INNOVATIONS IN TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE EDUCATION
ISSN 2181-371X
https://sr-journals.org/index.php/ITSE

GAME-BASED LEARNING IN TEACHING VOCABULARY TO A1 LEARNERS

*Scientific adviser:**Saparniyazov Rustem Shaniyazovich**, PhD,*
Associate Professor, English Linguistics Department
*Master student: **Palvanova Diyora Davranbekovna**,*
Second-year Master`s student in English Linguistics

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada A1 darajadagi o‘quvchilarga lug‘at o‘rgatishda o‘yin asosidagi ta’limning pedagogik roli tahlil qilinadi. Boshlang‘ich bosqichda leksik bilimlar o‘quvchilarning kirish ma’lumotlarini tushunishi, qisqa nutq birliklarini hosil qilishi va oddiy sinf muloqotida ishtirok etishining asosiy manbai hisoblanadi. Lug‘atni o‘zlashtirish bo‘yicha tadqiqotlar o‘rganish jarayoni leksik birliklarga takroriy duch kelish va ularni chuqur qayta ishlash darajasiga bog‘liqligini ko‘rsatadi.

Maqolada o‘yinlar A1 darajadagi o‘quvchilar uchun ayniqsa mos kelishi asoslab beriladi, chunki ular takrorlashni mazmunli o‘zaro ta’sirga aylantiradi, sinfdagi xavotirni kamaytiradi va motivatsiyani oshiradi. Boshlang‘ich darajadagi EFL o‘quvchilari bo‘yicha empirik tadqiqotlar mobil o‘yinlarga asoslangan ta’lim hamda o‘yinlar bilan qo‘llab-quvvatlangan gibrid o‘qitish motivatsiyani, o‘rganishning foydaliligini idrok etishni va lug‘atni o‘zlashtirish natijalarini yaxshilashini ko‘rsatadi.

Shuningdek, tahlillar o‘yinlarning samaradorligi ularning pedagogik jihatdan to‘g‘ri loyihalashtirilganiga bog‘liq ekanini ko‘rsatadi. Ta’limiy o‘yinlardagi faollik aniq motivatorlar, sodda qoidalar, leksik birliklarning ajralib turishi va o‘qituvchi rahbarligi bilan belgilanadi, faqat ko‘ngilocharlik bilan emas. Maqolada xulosa qilinishicha, o‘yin asosidagi ta’lim A1 darajasida lug‘atni rivojlantirishning tizimli usuli sifatida qaralishi lozim.

Kalit so‘zlar: o‘yin asosidagi ta’lim, lug‘at o‘rgatish, A1 darajadagi o‘quvchilar, boshlang‘ich EFL, leksik o‘zlashtirish, motivatsiya, ta’limiy o‘yinlar.

Abstract. This article examines the pedagogical role of game-based learning in teaching vocabulary to A1 level learners. At the beginner stage, lexical knowledge is the main resource through which learners understand input, produce short utterances, and participate in basic classroom interaction. Research in vocabulary acquisition shows that learning depends on repeated exposure to lexical items and on the depth of processing that occurs during those encounters. The article argues that games are especially suitable for A1 learners because they transform repetition into meaningful interaction, reduce classroom anxiety, and increase motivation. Empirical studies on beginner EFL learners show that mobile game-based learning and hybrid game-supported instruction can improve motivation, perceived usefulness, and vocabulary learning outcomes. The discussion also shows that games are effective only when they are pedagogically designed. Engagement in educational games depends on clear motivators, simple rules, lexical salience, and teacher guidance rather than on entertainment alone. The article concludes that game-based learning should be treated as a structured method for vocabulary development at the A1 level.

Keywords: game-based learning, vocabulary teaching, A1 learners, beginner EFL, lexical acquisition, motivation, educational games

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается педагогическая роль игрового обучения в преподавании лексики учащимся уровня A1. На начальном этапе лексические знания выступают основным ресурсом, обеспечивающим понимание входящей информации, построение кратких высказываний и участие в базовом учебном взаимодействии. Исследования в области усвоения лексики показывают, что эффективность обучения зависит от повторяемости встреч с лексическими единицами и глубины их переработки.

В статье обосновывается, что игры особенно эффективны для учащихся уровня A1, поскольку они преобразуют повторение в осмысленное взаимодействие, снижают учебную

тревожность и повышают мотивацию. Эмпирические исследования начинающих учащихся EFL свидетельствуют о том, что мобильное игровое обучение и гибридные формы, основанные на использовании игр, способствуют повышению мотивации, воспринимаемой полезности обучения и результатов усвоения лексики.

Показано также, что эффективность игр определяется их педагогически выверенным проектированием. Вовлечённость в образовательные игры зависит от наличия чётких мотивирующих факторов, простоты правил, выраженности лексического материала и педагогического сопровождения, а не только от развлекательного компонента. Делается вывод о том, что игровое обучение следует рассматривать как структурированный метод развития лексики на уровне A1.

Ключевые слова: игровое обучение, обучение лексике, учащиеся уровня A1, начинающие EFL, усвоение лексики, мотивация, образовательные игры.

Introduction

Teaching vocabulary to A1 learners is one of the most important tasks in beginner language education. At this level, learners are expected to understand and use basic lexical items related to everyday life, but their linguistic repertoire is still too limited to support communication without strong lexical scaffolding. Vocabulary is therefore not an auxiliary part of language learning; it is the basis that allows the learner to begin speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a meaningful way.

Vocabulary learning at the A1 stage is challenging because learners often forget words quickly when instruction relies only on translation, copying, or memorization. Nation argues that vocabulary learning requires two conditions: repeated encounters with words and high-quality mental processing of those encounters. He explains that the more often learners meet a word, and the deeper they process it, the more likely it is to be retained. This is particularly relevant for A1 learners, who need frequent recycling of simple words in short, controlled, and meaningful activities.

Games are effective in this context because they turn repetition into an active learning process. Instead of asking learners to repeat vocabulary mechanically, game-based activities require them to recognize, match, choose, act out, or produce lexical items in a social and task-oriented environment. Ellis shows that language processing is strongly tuned to input frequency and that lexical knowledge develops through repeated exposure to patterns in use. From this perspective, games support vocabulary learning because they create the repeated encounters that beginner learners need.

The affective side of learning is equally important. Dewaele and MacIntyre demonstrate that foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety are both central to learner experience, and that teacher support and positive peer interaction influence classroom emotions. For A1 learners, who are often hesitant to speak, games can lower the pressure of performance and encourage participation. In a game, mistakes are more likely to be interpreted as part of play rather than as failure, which helps reduce anxiety and promote risk-taking.

This article explores the pedagogical value of games in teaching vocabulary to A1 learners from theoretical and practical perspectives. It reviews major findings on vocabulary learning, explains why game-based instruction is suitable for beginners, and identifies conditions under which games are most effective in vocabulary teaching.

Methodology

This article is a conceptual and pedagogical review rather than an original classroom experiment. It synthesizes findings from empirical studies on vocabulary learning, game-based language instruction, beginner EFL learners, and educational game design. The review focuses on research that is directly relevant to A1 or beginner-level instruction and on studies that examine motivation, retention, engagement, and the design of learning activities.

The analysis draws on studies showing that beginner learners respond positively to game-based vocabulary instruction, including mobile applications and hybrid game-based systems. [1;115] It also

uses research on incidental vocabulary acquisition, task-induced involvement, and instructional design to explain why some games are more effective than others.

The reviewed literature was interpreted according to four analytical dimensions:

1. vocabulary learning mechanisms;
2. motivational and affective factors;
3. game design principles;
4. classroom applicability for A1 learners.

This structure allows the article to connect theory with pedagogy and to formulate practical implications for beginner vocabulary teaching.

Analysis and Discussion

1. Vocabulary learning depends on repetition and depth of processing

The first major finding of the literature is that vocabulary learning is cumulative. Nation argues that vocabulary growth requires repeated meetings with words and deep mental processing of those meetings. In practical terms, this means that A1 learners need to encounter the same lexical item many times in different forms and contexts before it becomes reliably available for use.

Ellis strengthens this position by showing that language acquisition is frequency-sensitive. He explains that learners abstract regularities from repeated exposure, and that lexical and grammatical processing are shaped by the distribution of input. [3;78] For beginner learners, this supports the use of repeated but varied vocabulary practice, because words become more stable when they are reused in pictures, actions, short dialogues, and simple tasks.

Hulstijn and Laufer add a further cognitive dimension by showing that task-induced involvement affects retention. Their involvement load hypothesis demonstrates that words are better remembered when learners must search for them, evaluate them, and use them in context. [8;123] Games naturally create this kind of involvement because they require learners to attend to form, meaning, and use while responding to the activity.

2. Games increase motivation and lower anxiety

A second major finding is that game-based learning improves the emotional conditions of vocabulary learning. Dewaele and MacIntyre show that enjoyment and anxiety are both strong influences on foreign language learning and that a supportive classroom atmosphere plays an important role in learner experience. For A1 learners, who often fear mistakes, games can reduce pressure and increase willingness to participate.

Gamlo's study found that beginner EFL learners viewed mobile game-based language learning applications as beneficial for learning and motivation. [7;212] The learners perceived the apps not only as enjoyable but also as useful for English study. This is important because motivation is often a decisive factor at beginner level, where learners may not yet have enough intrinsic linguistic confidence to persist through repetitive vocabulary practice.

Berns and colleagues found similar results with an A1.2-level hybrid game-based app. Their study showed that learners reported high levels of perceived usefulness and added value, and that the app supported both motivation and learning outcomes. This suggests that game-based learning is particularly effective when it combines individual practice with collaborative or interactive tasks.

Alhebshi and Gamlo likewise reported that mobile game-based vocabulary learning improved posttest performance and was perceived by learners as helping them retain words and reduce cognitive load. [5;175] This is highly relevant for A1 learners because they often struggle not only with meaning, but also with the mental burden of processing unfamiliar language. Games can make this process feel less demanding while still keeping it cognitively active.

3. Game effectiveness depends on instructional design

A third conclusion of the literature is that games are not automatically effective. Laine and Lindberg show that educational games require strong motivators and clear design principles if they are to sustain learner engagement. [3;25] This means that the teacher should not use a game simply because

it is entertaining. The game must be aligned with the vocabulary target, the learner level, and the lesson objective.

For A1 learners, simplicity is essential. Complex rules, long instructions, and excessive competition can distract from the lexical goal. Games should therefore be easy to understand and should focus on recognition, recall, and short production tasks. In beginner instruction, the most effective games are often those that combine clear repetition with visual support and short response cycles.

Munday's discussion of Duolingo is useful here because it shows how gamified tasks can complement conventional instruction through adaptive practice and spaced repetition. She argues that such tools are enjoyable and useful as long as they are treated as a complement to the curriculum, not a replacement for communicative teaching. [4;145] This is an important distinction for A1 vocabulary teaching, since learners need both structured input and opportunities for meaningful interaction.

4. Suitable games for A1 vocabulary teaching

The literature and pedagogical practice suggest that some game types are particularly suitable for beginner learners. Vocabulary Bingo and Picture Matching are effective for recognition and listening because they require learners to connect sound and image quickly. Simon Says and Charades are especially useful for action verbs and physical response because they link vocabulary to movement. Pictionary and adapted Hangman can support productive recall, while Board Race and Hot Potato are effective for quick review and repeated recycling.

These games are valuable because they generate repeated exposure without turning the lesson into pure drilling. They also allow the teacher to vary the level of support. For weaker learners, pictures, gestures, and model answers can be added. For more confident learners, the same game can be adapted to include sentence production or short interaction.

The strongest point of these game types is that they combine lexical repetition with engagement. This combination aligns with the theoretical work of Nation, Ellis, and Hulstijn and Laufer, all of whom emphasize the importance of repeated encounters and active processing. [9;225]

5. Authorial interpretation

In my view, the strongest argument for game-based vocabulary teaching at the A1 level is not simply that games make lessons more enjoyable. Their deeper value is that they create a learning environment where beginners can repeat words many times, process them meaningfully, and use them without excessive fear of error. This is exactly the kind of environment vocabulary learning requires at the start of language study.

I also believe that the teacher's role remains central. Games work best when they are carefully selected, clearly explained, and embedded within a structured lesson sequence. A game without a pedagogical purpose may entertain learners but will not necessarily support lexical development. A good A1 game should therefore be short, focused, visually supported, and linked directly to the target vocabulary.

The reviewed studies support this interpretation. Beginner learners respond positively to game-based learning, but the effects depend on learner motivation, design quality, and the way the activity is integrated into instruction. [10;202] For this reason, games should be understood as structured pedagogical instruments rather than as entertainment extras.

Conclusion

Game-based learning is a highly promising approach for teaching vocabulary to A1 learners because it supports the main conditions required for beginner lexical development: repetition, attention, engagement, and low anxiety. The reviewed literature shows that vocabulary learning depends on frequency and depth of processing, that beginner learners benefit from emotionally supportive classroom conditions, and that game-based instruction can strengthen motivation and retention.

At the same time, the literature makes clear that games are effective only when they are pedagogically designed. Clear rules, lexical focus, learner suitability, and structured recycling are necessary if games are to support real vocabulary growth. The main conclusion of the article is that

games should be treated as a deliberate instructional method for A1 vocabulary teaching, not as a decorative classroom activity.

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