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Gamification and Motivation in TFL

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Abstract

This study explores the role of AI gamification in motivating students in Teaching Foreign Languages (TFL) within the Uzbek context. AI tools offer personalized learning, instant feedback, and engaging features that enhance motivation and learner autonomy (Kolegova & Levina, 2024). However, they cannot fully replicate human interaction, emotional nuance, or cultural understanding essential for communicative competence (Dugošija, 2024). A semi-structured student interview protocol is proposed to gather local data, aiming to develop a balanced framework that integrates AI-driven engagement with authentic human-mediated learning.

Keywords: *practical benefits of AI, gamification, motivation, efficiency, cultural nuances, communicative competence.*

In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of Technology for Foreign Language Learning (TFL), offering learners personalized feedback, adaptive exercises, and gamified experiences that make language acquisition more engaging (Kolegova & Levina, 2024). AI-powered tools such as Duolingo, ChatGPT, and ELSA Speak have transformed traditional classroom practices into interactive digital environments where learning feels more like a game than a task (Kolegova & Levina, 2024).

However, while these innovations increase efficiency and motivation, they also raise concerns about the decline of authentic human interaction in language education. AI lacks emotional depth and cultural sensitivity, which are essential for developing communicative competence and social understanding (Dugošija, 2024). In the Uzbek TFL context, where many students rely on online self-study platforms, this issue becomes particularly significant—motivation may improve through AI's interactive features, but genuine communication skills may not (Dugošija, 2024). Meanwhile, gamified AI environments can enhance engagement and autonomy, suggesting that interactivity may sustain learners' interest even in the absence of direct teacher involvement (Kolegova & Levina, 2024).

This article argues that a student-centered interview protocol can reveal how AI's gamified and

interactive features influence motivation and compensate for reduced human interaction in TFL. By gathering local data from Uzbek learners, the study aims to propose a framework that balances AI-driven engagement (Kolegova & Levina, 2024) with the need for human communicative connection (Dugošija, 2024), ensuring that technology serves as a supplement—not a substitute—for interpersonal learning.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been widely recognized for its potential to enhance motivation and engagement in foreign language learning. Kolegova and Levina (2024) argue that gamified AI features—such as adaptive exercises, instant feedback, and reward systems—promote learner autonomy, increase time-on-task, and sustain long-term interest in language study. By providing personalized challenges, AI can accommodate different proficiency levels, ensuring that students remain engaged without feeling overwhelmed or demotivated. These interactive features transform routine language exercises into dynamic learning experiences, making practice both enjoyable and effective. As Kolegova and Levina (2024) note, the integration of gamification within AI platforms can result in measurable improvements in learner persistence and self-directed study habits.

Despite these advantages, AI's focus on interactivity and gamification may not fully compensate for the lack of authentic human interaction. Dugošija (2024) emphasizes that AI lacks the ability to convey emotional nuance, cultural context, and social cues—elements that are crucial for developing communicative competence in TFL. While students may be motivated to engage with AI platforms, they risk missing the collaborative, interpersonal aspects of language learning that are typically mediated by teachers or peer interactions. The tension, therefore, lies between AI's efficiency and engagement benefits (K&L, 2024) and the limitations in fostering authentic human-mediated communication (Dugošija, 2024, p. 5). This gap raises a critical question: can gamified AI truly substitute for human interaction, or does it require complementary strategies to ensure holistic language development?

This contradiction highlights the need for localized, student-centered research to understand how learners perceive AI's interactive features relative to human interaction. In the Uzbek TFL context, where AI tools are increasingly used for self-study, a semi-structured interview protocol can collect primary data on student motivation, engagement, and perceived communication gaps. The findings will guide the development of a framework that balances AI-driven engagement with the essential human dimension of language learning.

Presentation of Evidence (Interview Protocol)

The artifact for this study is a semi-structured student interview protocol designed to collect local data on how AI's gamified features influence motivation and whether they compensate for the lack of human interaction in TFL. The protocol is organized into the following sections:

Age, language level, and previous experience with AI-assisted language learning.
Purpose: contextualize responses and ensure participants feel comfortable.
Experience with AI Tools
Which AI-based language learning applications do you use?
How often do you use these apps?
Which gamified features (points, levels, badges, quizzes) do you use most?
Purpose: identify student familiarity with AI and gamified features.
Motivation and Engagement
Does using AI make learning English more enjoyable? Why or why not?
Which features keep you motivated to practice regularly?
Purpose: measure the motivational impact of gamified AI (Kolegova & Levina, 2024).
Comparison with Human Interaction
Do you feel that learning with AI can replace interaction with teachers or classmates?
What aspects of communication or cultural understanding are missing in AI-assisted learning?
Purpose: identify gaps in human-mediated learning as highlighted by Dugošija (2024).
Challenges and Suggestions
Have you experienced any difficulties using AI for language learning?
What could improve your learning experience with AI while maintaining social interaction?
Purpose: gather student perspectives to inform a balanced framework.
Closing
Open-ended invitation for participants to add observations about AI learning experiences.

Human-Mediated Analysis (Justification)

The design of this interview protocol directly addresses the critical contradiction identified in the literature: while gamified AI features increase motivation and engagement (Kolegova & Levina, 2024), they cannot fully replace the emotional, social, and cultural aspects of human interaction in language learning (Dugošija, 2024).

K&L (2024) support: Sections 2 and 3 explore students' engagement with gamified AI, capturing benefits such as motivation, autonomy, and persistence in language practice.

Dugošija (2024) supports: Sections 4 and 5 examine students' perceptions of missing human interaction, including communication nuances and cultural understanding, which AI cannot replicate.

Uzbek TFL context: By gathering primary data locally, the protocol ensures that the proposed framework reflects real experiences of students, rather than theoretical assumptions.

The artifact resolves the contradiction by providing evidence of both AI's benefits and limitations. Insights from the interviews will inform a balanced framework, which integrates AI-driven engagement with structured opportunities for human interaction, ensuring that learners gain both motivational and communicative competencies.

This study argues that a student-centered interview protocol can reveal how AI's gamified features influence motivation while identifying gaps in human interaction in TFL contexts. By focusing on Uzbek learners, the research balances K&L's emphasis on engagement with Dugošija's concerns about cultural and communicative limitations.

Implications:

TFL instructors can use AI gamification to boost motivation but should integrate structured opportunities for teacher and peer interaction.

Insights from the interviews can inform curriculum design that combines AI efficiency with authentic communication, ensuring learners develop both linguistic skills and social competence.

Language centers in Uzbekistan could adopt blended approaches, using AI for practice while reserving human interaction for high-stakes or cultural learning activities.

Future Research:

Quantitative follow-up studies measuring whether engagement from gamified AI translates into measurable improvements in speaking and listening skills.

Exploration of how AI can be adapted to provide more culturally sensitive feedback in TFL, reducing the reliance on teacher mediation for nuanced communication.

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