

*The role of simulation games in preparing students for communicative  
foreign language teaching*

*O papel dos jogos de simulação na preparação dos alunos para o ensino comunicativo de  
línguas estrangeiras*

*El papel de los juegos de simulación en la preparación de los estudiantes para la enseñanza  
comunicativa de lenguas extranjeras*

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**Abstract:** *Traditional language learning methods can often be tedious, leading to alienation and reduced motivation. We aimed to determine the impact of simulation games on developing students' communication skills when learning a foreign language. The following practical methods were used in the study: observation, expert evaluation, survey, and testing. The results, which we are excited to share, demonstrate the effectiveness of using simulation games compared to traditional teaching methods. The students of the experimental group (EG), through their hard work and the innovative approach of simulation games, improved their English level to B2 (R=1.76) compared to the students of the control group - CG (R=0.57). Also, the difference between the test results of the CG and the EG was in Reading Comprehension/Composition (22%), Listening (15%) and Interview (46%). Using simulation games influenced the improvement of communication skills, perception of information, and the desire for self-learning. Confidence in communication increased to 81% compared to the CG (50%). These results inspire hope for the future of foreign language education, underscoring the critical role of simulation games and providing valuable information about developing and implementing simulation scenarios to create situational real-life conditions for effective English language learning.*

**Keywords:** *Anxiety. Communicative competencies. Foreign language training. Modelling. Simulation training.*

**Resumo:** Os métodos tradicionais de aprendizagem de línguas podem muitas vezes ser enfadonhos, levando à alienação e à redução da motivação. Nosso objetivo foi determinar o impacto dos jogos de simulação no desenvolvimento das habilidades de comunicação dos alunos ao aprender uma língua estrangeira. Os seguintes métodos práticos foram utilizados no estudo: observação, avaliação de especialistas, pesquisa e testes. Os resultados

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demonstram a eficácia da utilização de jogos de simulação em comparação com os métodos de ensino tradicionais. Os alunos do grupo experimental (GE), através do seu trabalho árduo e da abordagem inovadora dos jogos de simulação, melhoraram o seu nível de inglês para B2 ( $R=1,76$ ) em comparação com os alunos do grupo de controlo - GC ( $R=0,57$ ). Além disso, a diferença entre os resultados dos testes do GC e do GE foi em Compreensão/Composição de Leitura (22%), Audição (15%) e Entrevista (46%). O uso de jogos de simulação influenciou na melhoria das habilidades de comunicação, na percepção de informações e no desejo de autoaprendizagem. Estes resultados trazem esperança para o futuro do ensino de línguas estrangeiras, destacando o papel crítico dos jogos de simulação e fornecendo informações valiosas sobre a concepção e implementação de cenários de simulação.

**Palavras-chave:** Ansiedade. Competências comunicativas. Modelagem. Treinamento de simulação. Treinamento em línguas estrangeiras.

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**Resumen:** Los métodos tradicionales de aprendizaje de idiomas a menudo pueden resultar aburridos y provocar alienación y reducción de la motivación. Nuestro objetivo fue determinar el impacto de los juegos de simulación en el desarrollo de las habilidades comunicativas de los estudiantes al aprender una lengua extranjera. En el estudio se utilizaron los siguientes métodos prácticos: observación, evaluación de expertos, investigación y pruebas. Los resultados demuestran la eficacia del uso de juegos de simulación en comparación con los métodos de enseñanza tradicionales. Los estudiantes del grupo experimental (GE), a través de su arduo trabajo y el enfoque innovador de los juegos de simulación, mejoraron su nivel de inglés a B2 ( $R=1,76$ ) en comparación con los estudiantes del grupo de control - CG ( $R=0,57$ ). Además, la diferencia entre los resultados de las pruebas CG y EG fue en comprensión/composición lectora (22%), comprensión auditiva (15%) y entrevista (46%). El uso de juegos de simulación influyó en la mejora de las habilidades comunicativas, la percepción de la información y el deseo de autoaprendizaje. Estos resultados brindan esperanza para el futuro del aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, destacando el papel fundamental de los juegos de simulación.

**Palabras clave:** Ansiedad. Competencias comunicativas. Entrenamiento de simulación. Formación en lenguas extranjeras. Modelado.

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## 1 INTRODUÇÃO

### 1.1 RELEVANCE

In the modern world, society is experiencing the inherent influence of innovation processes in all spheres of life. The latest technologies and transnational changes require modernising traditional educational approaches and implementing new learning strategies. The expansion of international relations with the European Union requires Ukraine to take an innovative approach and modernise all aspects of public life in line with European standards. Innovative changes are also taking place in the education sector, driven by integration processes and the need to meet the high standards and level of development of global education systems.

The competency-based approach to foreign language education, within the framework of state policy on the development of English in higher education, is focused on

forming a personality that is a critical thinker, capable of self-development, and fluent in communication at professional and academic levels. This implies the ability to interact in a multicultural environment, using various communication strategies for foreign language communication (Gjokolli, Gashi-Berisha, 2023).

Ukraine's education system strives to improve students' preparation in line with global needs. Due to this, there is a tendency to modernise foreign language teaching in higher education. To achieve this goal, teachers must study and implement the latest technologies and teaching methods, which in turn help improve the communicative potential of foreign language training. To do this, students need to have practical communication skills, namely the ability to reflect and identify communicative features in different linguistic cultures, as well as the ability to use appropriate linguistic and cultural communication strategies correctly (Nazarova, 2023).

## 1.2 UNDER-EXPLORED ISSUES

Undoubtedly, the exponential growth of those wishing to use modern technologies has renewed interest in studying the impact of digital games on language learning. Even though this field of research has expanded dramatically in recent years, modern researchers state that publications in this area are significantly limited because the introduction of technology into the educational process is a relatively new area (Peterson, 2023; Thomas, Yamazaki, 2021). Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that studying the effectiveness of technology use in the educational process and identifying its role in individual components of linguistic training is a relevant area that requires more attention.

## 1.3 AIM

Thus, the study aims to determine the role of using simulation games within the communicative method of teaching foreign languages.

## 1.4 OBJECTIVES/QUESTIONS

- a) To conduct a pedagogical experiment on students' foreign language skills before the experiment.
- b) Choose simulation games corresponding to the student's educational programme.
- c) To introduce simulation games to the experimental group.
- d) To test students' foreign language skills after completing the training programme in combination with simulation games.
- e) To evaluate changes in the level of anxiety while learning and communicating in a foreign language after studying under the experimental programme

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign language proficiency is an increasingly important issue for the young in the context of globalisation, as it is an essential tool for successful communication and professional development (Chernyakova, 2022). Given this, using simulation games to teach foreign

languages for communicative learning is a particularly relevant area for study and research.

Technology is becoming an increasingly common tool for learning and improving foreign language proficiency. The research study (Bykova, Lanskaya, Perova, Remaeva, Voinova, 2021) focused on the effectiveness of using modern technologies to enhance writing in foreign language learning. For this study, research articles were analysed to examine the impact of technology on students' writing abilities, namely their linguistic and pragmatic competencies. However, the researchers did not investigate other professional competencies necessary for learning a foreign language.

Today, a relevant technological tool is a digital game, which is not only entertainment but has also become a learning tool in the educational process (Mukaromah, Mutoharoh, 2019; Wilson, Supian, Sung, 2023). In addition, digital game-based learning has improved technology-enhanced foreign language learning in the twenty-first century, as noted by some studies in this area (Hwang, Chen, Chu, Chuang, Juan, Chen, 2023; Xu, Chen, Eutsler, Geng, Kogut 2020). Hence, it can be stated that digital game-based learning can be an effective method in the context of foreign language learning.

Using digital games in learning is a new instructional approach that can bring potential to foreign language learning and communication skills as it improves interaction between learners (Abdeen, Albiladi, 2021). Demirbilek, Talan and Alzouebi (2022). Building a game-based curriculum has the potential to bring an enjoyable and engaging learning experience to language learners. To support the previous point, Huang, Loerts and Steinkrauss (2022) noted that learning a foreign language improves cognitive abilities, namely the ability to synthesise, analyse and evaluate information when learning through games.

Simulation games are one tool of game-based learning (Shukla, Duthade, Deshbhratar, 2023). They allow you to model situations of future professional activity and the foreign language environment (Wong, Hussain, Saare, 2022; Yang, Hsieh, Wong, Hong, Lai, 2022).

Such technological capabilities can contribute to better developing foreign language communication skills based on professionally oriented vocabulary.

Researchers (Wong, Hussain, Saare, 2022) surveyed and analysed students' perceptions of how stimulating games affect learning performance in higher education. However, the study has limitations because the researchers focused only on students' feelings about using simulation games without examining the effectiveness of the application in improving students' knowledge and performance.

The researchers (Zelenska, Tymchenko, 2022) investigated the use of simulation modelling technologies and role-playing games in the foreign language training of future specialists. The study covered the stages of game model implementation and its importance for forming future specialists' professional competence in the context of foreign language training. The authors proposed the basic requirements for role-playing games and provided an example of a game. However, no empirical analysis was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the game model in real-life training. Peterson (2023) analysed how using digital simulation games in language learning can improve students' linguistic knowledge. The scholar noted that it is advisable to do further research on whether simulation games are an effective means of improving learning outcomes.

Anxiety is an important issue when learning and speaking a foreign language, ultimately affecting performance and confidence in oral presentations (Soran, Altun, Majeed, 2022). Digital games can promote active learning and reduce anxiety among foreign language

learners. Researchers (Yang, Zhang, Lin, 2022; Stavroulia, Makri-Botsari, Psycharis, Kekkeris, 2016) have noted that game-based learning methods reduce tension, fear, nervousness and anxiety among educators. The researchers developed an online simulation game in an experimental setting to create a virtual learning environment for learning English vocabulary. The study found that the level of fear of public speaking related to communication anxiety was much lower than before the experiment.

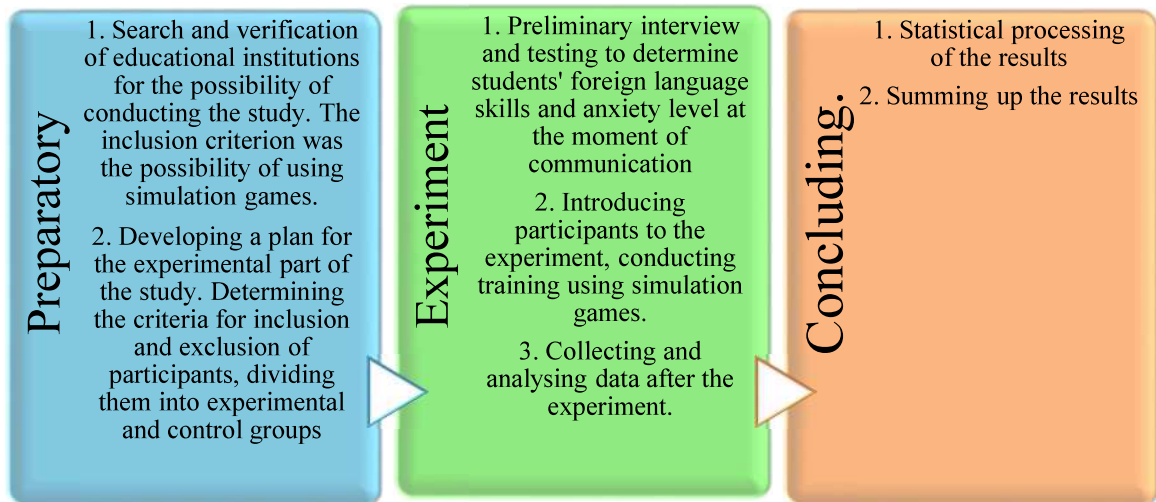
Based on the results of the analysis, it can be noted that the chosen area of research is very relevant to today's conditions. Game-based teaching methods help to improve students' communication skills while learning a foreign language. Simulation games were chosen as an innovative tool for implementation in the educational process, as they can enhance students' communication skills, immerse them in a foreign language environment and reduce stress during the educational process.

## 3 METHODS

### 3.1 THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The pilot study was conducted in August-January 2023/2024 based on higher education institutions: Educational and Research Institute of International Education of the National Technical University "Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute"; Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University; National University "Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic". All stages of the study were consistent and met the requirements for the experiment. The relevant stages of the study are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1- The sequence of the study



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

Based on the experiment's aim and objectives experts, a curriculum was formulated and implemented using simulation games (Table 1).

Table 1- Programme for introducing simulation games in the experimental group

Period	Topic	Number of hours	Aim
September-October	"Language tour"	10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of language skills</li> <li>2. Practical use of the language</li> <li>3. Study of cultural aspects</li> <li>4. Development of communication skills</li> <li>5. Preparation for real-life events</li> </ol>
October-November	"Business negotiations"	10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training in negotiation skills</li> <li>2. Mastering negotiation strategies and tactics</li> <li>3. Development of empathy and communication skills</li> <li>4. Conflict resolution</li> <li>5. Preparation for real business situations</li> </ol>
November	"Travelling abroad"	5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training in cultural adaptation</li> <li>2. Development of intercultural communication</li> <li>3. Formation of a tolerant approach</li> <li>4. Stimulating creativity and innovation</li> <li>5. Preparing for authentic international trips</li> </ol>
November-December	"Cultural event"	7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training in organisational skills</li> <li>2. Development of creativity and innovation</li> <li>3. Study of cultural heritage</li> <li>4. Development of communication skills</li> <li>5. Stimulating intercultural dialogue</li> </ol>
December	"A working day in a foreign company"	3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training in intercultural communication</li> <li>2. Development of intercultural competence</li> <li>3. Introduction to the work process in a foreign company</li> <li>4. Learning business communication</li> <li>5. Developing skills in an international environment</li> </ol>

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

### 3.2 SAMPLING

The study participants were 3-4-year undergraduate students as their acquired foreign language skills are suitable for the aim of the research. Their age ranged from 18 to 21 years. The snowball sampling method was used to select the students. The students who met the criteria (n=215) were asked to fill in a form inviting them to participate in the experiment. Everyone who wanted to participate had to give the completed form to the teacher. After analysing the forms, the total number of students expressed a desire to participate in the experiment was 198 people. Still, at the beginning of the experimental part of the study, five students went abroad, and three switched to distance learning, which contradicts the requirements of the experiment. Finally, the total number of students who participated in the study from the beginning to the end was (n=190). The sample size is large and evenly distributed by gender (M=50.5%; F=49.5%). During the interviews, it was found that the level of English proficiency in the sample was B1 or B2, which is 78% and 12% of the sample, respectively. The sample's lowest level of English proficiency is A1 and A2- 10%. For the sake of the purity of the experiment, it was decided to divide the sample into two groups: the control group (from now on referred to as CG), n=95, and the experimental group (from now on referred to as EG), n=95. The degree of anxiety at the moment of communication in English was also assessed. The assessment was carried out using the Likert scale:

- 1- Not expressed
- 2- Weakly expressed
- 3- Characteristically expressed
- 4- Strongly expressed
- 5- All signs are detected

After the interview, the students were divided into equal groups based on gender, language, and psychological criteria. The CG consisted of 95 students, and the EG of 95 students, respectively.

The expert group that observed the students during the experiment consisted of 7 people. Their work experience ranged from 10 to 35 years. The specialist group comprised teachers from the following departments: the Department of Ukrainian Language, the Department of English Language Practice and Methods of Teaching, the Faculty of Ukrainian and Foreign Philology, the Department of Foreign Languages for Professional Communication, and the Faculty of International Tourism and Economics.

### 3.3 METHODS

The following methods were used in the experimental part of the study:

Foreign language proficiency testing. The IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and KET (Key English Test) tests were chosen to identify basic communication skills in a foreign language. The test consists of three parts: Reading Comprehension / Composition, Listening, and Interview (Council Of Europe, 2023).

A survey was conducted to determine the degree of anxiety students experience when learning and communicating in a foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz, Cope, 1991). Students were asked to answer the questions (Yes/No) for diagnostic purposes.

Observation. During the experiment, a group of experts observed and evaluated personal changes in the learning and understanding of a foreign language by students of both groups. The evaluation criteria were divided into the following blocks: 1. Increased motivation; 2. Improved skills; 3. Understanding and perception; 4. Self-sufficiency; 5. Motivation for self-learning.

Statistical methods of analysis (Pearson correlation, Cronbach's alpha)

### 3.4 ETHICAL CRITERIA

The study complied with all ethical principles. Before the study began, the participants were familiar with the aim and objectives of the experiment.



#### 4 RESULTS

Before the introduction of simulation games, students of the control and experimental groups were offered to take an in-

ternational test to determine their level of English proficiency. For a comprehensive analysis, students took the IELTS and KET tests. The results are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2 Test results of the control and experimental groups on the level of foreign language proficiency before and after the experiment (according to the IELTS methodology)

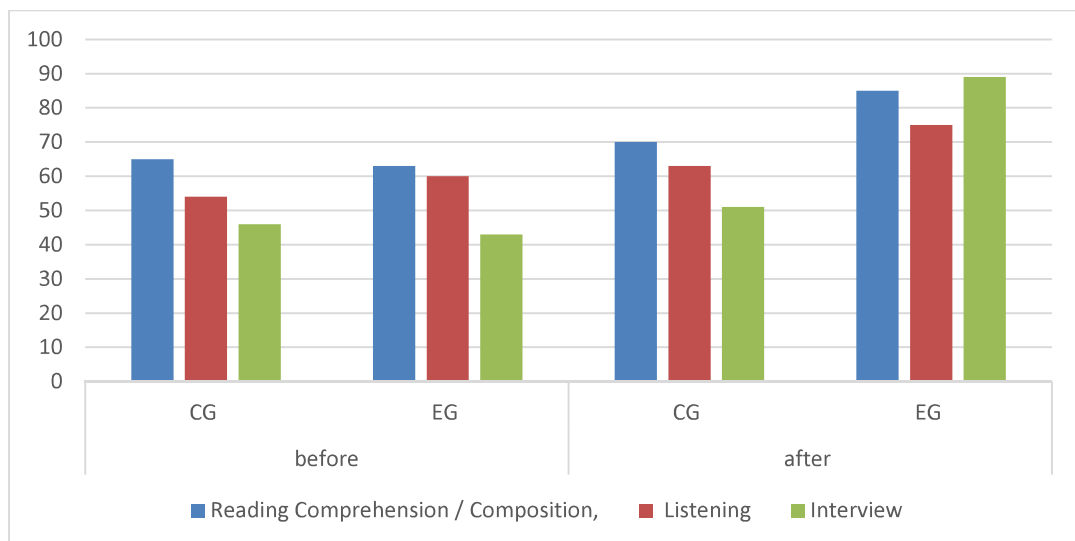
The calculated values	Before			After		
	Arithmetic mean	midpoint	Standard deviation	Arithmetic mean	midpoint	Standard deviation
	$\mu$	Me	$\sigma$	$\mu$	Me	$\sigma$
CG	4,53	4,3	3,3	5,1	4,9	3,3
EG	4,55	4,3	2,04	6,31	6,15	2,04

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

Table 3 shows that the test results of the CG students remained almost unchanged (R=0.57), and, according to Council of Europe (2023), the EG students were able to improve their English proficiency to B2, which meets the curriculum

requirements. The difference in the results obtained by EG before and after the experiment is slightly better than in CG (R=1.76). This result may be because the experimental methodology was more effective than the traditional one.

Figure 2. -The results of the control and experimental groups' testing of foreign language proficiency before and after the experiment (according to the KET methodology)



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

The test results in Figure 3 show that students in the EG obtained better results than those in the CG after completing the experimental programme. The difference between indicators such as Reading Comprehension/Composition (22%), Listening (15%), and Interview (46%) indicates that the communication skills of EG students are sufficiently developed compared to CG students. We believe such re-

sults are because the experimental group had enough practical classes to form the necessary components proposed in the testing.

The expert group also observed the students of both groups during the classes throughout the experiment. Every month, the experts collect and evaluate data to understand the trend of foreign language competencies (Table 3).

Table 3- Results of the expert group’s observations during the experiment (%)

Criteria	September		October		November		December	
	CG	EG	CG	EG	CG	EG	CG	EG
Increase in motivation	55	89	60	87	59	85	55	80
Improved skills	60	63	63	65	62	64	65	71
Understanding and perception	45	55	47	62	46	65	47	75
Self-sufficiency	40	76	41	78	45	77	50	81
Motivation for self-study	66	80	55	85	53	70	40	75

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

The results show that students’ motivation levels in the EG gradually decreased. In our opinion, this is because, at the beginning of the experiment, the level of willingness was higher due to personal interest in the new methodology and the desire to participate. The percentage of motivated students in the CG was linear over the semester. Such blocks as improving listening skills and comprehension improved almost equally in the EG and

CG. However, the number of students in the EG who became more confident in learning and communicating in a foreign language and interested in self-study increased to 81% compared to the CG (50%).

A survey was conducted before and after the experiment to analyse the degree of students’ anxiety about learning a foreign language. The answers of the EG and CG students are presented in Table 4.

Table 4-Results of the survey on anxiety before and after the experiment

Question.	CG		EG	
	Before	After	Before	After
1. I never feel entirely confident when I speak in a foreign language class.	58	57	79	25
2. I worry about language mistakes in communication.	90	46	72	38
3. I tremble when I know that I will be asked to speak in a foreign language	57	54	92	27
4. I am afraid when I don’t understand what the teacher says in a foreign language.	98	49	58	55
5. It would be better for me to attend more foreign language classes.	93	55	85	41



6. At a foreign language lesson, I think about things that have nothing to do with the lesson.	83	53	89	29
7. I think other students understand the language better than I do.	82	58	61	40
8. I usually struggle to concentrate on the task during tests.	63	50	99	43
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation.	66	56	83	40
10. I worry about the consequences of failing in class.	83	53	99	34
11. I don't understand why some people don't have any problems speaking a foreign language when completing a task.	76	58	78	37
12. I can get so nervous in a language lesson that I forget familiar words.	95	54	70	46
13. I am afraid of answering voluntarily in class.	57	53	61	53
14. I would be nervous speaking in a foreign language with native speakers.	92	56	57	25
15. I get upset when the teacher corrects me.	81	60	64	39
16. Even if I am well-prepared for the lesson, I am very anxious.	79	45	82	26
17. I often don't want to come to foreign language classes because I am not confident.	80	45	68	30
18. I feel confident when I speak a foreign language.	59	50	58	70
19. I worry that the language teacher will correct every mistake I make.	85	53	67	47
20. I fear other students will laugh at me when I speak a foreign language.	92	65	85	55
21. The more I prepare for the language test, the more confused and anxious I am.	91	56	96	45

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

The results of the pre- and post-experiment surveys provide information about the impact of simulation games on reducing students' anxiety while learning a foreign language. A lot of students feel a lack of self-confidence when communicating in a foreign language. After using simulation games, the percentage of such students decreased to 25%, although in the

EG, the number of students increased (79%). In addition, the number of students in the EG decreased with the following feelings: trepidation before public speaking, reduced concentration, and excitement when communicating with native speakers. Also, their confidence in communicating in a foreign language has increased. Unfortunately, the number of CG stu-

dents with anxiety only increased at the end of the experiment.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The study shows positive changes in improving educational opportunities in foreign language learning. Compared to the CG, students of the EG were able to improve their English language proficiency to B2 after communicative learning using simulation games. Also, participating in group games motivated students to learn a foreign language independently. This may be because they were interested in preparing for conversations that simulated real-life situations (Hope, Grant, Rogers, King, 2022). It is worth noting that simulation games had a significant impact on reducing anxiety during learning. After the experiment, students in the EG became more confident in their communication, reduced their public speaking trepidation and anxiety, and improved their concentration. Similar results were obtained in (Pina, Bordonaba-Juste, 2018).

Other researchers (Wong, Hussain, Saare, 2022) stated that most students surveyed who participated in the study indicated that simulation games are a convenient tool for learning in higher education. The EG students became more active in group scenarios and were more motivated to learn a foreign language independently. Therefore, the classes were more enjoyable for both students and teachers.

Researchers (Yang, Hsieh, Wong, Hong, Lai, 2022) found that after using the simulation game, students improved their performance in learning English vocabulary. In the study, EG students were also able to improve the communication skills necessary for learning English, such as reading comprehension/composition, listening, and Interviewing. Also, it was proved that the results obtained were better than those in the group that studied according to the traditional educational programme. This indicates the effectiveness of the chosen methodology. The results also confirm the findings of (Zelenska, Tymchenko, 2022), who have found that situational modelling technologies in the foreign language

training of future specialists are an effective tool for improving students' communication skills (Liontas, 2022). It has been stated that the role-based learning model helps to quickly set the social and subject direction of future professional activity.

The results (Dahalan, Alias, Shaharom, 2023; Tari, Safitri, 2023) show that gamification and game-based learning improve students' academic performance, engagement and motivation. Indeed, only the motivational score in the study tended to decrease in the experimental group. This may be due to increased motivation at the beginning of the experiment and students' interest in participating in it. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an additional study with an increase in the duration of the experiment to 3 years to obtain objective results.

Yang, Zhang and Lin (2022) found that compared to traditional learning, simulation games were more effective in helping students reduce their anxiety levels. Situation-based learning clearly and visibly connected English vocabulary learning to the real world (Chonnia, Izzah, 2022). Students with moderate and high anxiety learnt new English vocabulary after the simulation game. We agree with the results obtained, as after the experiment, EG students noted that they became more relaxed about fluent English communication, improved their self-esteem, and became more confident in answering during lessons.

## CONCLUSIONS

Incorporating simulation games into English language teaching can be an excellent pedagogical method for enhancing students' language learning and overall communication experience. Immersive games provide a unique opportunity to create an engaging learning environment that significantly improves students' vocabulary retention and use.

The study's findings provide valuable information about the development and implementation of simulation scenarios to create situational real-life conditions for effective English language learning, shed-

ding light on the critical role these games can play in developing professional foreign language skills. The experiment focused on introducing simulation scenarios into the learning environment, proving the importance of improving language proficiency, motivation and willingness to engage students. Using simulation games in communicative learning contributed to students' dynamic work and the coherence of an atmosphere that stimulates teamwork. Simulation games create an emotionally safe environment for students, which helps improve their knowledge of foreign languages and communication without worrying about mistakes, including enjoyment, competition, and challenge. Using simulation games dramatically increases students' self-confidence and reduces anxiety, creating a happy learning environment. Furthermore, games can be modified to suit specific language objectives, allowing teachers to focus on linguistic abilities such as grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, and reading comprehension. Role-playing games and simulations allow students to put their language skills into context by immersing them in real-life situations. Games are an effective and adaptable tool for transforming English language teaching and learning. A promising area for future research could be the study of the effectiveness of social media in improving students' grammatical skills in foreign language learning.

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