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## GAMIFICATION IN THE EDUCATION OF TOURISM SPECIALISTS

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### Gamification in the education of tourism specialists

**Abstract.** The article examines the role of gamification in foreign language learning among tourism students. The study analyzes the impact of game-based methods on students' motivation and the development of language skills essential for future professionals. The experimental research was conducted at the International University of Tourism and Hospitality (Turkistan) with the participation of 35 first- and second-year students randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. The experimental group used gamification elements in language learning, while the control group followed traditional methods. Data collection included a learning preferences questionnaire (Fleming, 1987), as well as pre- and post-tests to assess students' motivation and engagement before and after the experiment. All data were processed using the SPSS statistical analysis program, with additional observations and interviews conducted with participants. The findings demonstrate that gamification significantly enhanced student motivation and improved the language skills of the experimental group.

**Key words:** gamification, education in tourism, foreign language learning, student motivation, professional skills, digital learning technologies.

Ризаходжаева Гүлнара Абдужамитқызы, Әбдіханова Жадыра Аманбайқызы, Акешова Мадина Мурзахановна, Шалабаева Лаура Исмаилбековна

### Туризм мамандарын даярлаудағы геймификация

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада туризм саласында білім алатын студенттердің шет тілін үйрену үдерісінде геймификацияның рөлі қарастырылады. Ойын элементтерін пайдаланудың студенттердің мотивациясына және тілдік дағдыларын дамытуына әсері талданады. Эксперименттік зерттеу Түркістан қаласындағы Халықаралық туризм және меймандостық университетінде 1–2 курс студенттерінің қатысуымен жүргізілді. Студенттер кездейсоқ таңдалып, бақылау және эксперименттік топтарға бөлінді. Эксперименттік топта геймификация қолданылса, бақылау тобы дәстүрлі әдістермен оқытылды. Деректерді жинау үшін студенттердің оқу үдерісіндегі қалауларына арналған сауалнама (Fleming, 1987), сондай-ақ алдын ала және қорытынды тесттер қолданылды. Бұл зерттеу студенттердің мотивациясы мен тілдік құзыреттілігінің өзгерістерін анықтауға мүмкіндік берді. Барлық деректер SPSS статистикалық талдау бағдарламасы арқылы өңделді, қосымша бақылаулар мен сұхбаттар жүргізілді. Нәтиже геймификацияның студенттердің ынтасын айтарлықтай арттырып, олардың тілдік дағдыларын жақсартуға ықпал еткенін көрсетті.

**Түйін сөздер:** геймификация, туризм саласындағы білім, шет тілін үйрену, студент мотивациясы, кәсіби дағдылар, цифрлық оқыту технологиялары.

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### Геймификация в образовании специалистов по туризму

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается роль геймификации в обучении иностранным языкам студентов, обучающихся в сфере туризма. Проанализировано влияние игровых методов на мотивацию и развитие языковых навыков будущих специалистов. Экспериментальное исследование проведено в Международном университете туризма и гостеприимства (г. Туркестан) с участием 35 студентов 1–2 курсов, случайным образом распределённых на контрольную и экспериментальную группы. Первая группа обучалась с использованием элементов геймификации, вторая - традиционными методами. Для сбора данных применялась анкета предпочтений в обучении (Fleming, 1987), а также предварительные и итоговые тесты, позволившие оценить уровень вовлечённости и мотивации студентов до и после эксперимента. Все данные были обработаны с использованием программы статистического анализа SPSS; дополнительно проводились наблюдения и интервью с участниками. Результаты показали, что внедрение геймификации существенно повысило мотивацию и способствовало улучшению языковых навыков студентов экспериментальной группы.

**Ключевые слова:** геймификация, образование в сфере туризма, изучение иностранного языка, мотивация студентов, профессиональные навыки, цифровые образовательные технологии.

**Introduction.** Modern education faces a number of problems, one of the key factors is the involvement of students in the learning process. This problem requires teachers to search for innovative methods that contribute to the development of interest and motivation in students. This is especially true in the context of rapidly changing technologies and educational trends. Traditional methods and forms of knowledge control are gradually losing their effectiveness, and more dynamic approaches are coming instead. An important part of such changes is the integration of gamification into the educational process. Gamification as a method of teaching combines elements of games and educational technologies that help to activate the interest of students and increase their involvement in the educational process.

Tourism students encounter several challenges in learning foreign languages, which hinder their professional development. One of the key issues is the lack of motivation. Many students experience a decline in interest in learning a language because the educational material often lacks connection to real-world professional tasks. Tourism as a field requires practical communication skills, but traditional teaching methods frequently overlook this aspect, focusing instead on theoretical knowledge.

Another significant challenge is the difficulty in information perception. Students have diverse cognitive styles, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, yet educators do not always adapt teaching methods to align with these preferences. This mismatch between teaching methods and students' learning styles reduces the effectiveness of language acquisition.

Additionally, students face problems in applying language skills in professional contexts. For instance, they struggle with tasks like customer service, conflict resolution, and conducting tours, which are essential for their future careers. The gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application creates barriers in their professional readiness.

The stress and language barrier represent another major obstacle. Many students feel anxious when using a foreign language, especially in speaking situations. This stress inhibits their ability to interact freely with native speakers, which is critical for working in the international tourism sector.

Lastly, there is a lack of practical skills development. Traditional teaching methods often emphasize grammar and reading comprehension while neglecting the development of communication and interpersonal skills. As a result, students are

unprepared for real-world conditions in tourism, where language proficiency is a fundamental requirement.

Solving these problems through gamification. Introducing innovative methods such as gamification can help overcome these challenges. Gamification increases motivation by incorporating game elements like competitions, leaderboards, and interactive tasks that make learning more engaging. It also adapts the learning process to students' cognitive styles, particularly visual and auditory, which are prevalent among tourism students. Furthermore, gamification promotes the development of professional skills by simulating real-world situations in a game format. This approach reduces stress by creating a comfortable and enjoyable learning environment, ultimately helping students overcome language barriers and gain practical communication skills.

Old methods such as the method of conducting control are no longer suitable for modern youth for learning. And teachers have to look for trends or create them.

In the 21st century, globalization and rapid digitalization have transformed both education and tourism into dynamic sectors requiring innovative approaches for effective development. Foreign language proficiency has become a critical competence not only for academic purposes but also for professional growth in tourism, where communication skills directly influence service quality and customer satisfaction [1]. In this context, educational innovations such as gamification and art therapy have emerged as promising methodologies that can enhance learning motivation, creativity, and cognitive engagement among students [2, 3].

The tourism industry increasingly demands specialists capable of intercultural communication, problem-solving, and adaptability [4]. Traditional teaching methods often fail to fully meet these demands, highlighting the need for approaches that combine emotional involvement and interactive technologies [5, 6]. Gamification, defined as the use of game-based elements in non-game contexts, has demonstrated effectiveness in fostering motivation, critical thinking, and active learning across various disciplines [7, 8]. Similarly, art therapy techniques, originally applied in psychology, have been successfully integrated into educational settings, promoting self-expression, reducing anxiety, and stimulating creativity [9, 10].

Recent research in Kazakhstan and Central Asia emphasizes the importance of aligning foreign language teaching with the requirements of the tourism sector, where experiential and culturally enriched

learning methods are particularly valuable [11, 12]. UNESCO's initiatives on creative tourism also underline the role of innovative education in preserving cultural heritage and preparing future specialists [13, 14]. Moreover, digital technologies and gamified tools have proven to be efficient in engaging youth audiences, particularly within the framework of tourism education and professional training [15, 16].

Empirical studies conducted in different countries show that integrating gamification into language teaching improves vocabulary retention, communicative competence, and teamwork skills [17, 18]. At the same time, art-based methods help learners cope with stress, enhance empathy, and develop a deeper understanding of cultural contexts, which is essential in hospitality and tourism professions [19]. Combining these two approaches may therefore provide a comprehensive model that unites cognitive, emotional, and practical aspects of learning [20].

**The purpose of this research** is to design and evaluate a course that integrates art therapy and gamification techniques into foreign language teaching for students in the tourism sector.

**The main objectives of the study are:**

1. To analyze theoretical foundations and previous research on gamification and art therapy in education.
2. To identify the specific requirements of tourism education and its alignment with innovative teaching strategies.
3. To develop a model course that combines gamification and art therapy in foreign language learning.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of this integrated approach in enhancing students' cognitive and professional skills.

Thus, the study seeks to contribute to both the theoretical understanding and practical application of innovative pedagogies in tourism education, supporting the development of qualified specialists for the global labor market [21-25].

**Materials and methods.** Participants. The study was conducted at the School of Tourism of the International University of Tourism and Hospitality. A total of 35 undergraduate students participated, including 17 females and 18 males, all enrolled in the second and third years of study. Following best practices in applied educational research, a quasi-experimental design was employed, dividing participants into experimental and control groups. Such division allowed the researchers to compare the impact of gamification on language learning motivation and professional skill development, which

is widely used in similar studies on educational innovation.

**Procedure.** The intervention lasted for four weeks and was integrated into regular English language classes. Prior to the experimental phase, students from both groups completed a pre-test, designed to evaluate their baseline motivation and language skills. At the end of the intervention, a post-test was administered to assess potential changes, in line with methods employed in prior gamification and cognitive learning research.

Additionally, students completed a learning-style questionnaire adapted from Fleming's VARK model, which identifies visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic preferences. This diagnostic step was essential to align the gamification tasks with students' individual cognitive tendencies, consistent with approaches highlighted in multimedia learning and personalized education studies.

The experimental group engaged in gamified lessons, incorporating point systems, leaderboards, and role-playing scenarios relevant to tourism contexts. The control group followed a traditional curriculum without game elements. This procedure reflects widely applied designs in comparative gamification studies.

**Instruments.** The reliability of pre-test and post-test instruments was verified using Cronbach's Alpha, which remains a standard statistical measure for internal consistency in educational research. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), following protocols in earlier gamification-focused studies.

Beyond quantitative measures, qualitative tools were also implemented. The researchers conducted systematic classroom observations to record behavioral patterns such as participation, collaboration, and persistence when completing tasks, following protocols described in pedagogical psychology [16, p. 119]. Observation notes were compiled into structured forms, ensuring comparability and reliability of results.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants at the end of the intervention. The interview guide was designed to capture subjective experiences, perceived motivation, and opinions on the usefulness of gamified tasks for professional development. Similar qualitative approaches are common in research on tourism education and student engagement [17, p. 100].

**Data Analysis.** Quantitative data from pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed with descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, and reliability assessments via Cronbach's Alpha. These analyses

allowed the identification of statistically significant changes in motivation and performance, consistent with the methodology recommended in recent cognitive and gamification studies [19, p. 288].

For qualitative data, content analysis was applied to both observation notes and interview transcripts. Categories such as motivation, engagement, collaboration, and professional relevance were used to code the material. This combined approach of quantitative and qualitative analysis supports triangulation, which strengthens validity and reliability of findings [20, p. 16; 21, p. 130].

**Ethical Considerations.** All procedures complied with established ethical research guidelines. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary. Confidentiality was guaranteed, and anonymity of responses was maintained throughout the analysis. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, following international standards for

educational and psychological research ethics [2, p. 274; 6, p. 315].

**Results.** The results of the study confirm that the use of gamification elements in teaching foreign languages significantly increased students' motivation and contributed to the improvement of language skills. All the results of the questionnaire, pretest and posttest were analyzed and processed in the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program. This allowed the authors to conduct a detailed statistical analysis and identify differences between the experimental and control groups.

At the very beginning of the experiment, a VARK questionnaire was conducted to identify students' preferences in foreign language learning styles (Figure 1). The results showed that most students who participate in the experiment prefer visual and auditory perception of information. Table 1 below shows the results of the questionnaire.

Table 1 – Preferences of 1st-2nd year students in the field of tourism in studying foreign languages (Compiled by the authors based on the results of the VARK questionnaire)

Type of perception	Experimental group	Control group
Visual	42 per	38 per
Auditory	28 per	32 per
Readin/Writnig	18 per	17 per
Kinesthetic	12 per	13 per

The results of the VARK questionnaire confirmed the students' inclination towards visual and audio perception in general. This also corresponds to the trends in educational technologies. Multimedia and visual elements in foreign language teaching play an important role in increasing engagement and motivation. This opens up opportunities for using gamification with visual and audiovisual elements,

such as animations and sound effects. The results of the pre-test and post-test also showed a positive side in that gamification significantly influences the increase of students' motivation in studying language materials. The average motivation score before the introduction of the game was 2.9, and after it was 4.3. In the control group, the change was much smaller (Table 2).

Table 2 – Average motivation scores on a scale from 1 to 5, before and after the experiment (compiled by the authors based on experimental data)

Group	Pretest	Posttest
Experimental	2,9	4,3
Control	3,1	3,2

To analyze the statistical significance of changes in motivation in both groups, a paired t-test was conducted (Table 3).

Table 3 – Results of the t-test table for change in motivation (compiled by the authors based on experimental data)

Group	T-value	Degrees of freedom	P-value
Experimental	-9,52	25	<0,001
Control	-0,89	25	0,38

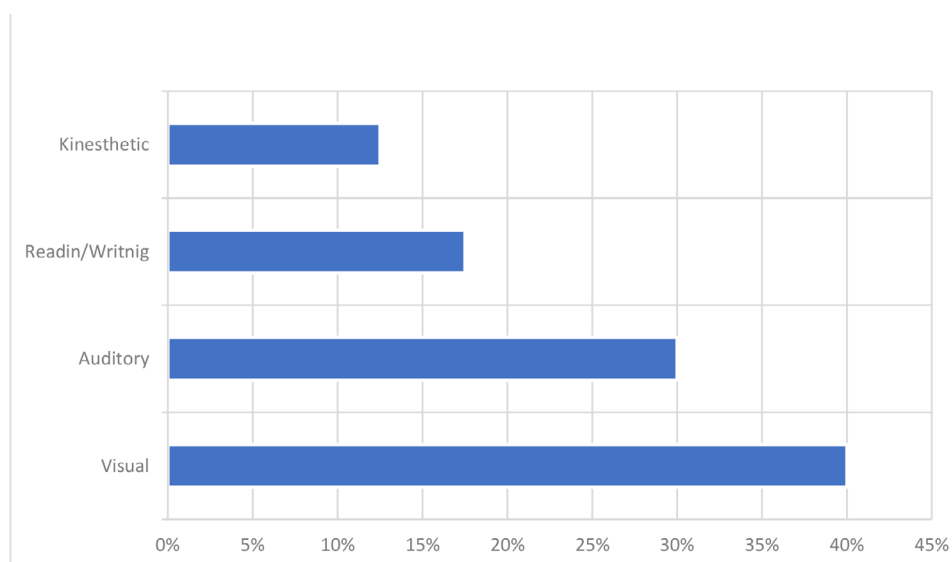


Figure 1 – Average results of both groups (compiled by the authors based on experimental data)

In the experimental group where lessons were conducted using the gamification method, the changes in the motivation level were statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The result confirms that gamification contributes to a significant increase in student motivation. And in the control group there were no changes ( $p = 0.38$ ). The results of the control group show that traditional methods of language teaching do not lead to significant results in motivation. This also confirms the data obtained from the interviews where tourism students noted

that game methods, especially visual ones, enhance their perception of the material. The results of the language skills tests also showed positive changes in the results of the experimental group. Students participating in the game process not only showed significantly greater interest in the lessons but also positive test results. After the introduction of game elements, the average score on the tests in the experimental group increased by 17.4 points, while in the control group the changes were only 3.4 points (Table 4).

Table 4 – Average motivation scores on a scale from 1 to 5, before and after the experiment (Compiled by the authors based on experimental data)

Group	Pretest	Posttest	Difference
Experimental	58,2	75,6	17,4
Control	30,1	63,4	3,4

A paired t-test was also conducted to analyze the impact of gamification on language development (Table 5).

Table 5 – Results of the T-test (Compiled by the authors based on experimental data)

Group	T-value	Degrees of freedom	P-value
Experimental	-1,14	25	<0,001
Control	-1,48	25	0,15

In the experimental group where lessons were conducted using game elements, the results of language skills development were high ( $p < 0.001$ ). In the control group, the improvements were minimal and statistically insignificant ( $p = 0.15$ ). Comparison of the results of the groups indicates the effectiveness of innovative methods compared to traditional approaches.

During the interview, tourism students shared positive feedback about gamification. Most noted that game elements made learning more fun and motivating. Below are some questions and their answers from the interview.

- What did you like most about the learning process using gamification?

The answers of most students: “Games made the lessons more fun and helped memorize new words faster”, “The competition in the group was fun, all my classmates were involved in the lesson, even the less active ones”.

- How did gamification affect your interest in learning a language?

Most students’ answers: “I became more interested in learning languages because games made lessons more interesting”, “I started studying more often because lessons became more interesting”, “Before, I didn’t even want to go to English lessons, now I would like to study more, I like lessons with game elements.”

- Are there any aspects that you would like to improve in the gamification process?

Most students’ answers: “I would like more game options”, “More interaction with visual tools”.

Based on the interview results, the authors of the study concluded that students appreciate the use of gamification and, in their opinion, game elements make lessons interesting.

The observation results were consistent with the interview results and students’ responses. During the observation, the authors noted that students from the experimental group actively participated in the game process and expressed high interest in the tasks. Unlike the experimental group, such high involvement was not observed in the control group. Thus, the observations confirmed that gamification significantly increases student activity in the class-

room. Students were more involved in the tasks, actively discussed them in groups. In the game forms, situations were visualized that could arise with tourists in the future, and in such tasks, students coped with tasks better and more creatively, which shows the benefits of gamification in preparing tourism students for languages.

**Discussion.** The findings provide clear evidence that gamification is an effective pedagogical tool in language education for tourism students. The VARK results demonstrated that students predominantly rely on visual and auditory modalities, which aligns with current research on the effectiveness of multimedia-based learning [7, p. 215; 12, p. 263]. Gamification, with its integration of visual elements, competition, and interactivity, is thus particularly suited for this audience.

This study makes a significant contribution to the theory of education by integrating the concept of gamification into foreign language learning for tourism students. One of the key theoretical contributions is the expansion of the theoretical foundation of gamification. The study provides empirical evidence confirming the effectiveness of gamification in enhancing students’ motivation and cognitive engagement, which was previously insufficiently explored in the context of tourism education.

Another important aspect is the development of a model for integrating game elements. The presented model combines gamification and multimedia technologies tailored to students’ cognitive styles, representing an innovative approach in educational practice. This model bridges the gap between traditional teaching methods and the dynamic needs of modern students.

The study also addresses gaps in motivation research. Previous studies often focused on general educational contexts without considering the specific needs of tourism students. By emphasizing the importance of language skills in tourism, this research highlights how gamification can be used to address motivational challenges specific to this field.

From a practical perspective, the study offers valuable tools and methodologies for educators. First, it provides tools for increasing motivation, such as game-based tasks and interactive activities

that make learning more engaging. Educators can use these tools to foster a more dynamic and enjoyable learning environment.

Second, the study introduces a methodology for adapting educational materials. By incorporating multimedia and gamified elements, educators can create personalized learning experiences that align with students' cognitive preferences, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of language teaching.

Lastly, the study contributes to the preparation of specialists for real-world tasks. Through gamified scenarios, students develop essential skills such as intercultural communication, problem-solving, and creative thinking. These skills are vital for their future careers in tourism, where interaction with international clients and multicultural environments is common.

This study addresses several gaps in existing research. First, it fills the lack of research on gamification in tourism education. Despite the growing popularity of gamification, its application in teaching tourism students has been underexplored. The study provides empirical data demonstrating its effectiveness in this specific context.

Second, the research tackles the insufficient adaptation of educational technologies to professional requirements. By showing how gamification can prepare students for real-world professional situations, the study bridges the gap between theoretical learning and practical application.

Finally, the study addresses the limited research on students' cognitive preferences. The analysis of VARK results confirms the need to adapt teaching methods to align with students' cognitive styles, which was previously overlooked in educational research.

The significant improvement in motivation and test performance in the experimental group confirms earlier conclusions of Hamari et al. and Plass et al., who highlighted the strong motivational effect of gamification. Similarly, Connolly et al. emphasized that serious games enhance both engagement and academic outcomes [10, p. 672; 11, p. 3027; 12, p. 279].

The qualitative findings (observations and interviews) further underline the motivational benefits of gamification, consistent with the arguments of Gee and Kim et al., who stress the role of game-based learning in fostering learner autonomy and deeper involvement. Students' requests for more diverse game elements also correspond to Deterding et al.'s observation that sustained interest requires variety in design [8, p. 179; 9, p. 11; 13, p. 138].

The study additionally supports the conclusions of Kazakhstani researchers, who noted the positive

impact of gamification and digital games on motivation and cognitive skills development in higher education. In the context of tourism education, where language proficiency and intercultural competence are vital, gamification provides not only increased motivation but also practical skill development, preparing students for real-world professional situations.

In summary, the results suggest that gamification is not merely a motivational tool but a comprehensive educational strategy that enhances learning outcomes, aligns with students' cognitive preferences, and develops key competencies required in tourism.

**Conclusions.** The role of gamification in teaching foreign languages, especially in the context of preparing students for work in the tourism industry, is an important and promising area. Research has shown that the introduction of game elements in teaching foreign languages increases students' motivation and helps improve their language skills. Students who participated in the experimental group using gamification demonstrated a significant improvement in motivation and academic performance compared to the control group, whose lessons were conducted using a more traditional method. These results show that game elements make learning more fun and effective. This leads to stimulation of learning the material in more interesting forms.

The data on students' preferences in perceiving information obtained using the VARK questionnaire showed that most students are inclined to visual and audiovisual perception. This opens up opportunities for using multimedia and visual elements in educational games. Gamification in teaching foreign languages contributes to the development of not only language skills, but also professional competencies, which are important factors for specialists in the tourism industry. In a field where interaction with international clients and a multicultural environment are key, language skills are essential. Gaming elements can help students develop these skills, making them more prepared for real-life challenges in the tourism industry.

To implement gamification, it is necessary to take into account the characteristics and needs of students. It is important that game tasks not only develop language skills, but also that they meet the professional requirements that students will face in the field of tourism, such as customer service skills, situational problem solving and creativity development. In this scenario, gamification can become not only an effective tool for improving language skills, but also an important element

of training specialists ready for the challenges of the globalized tourism industry. To introduce gamification into the educational process, teachers need to be prepared to create high-quality and exciting game elements. It is necessary to provide them with knowledge about gamification methods and the means of evaluating effective methods. Regular monitoring and evaluation of gamification results will help to adjust approaches. Periodic analysis of the methods will help maintain a high level of student engagement throughout the course. It is recommended to use digital platforms to create

interactive game tasks and virtual worlds. It is also worth developing a system of awards and rewards that will motivate students to actively participate in the learning process. The introduction of modern technologies such as leaderboards, virtual points and certificates and their combination with gamification can significantly increase students' interest in learning.

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