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EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN GAME-BASED LEARNING: EXPLORING MEME-INSPIRED DIDACTIC ARCADES

Introduction. Game-based learning (GBL) has demonstrated potential for increasing learner motivation, attention, and retention. However, one of the least systematically addressed dimensions in GBL research is the role of emotional engagement, particularly how affective responses to humor, surprise, or relatability shape cognitive outcomes. By linking linguistic dimensions (lexis, grammar, phonetics) with meme-inspired interactions and tailoring recommendations based on age, interests, and emotional profiles, the project investigates how humor-driven engagement can transform traditional second-language acquisition. Findings from related literature and the design process indicate that emotional resonance is not an incidental byproduct but a central driver of effective learning in game-based environments.

The intersection of education and digital entertainment has become a focal point for pedagogical innovation. While games in education are valued for interactivity and motivation, the role of emotion in such contexts has received comparatively less attention. Emotional engagement is critical in language learning, where affective states influence willingness to communicate, risk-taking, and memory retention. The *Fillion_arcades* project is a prototype web-based system that combines memes an inherently affective and culturally situated medium with structured didactic tasks. Teachers can upload, curate, and recommend meme-based games to learners, and the system uses AI to update materials annually with new cultural artifacts. This creates a dynamic environment for learners accustomed to fast-evolving digital cultures.

Main part. Game-based learning has been shown to improve intrinsic motivation, persistence, and problem-solving. According to Self-Determination Theory [1], games can foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness factors associated with deeper learning. Yet emotional responses to in-game events are often treated as secondary outcomes rather than primary levers. Affective engagement in learning environments denotes the degree to which learners experience positive emotional states such as joy, curiosity, humor, or belonging. Neuroscientific evidence suggests emotionally salient stimuli are more likely to be encoded and recalled. Therefore, integrating humor and culturally relevant content into GBL may amplify cognitive gains. Memes are digital units of culture that rely on humor, irony, and shared context. Their viral spread shows capacity to elicit emotional responses quickly and universally. As multimodal artifacts (image + text + cultural reference), memes can catalyze linguistic and cultural discussion.

The *Fillion_arcades* system was developed to explore memes, emotional engagement, and language learning. Its design rests on four principles [2]:

1. **Customization by Linguistic Aspect:** Teachers and learners can focus on lexis, grammar, or phonetics to align with curricular goals.
2. **Audience Adaptation:** A short survey captures learner age, interests, and preferred emotional tone, allowing the system to recommend games suited to different profiles.
3. **AI-driven Meme Updating:** The backend integrates external APIs (e.g., Reddit, Giphy) to fetch emerging memes annually. AI moderation filters ensure only age-appropriate, culturally safe memes are retained.
4. **Gamified Arcade Interface:** The site uses an arcade aesthetic to enhance immersion. Technically, the system uses a Node.js backend with JWT authentication, a React frontend with an admin panel, and recommendation algorithms that mix heuristic scoring with embedding-based semantic similarity.

Embedding memes into language tasks leverages humor to lower affective filters. Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis suggests negative emotions inhibit input processing, whereas humor and curiosity facilitate acquisition. The survey ensures emotional tone resonates with learners’ generational references. For younger learners, playful memes foster relatability; for older learners, nostalgic or explanatory memes may be prioritized. Teachers can ana-

lyze learners' responses to recommended games and iteratively refine the corpus. Emotional resonance becomes a measurable and adjustable dimension rather than a byproduct.

Integrating memes into GBL can increase motivation by bridging leisure and learning, keep content dynamic through AI-driven updates, and personalize emotional fit via survey and embeddings [3]. Memes often rely on irony or taboo themes, requiring careful moderation. Their ephemerality means content can become outdated quickly. Equity concerns arise when learners are not immersed in the same digital cultures. Given memes' unregulated circulation, safeguards are essential: ensure proper attribution, moderate for offensive content, and avoid reinforcing stereotypes.

Conclusion. The Fillion_arcades project illustrates how emotional engagement can be intentionally integrated into game-based learning via meme-driven design. By situating humor and cultural relevance at the center of linguistic practice, affect emerges as a primary mechanism for learning. Future work should empirically measure learning outcomes across diverse cohorts and examine how emotional tones (humor, irony, nostalgia, empathy) influence acquisition and retention.

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SIGNIFICANCE OF ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN THE LECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY

Introduction. The aim of this article is to substantiate the need to study engagement strategies to improve learning lecture materials by university students. Lectures are a fundamental mode of instruction in higher education, designed to impart knowledge efficiently to large groups of students. However, the traditional lecture format often faces criticism for passive student involvement and limited interaction, which can negatively affect motivation and learning outcomes.

In the context of Generation Z's difficulty in systematically perceiving educational material presented in a traditional lecture format, studying strategies to engage undergraduate students in assimilating lecture content becomes especially important. Moreover, due to the inclusion of English-language lecture courses in the curricula of the first and second levels of higher education in the Republic of Belarus, the real needs of specialists and researchers, as well as the increasing demands of the international, intercultural professional and scientific space, this problem becomes even more complex and urgent [1, p. 119].

A notable modern trend in pedagogical and linguodidactic research, is the increased integration of educational technology [2]. This development responds to the evolving landscape of higher education, where technology-enhanced learning environments facilitate more interactive, learner-centered approaches. The use of digital tools, multimedia resources, and online platforms supports the implementation of engagement strategies, offering innovative ways to promote active participation and deeper thinking.

Main part. In the Breakcold dictionary, the definition of engagement strategies is defined as carefully planned approaches aimed at attracting and maintaining the interest, involvement, and loyalty of a target audience to create meaningful and effective interactions [3]. The study by Modern Campus describes engagement strategies as methods and techniques designed to increase active student participation in the learning process through collaborative tasks, interactive activities, and technologies that support motivation and comprehension [4]. According to Xello, engagement strategies consist of systematic actions aimed at actively involving participants by capturing their attention, emotional investment, and cognitive engagement, which is especially crucial for ensuring ongoing and sustained interaction [5]. In the realm of digital marketing, Adogy defines engagement strategies as deliberate efforts to develop relevant and compelling content that encourages users to interact and strengthens brand loyalty [6].

In education, engagement reflects the active involvement that fosters motivation and learning outcomes. To substantiate the need for engagement strategies, a survey was conducted among university students to assess their level of involvement in learning lecture materials. The analysis of the survey data revealed that many students experience a lack of active participation and motivation in traditional lecture settings. These findings underscore the necessity of implementing engagement strategies to enhance student participation and cognitive involvement.