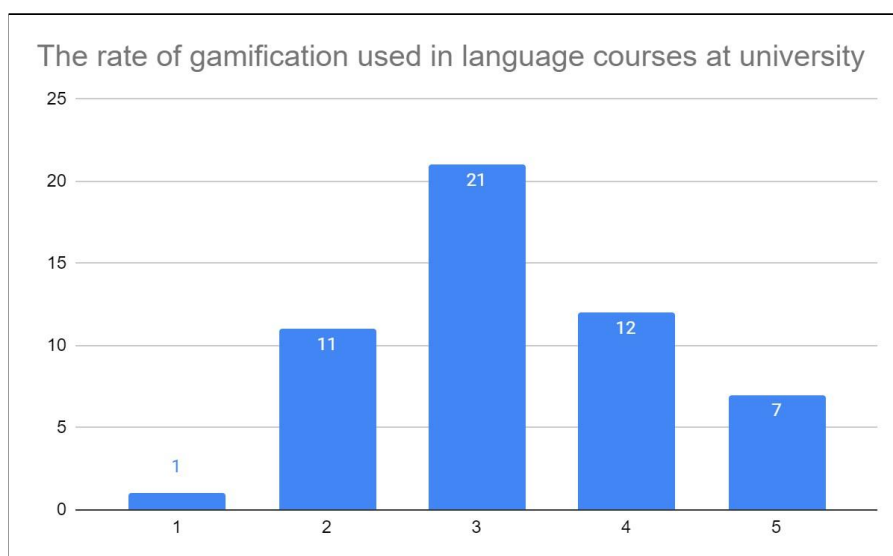
Chart 2



Source: compiled by the author

To understand students' perception for future application of gamification, it was necessary to consider their opinion about the effects of motivation and engagement in gamification. As chart 2 shows 24 participants agree with the statement that gamification increases motivation and engagement of students in the learning process. 18 participants strongly agree and 8 of them are neutral. Last 2 participants disagree with this statement.

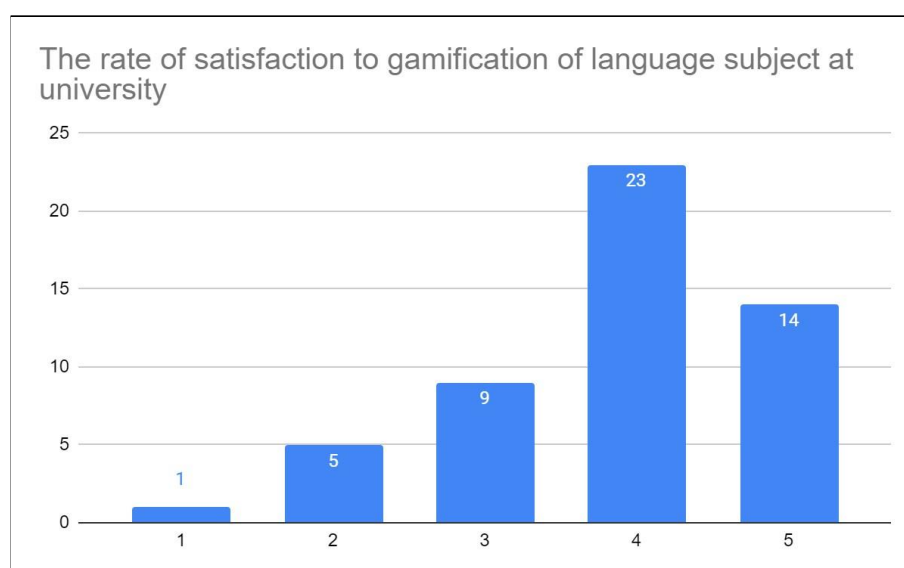
Chart 3



Source: compiled by the author

As in Chart 3 from all 52 participants, 21 participants chose that gamification in language courses used, but rarely with identification of rate 3 which is located below of the chart. 11 participants chose that gamification is not used a lot, only for several times with identification of rate 2. 12 respondents chose that gamification is used usually, but not always (rate 4). While 7 of the respondents answered that gamification is used very often (rate 5). Only one respondent chose that gamification was never used (rate 1).

Chart 4



Source: compiled by the author

Chart 4 represents the rate of satisfaction of students on their past and current experience



in gamification methods at language classes. As in chart representation, 23 of participants chose the rate 4, which means that they are dissatisfied, but not completely. While 14 of respondents were fully dissatisfied with the gamification method that their instructors used in the learning process.

As it mentioned earlier, the responses were collected by open-ended questions. One participant with number 16 responded that repeated games are not suitable for all learners. I would like to come up with a new game, not only Kahoot, personally I played only Kahoot games in my classes. I am sure that not only me. There are so many other games, I would recommend teachers to find or think out new games, and it's not only computer based games, it can be traditional group games connected with a course itself.

Another participant with number 30 responded that gamification is not only for fun.

I want the games to be more meaningful, because in some classes we play it only for fun. Yes, it is engaging, however I sometimes feel like we are just wasting time. I think games that are played only for fun could be included a few times just to engage, unite the students, but I do not think that games for fun should be played in almost every lesson.

Participant with number 26 whose answer described that old gamification should be replaced with new ones.

Willingness of teachers to change their old methods and to use more modern ways of games and technologies in our lessons. It will be better if the games, even if they are old traditional games, add new facts and new words which are taken from the current subject.

By considering the respondents' answers that they are quite satisfied with, the effect of using gamification makes the language learning easier to comprehend, as the university system of education is tough.

The data analysis showed that perception of students toward gamification was relevant and students want to have more reliable and practical knowledge to learn their second languages at their university. By offering a gamification method, most participants showed positive reactions and mentioned the importance of including gamification into the learning process.

Following research questions used in this study:

RQ1. What are the higher education students' perceptions towards using gamification in language classes?

According to Bartle (1996), games might be the same, but not every player is the same.



The main goal of designing gamification is to suit every learner's need in gamifying lessons. Many of the participants offer their own interpretation and suggestion into gamifying the current teaching of languages. As a suggestion, students offer modernization of existing games, both traditional and technological games. Diversifying the teaching materials, coursebooks, adding cultural importance of language that have been taught, adding the importance of using specific language that students learn. Thus, the perception of students toward gamification shows that they are willing to learn by gamification and it seems that gamification makes students active and enjoy the learning process, but the problem is in the using old methods of gamification at their university, which reduces the motivation to learn by gamification.

RQ2. What are the effects of the application of gamification on higher education students?

As Landers (2014) stated “reason for failing is usually poor planning or inadequate design.” (p.17). The most common reasons for implementing gamifying language disciplines is using the same platforms and lack of using games at all. Half of the responses showed that the lesson plans of foreign language teachers do not have diversity in educational materials, the topics are covered superficially, no authentic materials to connect it with gamification. In addition, most teachers use the same game-design for all their subjects, as an example Kahoot platform, which led to getting used to the same games and monotony. As a result, it led to demotivation of students, which must not be in language learning classes.

However, the limitations of the results obtained are the non-inclusion of teachers in the survey, which would explain why certain issues in teaching languages happened. Problems may lie in the education system of a particular university, which rules and boundaries that teachers cannot go beyond. But, the aim of study is to look from learners' side to their study.

Conclusion

The research aimed to identify the effects of gamification methods in language classes on students and their attitude to that method. Based on the qualitative analysis, it can be concluded that using meaningful and real-life practical game-elements are important factors to consider when designing the lesson plan for higher education students of language specialists. The results indicated that students are welcome for collaborative work with teachers and ready to test different new approaches of gamification. Students' perception is quite positive which explains their willingness to use modern ways of learning through gamification. This research clearly illustrates the problems of the current teaching system of languages, but it also raises the question of teachers'



willingness to change the methods that have been proven over the years. Because, as the results showed, today's students need changes and new methods. To better understand the implications of these results, future studies should address the opinions and perceptions of teachers, as well as a larger number of students from various courses, in which language is taught at least two times per academic year.

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