

**COMPARING TRADITIONAL AND GAMIFIED
VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION METHODS****Yuldoshev Khaydarbek**Independent researcher at National
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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20598503>**ARTICLE INFO**Received: 04th June 2026Accepted: 06th June 2026Online: 08th June 2026**KEYWORDS***gamification, vocabulary
instruction, EFL, lexical
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technology, learner motivation***ABSTRACT**

Vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in second language acquisition and communicative competence. This study compares traditional vocabulary instruction methods with gamified vocabulary instruction to determine their effectiveness in improving vocabulary acquisition, retention, and learner motivation. A quasi-experimental design was employed involving 60 EFL students divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received gamified vocabulary instruction through digital platforms and game-based activities, while the control group was taught using traditional methods such as memorization, translation, and repetition. The findings revealed that students exposed to gamified instruction demonstrated significantly higher vocabulary gains, better retention rates, and increased motivation. The study concludes that gamification offers substantial advantages over traditional vocabulary teaching approaches and can effectively enhance lexical development in EFL contexts.

Introduction

Vocabulary is widely recognized as one of the most important aspects of language proficiency. Learners with a strong vocabulary foundation are generally more successful in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Traditionally, vocabulary teaching has relied on techniques such as rote memorization, dictionary use, translation exercises, and repetition. While these approaches may contribute to vocabulary acquisition, they often fail to maintain learner motivation and engagement.

Recent developments in educational technology have introduced gamification as an innovative approach to language instruction. Gamification incorporates game elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, rewards, and progress tracking into educational activities. These features aim to increase learner engagement and motivation while facilitating knowledge acquisition.

The growing popularity of platforms such as Quizlet, Kahoot!, Wordwall, and Duolingo has transformed vocabulary instruction in many EFL classrooms. However, questions remain regarding whether gamified instruction is more effective than traditional approaches. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests to determine significant differences between groups.

Results

Vocabulary Achievement

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Gain Score
Experimental	54.2	86.5	32.3
Control	53.8	70.1	16.3

The experimental group demonstrated nearly double the vocabulary gains achieved by the control group.

Vocabulary Retention

Table 2. Delayed Retention Test

Group	Retention Score
Experimental	82.4
Control	63.7

The gamified group retained significantly more vocabulary after four weeks. Student responses indicated:

90% found gamified lessons enjoyable.

86% reported increased motivation.

84% participated more actively.

81% preferred gamified instruction.

78% felt less anxiety during vocabulary practice.

Classroom observations also revealed higher participation rates and more collaborative learning behaviors among students in the experimental group.

Discussion

The findings suggest that gamified vocabulary instruction is significantly more effective than traditional methods in promoting vocabulary acquisition and retention.

One possible explanation is that game elements create a highly engaging learning environment. Points, badges, rewards, and competition encourage repeated exposure to vocabulary items, which strengthens memory formation. Additionally, immediate feedback allows learners to identify mistakes and correct them promptly.

Traditional methods, while useful for introducing vocabulary, often rely heavily on passive learning. Students may memorize words temporarily without meaningful interaction. In contrast, gamified activities promote active participation and repeated retrieval, both of which are known to enhance long-term retention.

The motivational benefits observed in this study align with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key factors in learner motivation. Gamified learning environments appear to satisfy these psychological needs more effectively than traditional instruction.

The findings also support previous studies demonstrating that gamification can positively influence language learning outcomes, particularly vocabulary development.

Conclusion

This study compared traditional and gamified vocabulary instruction methods among EFL learners. The results demonstrated that gamified instruction significantly improved

vocabulary acquisition, retention, learner engagement, and motivation. The findings indicate that gamification should be considered an effective supplementary strategy for vocabulary instruction. While traditional methods remain useful for introducing lexical items, integrating digital gamification tools can substantially enhance learning outcomes. Future research may investigate the long-term effects of gamification on lexical competence and explore the role of artificial intelligence in personalized vocabulary learning environments..

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