

## GAMIFIED DIGITAL TASKS TO IMPROVE EFL LEARNERS' MOTIVATION AND VOCABULARY RETENTION

Tahmina Mamatova Jamshid qizi

Teacher, Dept. of Foreign Languages and Humanities

Cyber University, State University

Gmail: [tmamatova82@gmail.com](mailto:tmamatova82@gmail.com)

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20226555>

### Abstract:

This article discusses the role of gamified digital tasks in improving EFL learners' motivation and vocabulary retention. Vocabulary learning is one of the most important aspects of foreign language development, yet many learners experience difficulties in remembering new words and using them actively in communication. Traditional vocabulary learning methods, such as memorizing word lists or translating isolated words, may not always keep students motivated or help them retain vocabulary for a long time. Gamified digital tasks offer a more engaging approach by using elements such as points, levels, badges, challenges, progress bars, leaderboards, and instant feedback. The article explores how gamification can make vocabulary learning more interactive, regular, and learner-centered. It argues that gamified tasks are most effective when they are connected with clear learning objectives and supported by teacher guidance. The article concludes that gamified digital vocabulary practice can increase learners' motivation, encourage regular revision, and improve long-term vocabulary retention in EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** *Gamification, digital tasks, vocabulary retention, EFL learners, motivation, English language teaching, learner engagement, digital learning.*

### INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a central part of English language learning. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners cannot understand texts, express ideas clearly, follow conversations, or participate in meaningful communication. Grammar is important, but vocabulary gives learners the actual words they need to communicate. For EFL learners, especially those who have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, vocabulary development requires regular practice, repetition, and meaningful use.

However, vocabulary learning is often difficult for students. Many learners memorize words before a test, but forget them shortly after. Some students write new words in notebooks but rarely return to revise them. Others know the translation of a word but cannot use it correctly in speaking or writing. Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge develops gradually through repeated exposure, active use, and meaningful context. This means that learners need more than one-time memorization; they need continuous and structured vocabulary practice.

One of the main challenges in vocabulary learning is motivation. Students may understand that vocabulary is important, but they do not always enjoy the process of learning and reviewing words. Traditional vocabulary exercises can become repetitive and passive. When learners are not emotionally engaged, they may study only when the teacher requires it or when an exam is approaching. Dörnyei (2001) states that motivation is one of the key factors influencing success in language learning, because motivated learners are more likely to make effort, continue practising, and take responsibility for their progress.

In recent years, gamification has become an increasingly popular approach in education. Gamification means using game-like elements in non-game learning contexts. These elements may include points, badges, levels, missions, rewards, progress tracking, challenges, and competition. Deterding et al. (2011) explain that gamification involves the use of game design elements in non-game contexts. In language learning, this does not mean turning every lesson into a game. Rather, it means using motivational features of games to make learning more engaging and goal-oriented.

Gamified digital tasks can be especially useful for vocabulary learning because vocabulary requires frequent revision. Digital tools can remind students to review words, provide short quizzes, give immediate feedback, and show progress. For example, a vocabulary app may give learners points for correct answers, move them to a higher level after completing a set, or show a progress bar that motivates them to continue. These features can make vocabulary practice feel less boring and more achievable.

One important advantage of gamification is that it gives learners a clear sense of progress. In traditional vocabulary learning, students may not always notice their improvement. They may feel that they are simply learning endless lists of words. In gamified tasks, progress becomes visible. Learners can see how many words they have mastered, how many levels they have completed, or how many days they have practised. This can create a feeling of achievement and encourage students to continue learning. Kapp (2012) argues that gamification can support learning by increasing engagement, feedback, and goal-oriented behavior.

Another benefit is immediate feedback. In many traditional classroom tasks, students complete an exercise and wait for the teacher to check it. In digital gamified tasks, learners can immediately see whether their answer is correct or incorrect. This quick feedback helps students notice mistakes and correct them while the task is still fresh in their memory. Harmer (2015) notes that feedback is important in language teaching because it helps learners understand their performance and improve their future language use.

Gamified vocabulary tasks can also support spaced repetition. Spaced repetition is a learning technique where students review words at planned intervals instead of trying to memorize many words at once. This method helps learners move vocabulary from short-term memory to long-term memory. Digital platforms can automatically organize revision and show difficult words more often. This is particularly useful for EFL learners because vocabulary retention depends on repeated exposure and active recall (Nation, 2001).

In addition to improving memory, gamified tasks can make learners more active. Instead of only reading a word and its translation, students may match words with pictures, complete sentences, choose the correct meaning, listen and identify words, or use words in short challenges. These tasks require learners to interact with vocabulary in different ways. Schmitt (2000) explains that vocabulary learning is stronger when learners engage with words through meaning, form, and use. Gamified digital tasks can provide this variety in an attractive and organized format.

Competition can also be a motivational element, but it should be used carefully. Some learners enjoy leaderboards and challenges because they create excitement and encourage effort. However, too much competition may discourage weaker students. For this reason, teachers should balance competitive and personal progress elements. For example, instead of

only ranking students against each other, the teacher can encourage learners to compete with their own previous results. This helps students focus on self-improvement rather than fear of comparison.

Gamification also supports learner autonomy. Learner autonomy means that students take more responsibility for their own learning. When students use digital vocabulary tools outside the classroom, they can practise at their own pace and choose when to review. Benson (2011) explains that autonomous learners are more active in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning. Gamified digital platforms can support this process by giving students personal progress data and encouraging regular study habits.

However, gamified learning should not be used only for entertainment. If the task is fun but does not support real learning, its educational value becomes weak. The teacher should make sure that every gamified activity has a clear purpose. For example, a quiz should not only give points; it should help students understand word meaning, pronunciation, spelling, or usage. The game elements should support the learning objective, not distract from it.

The teacher's role is therefore very important. Teachers should select appropriate digital tools, prepare vocabulary sets, explain task rules, and connect gamified practice with classroom activities. For example, students may practise vocabulary through a digital quiz at home, and then use the same words in classroom speaking tasks. This connection helps students move from recognition to active use. Without classroom follow-up, students may remember words only for the quiz but not use them in real communication.

Gamified vocabulary learning can be organized in different classroom formats. One simple method is a weekly vocabulary challenge. The teacher gives students a set of words related to the current unit, and students practise them through a digital platform during the week. At the end of the week, students complete a short communicative task using the words. This method combines digital practice with meaningful language use.

Another method is team-based vocabulary missions. Students work in small groups and complete different tasks, such as matching words with definitions, creating example sentences, explaining words without translation, or making short dialogues. Teams can receive points for accuracy, creativity, and cooperation. This type of activity encourages both vocabulary learning and communication.

Digital badges can also be useful. A badge is a small digital reward given for completing a task or reaching a goal. For example, students may receive badges for completing five vocabulary reviews, learning twenty new words, using new vocabulary in speaking, or improving their quiz score. Badges can make progress visible and give learners a sense of accomplishment. Werbach and Hunter (2012) note that game elements such as badges and levels can encourage participation when they are connected with meaningful goals.

Gamified digital tasks are especially relevant in modern higher education. Many students are familiar with mobile applications, online platforms, and digital games. For students at Cyber University, digital learning environments are already part of their academic experience. Therefore, using gamified digital vocabulary tasks can make English learning more connected to students' everyday habits and technological interests.

At the same time, there are some limitations. Not all students may have equal access to smartphones, internet, or suitable devices. Some learners may focus only on collecting points

rather than understanding vocabulary deeply. Others may become distracted by the game elements. For this reason, gamification should be used as a supplementary approach, not as a replacement for teacher explanation, classroom interaction, and meaningful communication.

Another limitation is that gamified tasks may sometimes emphasize recognition more than production. For example, students may choose the correct answer in a quiz but still be unable to use the word in a sentence. To solve this problem, teachers should include productive tasks after digital practice. Students should speak, write, explain, or role-play using the vocabulary they have learned. This helps transfer vocabulary from passive knowledge to active communication.

Gamified digital tasks can also help reduce anxiety. Some students feel uncomfortable when answering vocabulary questions in front of the class. Digital practice allows them to make mistakes privately and try again. This can increase confidence, especially among weaker learners. Deci and Ryan (2000) argue that learners are more motivated when they feel competent and in control of their learning. Gamified tools can support this feeling by giving students manageable challenges and visible progress.

In EFL classrooms, vocabulary learning should be both systematic and engaging. Students need structure, repetition, and teacher guidance, but they also need motivation and active participation. Gamified digital tasks provide a way to combine these needs. They can make vocabulary study more regular, interactive, and enjoyable while still supporting serious learning goals.

Overall, gamified digital tasks can play an important role in improving EFL learners' motivation and vocabulary retention. When carefully planned, they help students review vocabulary more often, receive immediate feedback, track their progress, and stay engaged in the learning process. However, the success of gamification depends on thoughtful teacher guidance, appropriate task design, and connection with real language use.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, vocabulary retention is one of the major challenges in EFL learning. Students often forget new words because they do not review them regularly or use them in meaningful contexts. Traditional vocabulary learning methods may not always provide enough motivation for continuous practice.

Gamified digital tasks can help address this problem by making vocabulary learning more engaging, structured, and interactive. Points, levels, badges, challenges, progress bars, and instant feedback can encourage students to practise more regularly. Digital tools can also support spaced repetition and help learners notice their progress over time.

However, gamification should not be used only for fun. It should be connected with clear learning objectives and supported by teacher guidance. Students should not only recognize words in quizzes, but also use them in speaking, writing, and real communication. When gamified digital practice is combined with classroom activities, it can improve both vocabulary retention and learner motivation.

The article concludes that gamified digital tasks are an effective supplementary method for English language teaching. They can help EFL learners become more active, motivated, and confident in vocabulary learning, especially in modern educational environments where students are already familiar with digital tools.

**Adabiyotlar, References, Литературы:**

1. Benson, P. (2011). *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
2. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.
3. Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L. (2011). From game design elements to gamefulness: Defining gamification. *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference*, 9–15.
4. Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
5. Harmer, J. (2015). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Pearson Education.
6. Kapp, K. M. (2012). *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction*. Pfeiffer.
7. Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge University Press.
8. Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
9. Werbach, K., & Hunter, D. (2012). *For the Win: How Game Thinking Can Revolutionize Your Business*. Wharton Digital Press.