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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DIGITAL TOOLS AND GAMIFICATION IN GEOGRAPHY LESSONS: NEW APPROACHES IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

The digitalization of education is becoming an integral part of the modern learning process. This is especially noticeable in the teaching of subjects such as geography, which requires the use of interactive tools to study physical and socio-economic processes. In modern conditions, digital technologies and gamification not only contribute to better assimilation of material but also engage students, increasing their interest in the subject. Traditional approaches based on classical teaching methods require adaptation to the needs of the digital generation.

A review of the literature indicates that integrating new technologies into the educational process significantly impacts the development of students' competencies. Researchers such as Karl Kapp, Jesse Schell, James Paul Gee, Richard Bartle, Anthony Picciano, Sebastian Deterding, and Jessica Hammer emphasize that game-based methods promote the development of critical thinking and increase students' motivation. In their studies, they highlight that gamification helps create interest in educational material, allowing students to actively participate in the learning process by completing game-like tasks. These methods enable students to master complex concepts through practical experience and reflection, significantly improving knowledge and skill acquisition.

These researchers have made a significant contribution to the development of gamification in education, demonstrating that its implementation improves learning outcomes and fosters key student competencies such as critical thinking, social interaction, and motivation for learning.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the impact of interactive digital tools and gamification on the formation of key geographical competencies among students, such as critical thinking, data analysis, and spatial understanding. A particular emphasis is placed on how these tools can enhance the effectiveness of the learning process and encourage active student engagement in geography studies.

In the modern world, digital tools play an important role in the learning process, particularly in teaching geography. Among the most commonly used tools are interactive maps, spatial analysis programs, virtual reality, and other technologies that allow students to delve deeper into lesson topics [1]. For example, virtual maps help students better understand geographical processes, while virtual journeys enable them to explore distant locations without leaving the classroom.

One example of successfully integrating virtual reality into geography teaching was implemented through the "Virtual Reality in Teaching Geography" program. This technology allows students to transport themselves to different geographical regions,

explore climate conditions, terrain, and local ecosystems. Students can interact with the virtual environment, enhancing their understanding of the material and making the learning process more interactive. This not only facilitates knowledge acquisition but also develops critical thinking and analytical skills, which are essential competencies for modern students [1].

The implementation of digital tools in education also encourages students to explore new technologies and approaches to acquiring knowledge. The use of tools such as Google Earth, interactive maps, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) enables students to explore spatial relationships in greater depth and analyze geographical data. According to the study by Gog and Rosu [2], integrating modern technologies into geography teaching significantly increases student motivation for learning. They absorb material more quickly and easily since the information is presented in a visual format, making complex concepts and processes more understandable.

However, the effectiveness of using digital technologies largely depends on the proper selection of tools and methods for their implementation. It is crucial to integrate technologies in a way that complements the learning process and aligns with educational goals. This involves not only using digital tools for material demonstration but also actively engaging students in independent research and analysis of geographical phenomena.

Gamification in geography teaching makes the learning process more interactive and engaging for students. The use of game elements such as point systems, levels, rewards, and competitions creates additional motivation for students, helping them overcome complex tasks. Moreover, gamification enables students to better assimilate material through active participation in the learning process.

For instance, game-based simulations of natural disasters can help students understand how geographical factors influence the development of events and how societies respond to these factors. This allows students to see the connection between theoretical knowledge and real-world events. The use of such approaches helps students develop cognitive skills, critical thinking, and the ability to make decisions based on provided information.

According to the study by Hrushka [3], interactive distance learning technologies incorporating gamification elements help students better absorb material. This is because students actively participate in the learning process, improving their academic performance. Using such methods not only makes learning interesting but also promotes teamwork, responsibility, and organization.

Game-based approaches also stimulate the development of collaboration skills, as they often involve tasks that require teamwork or group participation. This enables students not only to better assimilate material but also to develop social skills, which are important for both successful learning and future professional activities.

Despite significant advantages, the implementation of digital tools and gamification in geography teaching faces several challenges [4]. One of the main barriers is the insufficient technical training of teachers and the limited material resources in schools, particularly in rural areas. To successfully integrate these tools

into the educational process, it is necessary to provide adequate technical support and teacher training so they can effectively use modern technologies.

Additionally, it is important to consider the individual needs of students, as some may struggle to adapt to new approaches or have underdeveloped technology skills. Therefore, the teacher's task is to balance traditional teaching methods with modern innovative approaches to ensure the most effective learning experience for all students.

For the successful implementation of gamification and digital tools in geography teaching, several important aspects should be considered. Firstly, game elements such as point systems, achievements, and levels should be applied to motivate students and make the learning process more interactive. This can be useful for knowledge assessment, where game mechanics help reduce student stress during testing and increase their engagement.

Furthermore, interactive digital tools [5], such as virtual maps or simulations, can be effective in explaining complex geographical processes. The use of virtual reality or interactive maps enables students to better assimilate material since they can interact with information in a visual format. This promotes the development of critical thinking and spatial skills.

It is also essential to focus on teacher training. Educators should undergo appropriate training to effectively use new technologies and gamification methods in the learning process. This will allow them to integrate these tools in a way that meets students' needs and contributes to achieving educational goals. Additionally, ensuring technology accessibility for all students, regardless of their place of residence or financial situation, is important. The use of gamification and digital tools should be inclusive, providing equal opportunities for all participants in the educational process.

Digital tools and gamification in geography teaching play a key role in shaping students' competencies, making learning more interactive, engaging, and effective. The use of these methods fosters the development of critical thinking, spatial analysis, and teamwork skills. However, for their effective implementation, adequate technical support and teacher training must be provided. Innovative teaching methods combined with gamification can become an essential tool in the modern educational process.

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