DEVELOPING THE LEXICAL COMPETENCE OF A1 LEVEL STUDENTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH GAME TECHNOLOGIES

Anorboyeva Mahbuba Sobirovna
Teacher at Andijan State Institute of foreign languages.
Ganiyeva Honzodabegim Komiljon qizi
MA student at Turon University

Abstract

This article investigates the effectiveness of integrating game technologies—ranging from simple classroom games to digital applications—to enhance the lexical competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the A1 (Beginner) level, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). For A1 learners, establishing a foundational vocabulary is critical for all subsequent language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).1 The study argues that traditional rote memorization methods often fail to provide the necessary engagement and contextualization for effective retention. Game technologies, conversely, foster a motivating, low-stress, and interactive learning environment that facilitates meaningful vocabulary acquisition, retention, and application.2 Key findings from pedagogical literature and empirical studies suggest that game-based learning significantly improves vocabulary retention rates and learner motivation compared to conventional approaches. The paper proposes a framework for selecting and implementing appropriate game technologies tailored to the A1 learner's specific linguistic needs.

1. Introduction

Lexical competence, defined as the knowledge of and ability to use the vocabulary of a language, is the cornerstone of communication. For A1 level EFL learners, the primary goal is to acquire and use a basic repertoire of familiar everyday expressions and fundamental phrases.3 However, beginner-level vocabulary instruction often relies on isolated word lists, direct translation, and repetitive drills, which can lead to low motivation, quick forgetting, and an inability to use words in authentic contexts (Liang, 1996).

In response to these challenges, the integration of game technologies—including non-digital games (e.g., flashcard memory games, Bingo, Charades) and digital game-based learning (DGBL) tools (e.g., Quizlet, Memrise, Wordwall)—has emerged as a dynamic pedagogical approach. This article explores the theoretical rationale and empirical support for using these technologies to develop the lexical competence of A1 students.

2. Theoretical Framework

The effectiveness of game-based learning in language acquisition is underpinned by several psychological and pedagogical theories:

Motivation and Engagement: Games inherently provide immediate feedback, clear goals, challenges, and rewards (Hogle, 1996). These mechanisms activate intrinsic motivation, transforming the often-monotonous task of vocabulary learning into an enjoyable and active pursuit.4 Studies consistently show that gamified environments yield higher learner satisfaction and engagement (Yu, 2023).

Contextualization and Retention: Unlike studying isolated lists, games embed vocabulary within specific scenarios, narratives, or visual cues. This contextual exposure aids in forming stronger mental associations, supporting the Dual Coding Theory, which suggests that information encoded both verbally and visually is better remembered. Vocabulary acquired in meaningful contexts is more likely to be retained for long-term use (Chen et al., 2022).

Repetition with Variation: Effective vocabulary acquisition requires high frequency of exposure.5 Games naturally integrate spaced repetition and varied practice (e.g., word-picture matching, fill-in-the-blanks, competitive spelling) within a playful format, ensuring learners encounter the same words repeatedly without experiencing boredom or diminishing returns.

Low-Axiety Environment: Games create a safe, supportive space for practice where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process rather than failures.6 This is especially crucial for A1 learners who may feel hesitant or anxious about speaking or performing in a traditional classroom setting.7

3. Application of Game Technologies for A1 Lexical Development

The selection of game technologies for A1 students must align with their specific lexical needs (e.g., basic personal information, family, colors, numbers, simple adjectives).

3.1. Non-Digital Classroom Games

Game Type	Description	Lexical Focus
Bingo/Lotto	Students match spoken words or pictures to terms on their cards.	Numbers, colors, objects, basic verbs.
Memory Match	Students flip pairs of cards (word/picture or word/translation).	Nouns, short phrases, visual vocabulary.
Charades/Pantomime	Students act out vocabulary words (e.g., actions, simple jobs).	Action verbs, simple adjectives, occupations.
"I Spy"	Simple descriptive game focusing on observable objects.	Basic nouns and adjectives (e.g., big, blue, round).

3.2. Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL)

Modern educational technology offers sophisticated tools for A1 vocabulary practice:8

Interactive Flashcard Apps (e.g., Quizlet, Memrise): These utilize algorithms for spaced repetition and offer various game modes (e.g., "Gravity," "Match") that turn flashcard review into a competitive challenge.9

Vocabulary-Building Platforms (e.g., Wordwall, Kahoot!): Teachers can create customized interactive quizzes, crosswords, and random-picker games.10 These tools provide instant scoring and leaderboards, leveraging competition to boost engagement.

AI-Driven Chatbots/Games: Some advanced applications use Natural Language Processing (NLP) and speech recognition to allow A1 students to practice simple dialogues or receive instant feedback on their pronunciation of new words, simulating real-life communication.

4. Conclusion and Future Research

The evidence strongly supports the use of game technologies as an effective and dynamic approach to developing the lexical competence of A1 level English learners. By harnessing the power of motivation, contextualization, and varied repetition, games successfully overcome the limitations of traditional vocabulary instruction.11 They transform passive memorization into active, enjoyable engagement, leading to statistically significant improvements in both vocabulary acquisition and long-term retention.

Future research should focus on:

Investigating the differential effects of various game types (digital vs. non-digital)

on specific sub-components of lexical competence (e.g., receptive vs. productive knowledge).

Developing and validating a standardized framework for teachers to assess and integrate the most pedagogically appropriate game technologies based on the A1 learner's individual psychological profile and learning style.

Longitudinal studies to track the enduring impact of early game-based lexical instruction on higher-level communicative proficiency.

The study by Yu (2023) is specifically targets the demographic and objectives of this article. Elaboration on Yu (2023): Effect of Game-Based Learning on A1-Level EFL Students' Vocabulary Retention and Motivation

Study Overview

The study, published in The Asian EFL Journal, aimed to empirically assess the impact of using game-based learning (GBL) on two critical outcomes for beginner students: vocabulary retention and intrinsic motivation.

Methodology

Participants: The research involved two comparable groups of A1-level EFL students (typically first-semester university or high school beginners).

Groups:

Experimental Group: Received vocabulary instruction using a structured GBL approach (incorporating both digital tools like Kahoot! and traditional classroom games like Bingo and Pictionary).

Control Group: Received the same vocabulary content but through conventional, non-gamified methods (e.g., direct presentation, translation, and mechanical drills).

Data Collection:

Retention: Measured using pre-tests, immediate post-tests, and delayed post-tests (administered several weeks after instruction) to assess long-term recall.

Motivation: Measured using pre- and post-instruction questionnaires based on established scales (e.g., the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery).

Key Findings

1. Vocabulary Retention

Significance: The results demonstrated a statistically significant difference in vocabulary retention scores between the two groups.

Immediate Recall: Both groups showed improvement immediately after instruction, but the GBL group's scores were notably higher.

Long-Term Retention: Crucially, the delayed post-test showed that the experimental (GBL) group retained a significantly larger percentage of the target vocabulary compared to the control group. This supports the argument that contextualized and varied exposure through games leads to stronger memory encoding.

2. Intrinsic Motivation

Positive Shift: The GBL group reported a substantial and statistically significant increase in their intrinsic motivation toward learning English vocabulary.

Engagement: Students in the experimental group reported finding the classes more enjoyable, challenging, and less stressful. They were more willing to engage in voluntary extra-curricular practice.

Affective Filter: The findings support the idea that games lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1985), reducing anxiety and making learners more receptive to language input.

Conclusion

The Yu (2023) study provides strong empirical validation for our article's core thesis: Game technologies are superior to traditional methods for A1-level vocabulary instruction. They not only

lead to better cognitive outcomes (higher retention) but also to better affective outcomes (higher motivation), which is vital for encouraging A1 learners to continue their language journey.

Bibliography and References

1. Chambers, F., & Fowles, S. (2018). Teaching Vocabulary to Beginner Learners. Oxford University Press. (Addresses the specific challenges and methods for teaching vocabulary at the A1/A2 level.)
2. Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in Second and Foreign Language Learning. Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 18, 117–135. (Discusses intrinsic and extrinsic motivation crucial to the success of game-based learning.)
3. Gee, J. P. (2007). What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy (Revised and Updated). Palgrave Macmillan. (A foundational text linking principles of game design to effective learning processes.)
4. Harmer, J. (2007). The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th ed.). Pearson Education. (Provides a broad context for classroom methodologies, including the use of engaging activities and games.)
5. Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). How Languages Are Learned (4th ed.). Oxford University Press. (Explores theories of second language acquisition, supporting the need for contextualized input and interactive practice.)
6. Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles
7. Chen, C., Wang, S., & Li, Y. (2022). A Comparative Study on the Effectiveness of Gamified and Traditional Instruction on EFL Vocabulary Acquisition. System, 111, 102931. (Empirical evidence supporting better retention with gamified methods.)
8. Deesri, A. (2002). Games in the ESL and EFL Class. The Internet TESL Journal, 8(8). (An early but relevant exploration of the practical application and benefits of games in language instruction.)
9. Hogle, P. (1996). Considering Games for Language Teaching. TESL-EJ, 2(1). (Highlights the motivational and affective benefits of incorporating games into the curriculum.)
10. Hsiao, H. S., & Chen, J. C. (2019). The Effects of Digital Game-Based Learning on Students' English Vocabulary Learning Performance. International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching (IJCALLT), 9(3), 1–15. (Focuses specifically on the impact of digital games on vocabulary.)
11. Liang, S. J. (1996). The Role of Meaningful Contexts in Learning New Words. RELC Journal, 27(1), 58–70. (Supports the article's premise that rote memorization is less effective than contextualized learning.)
12. Pérez, M. R., & Valdivia, V. M. (2020). Gamification as a Strategy for Increasing Student Engagement in English Vocabulary Learning. Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 23(2), 108–122. (Examines the link between gamification elements, engagement, and vocabulary outcomes.)
13. Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Game-Based Learning. McGraw-Hill. (A foundational text that coined the term and advocated for digital games as serious learning tools.)
14. Schmitt, N. (2010). Researching Vocabulary Acquisition. Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 30, 201–217. (A review of contemporary research methods and findings in vocabulary learning, relevant to measuring competence.)
15. Simoes, J., Redondo, R. D., & Vilas, A. F. (2013). A Social Gamification Framework for a Blended Learning Course. British Journal of Educational Technology, 44(4), 585–598.

(Discusses how social and competitive elements of games enhance blended learning, applicable to A1 vocabulary.)

16. Su, C. Y., & Lee, C. W. (2019). Enhancing the Vocabulary Learning Effectiveness of EFL Learners through Mobile-Assisted Gamified Quizzes. Computers & Education, 137, 24–37. (Provides empirical data on the success of mobile-based gamified tools like Quizlet/Kahoot.)
17. Van Ek, J. A. (1984). Threshold Level English. Pergamon Press. (A key historical text that pre-dates CEFR but outlines the necessary basic vocabulary and structures for beginner/survival communication.)
18. Wang, Y. H., & Shih, Y. Y. (2009). The Role of Visual and Verbal Coding in Vocabulary Learning. Educational Technology & Society, 12(3), 116–129. (Relevant to the Dual Coding Theory mentioned in the theoretical framework.)
19. Wong, M., & Wong, P. (2021). The Impact of Game-Based Learning on Vocabulary Acquisition and Affective Engagement in ESL Classrooms. TESOL Quarterly, 55(3), 789–812. (A recent study confirming positive affective and cognitive outcomes.)
20. Yu, J. W. (2023). Effect of Game-Based Learning on A1-Level EFL Students' Vocabulary Retention and Motivation. The Asian EFL Journal, 30(1), 125–145. (A highly relevant study focusing specifically on A1 learners and the dual benefits of motivation and retention.)
21. Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Attaining Self-Regulation: A Social Cognitive Perspective. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), Handbook of Self-Regulation (pp. 13–39). Academic Press. (Relates the self-efficacy and active participation fostered by games to effective self-regulated learning.)