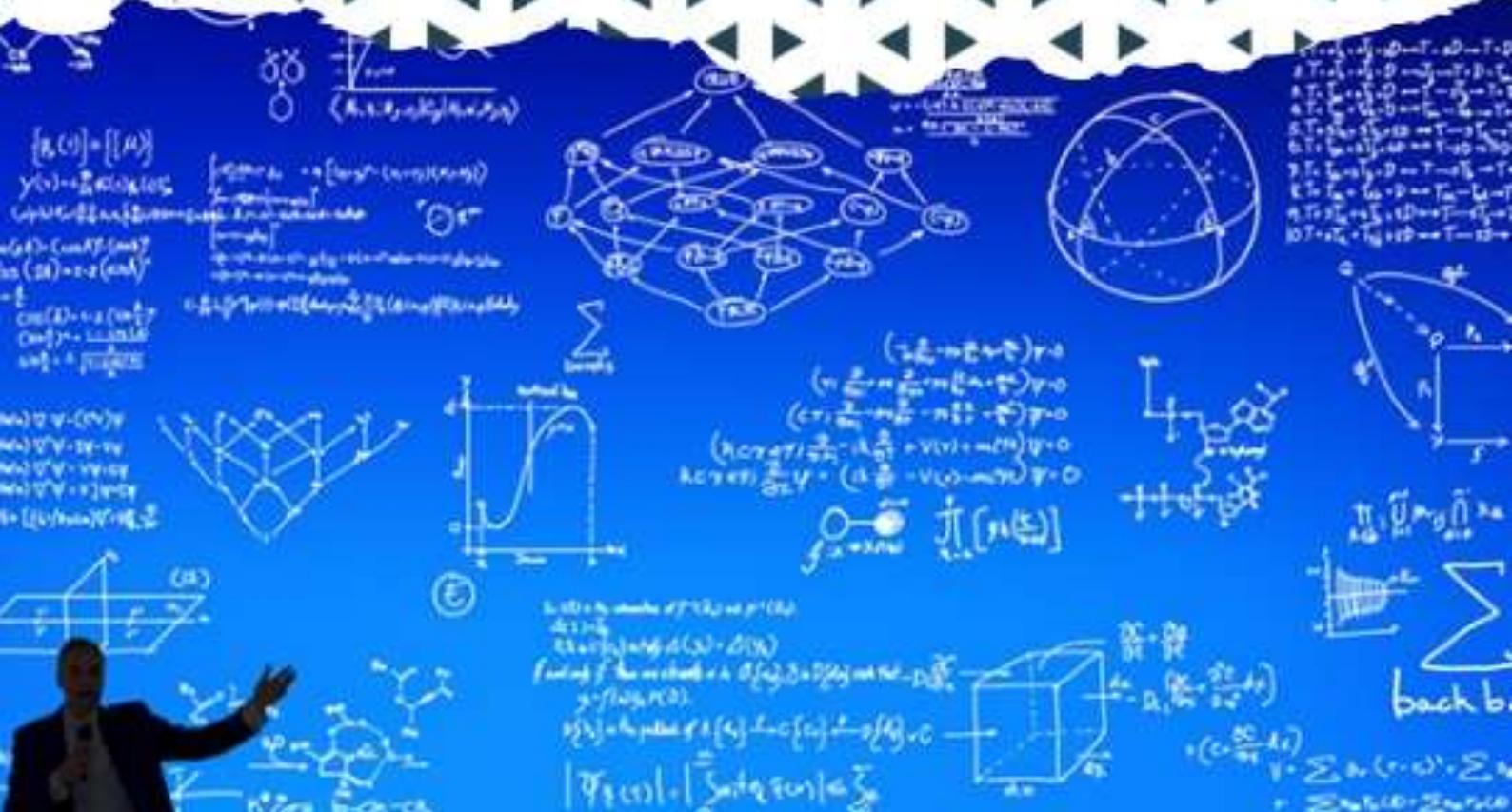




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Interactive story-based games for teaching politeness and register variation**Abdullayev Xurshid Furqatovich**

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ABSTRACT. This article investigates the use of interactive story-based games as an innovative method for teaching politeness and register variation in EFL classrooms. The study emphasizes that immersive story scenarios engage learners in context-based decision-making, allowing them to practice appropriate linguistic forms in formal, neutral, and informal situations. Practical classroom applications, including branching dialogue activities, role-play, and reflective tasks, are discussed. Research findings suggest that these games improve learners' sociolinguistic awareness, pragmatic competence, and motivation.

Keywords: interactive story-based games, politeness, register variation, EFL teaching, pragmatic competence.

MAIN PART. Interactive story-based games provide learners with immersive environments where they must make decisions based on social context, relationship, and formality level. By engaging in branching dialogues, students encounter scenarios requiring formal, neutral, or informal language, allowing them to practice politeness strategies and register variation. For instance, a student may choose between a formal request ("Could you please send me the report?") and an informal request ("Hey, can you send me the report?"), observing the communicative consequences of each choice. These games encourage active learning, as learners participate in realistic conversations and see immediate feedback. Role-playing elements allow students to adopt characters' perspectives, enhancing empathy and understanding of social norms. Reflective writing tasks following gameplay further reinforce learning, as students explain why certain linguistic choices are appropriate in given contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, integrating story-based games aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Pragmatic Competence Theory, as learners apply theoretical knowledge in simulated real-life interactions⁶. Digital platforms like Twine, Classcraft, and interactive Google Slides can be adapted to design branching storylines focusing on politeness and register variation. Research indicates that learners exposed to such interactive tasks demonstrate higher motivation, increased sociolinguistic awareness, and improved pragmatic competence⁷. Another key benefit of interactive story-based games in language teaching is that they offer learners a safe and controlled learning environment where they can experiment with different forms of expression without fear of judgment. In real-life situations, inappropriate language choices may cause misunderstandings or discomfort, but within the framework of a story-based game, learners can test various politeness strategies and registers, observe how virtual characters react, and learn from their mistakes. This trial-and-error method

promotes deeper understanding and long-term retention of pragmatic language functions.

Moreover, interactive games encourage learners to pay close attention to non-verbal communication cues such as intonation, facial expressions, and gestures. When characters within a game respond differently based on tone or level of formality, students quickly realize the importance not only of word choice but also of delivery. For instance, saying "Excuse me, may I speak to you?" in a polite tone differs greatly from saying the same phrase abruptly. This teaches students that politeness is not only linguistic but also behavioral, supporting development of socio-pragmatic awareness.

Additionally, interactive story-based games are particularly effective in mixed-ability classrooms. Through differentiated gameplay, stronger learners may opt for more advanced expressions and complex politeness formulas, while beginner learners may choose simpler but still polite options. This makes learning inclusive and personalized, allowing each student to progress at their own pace while still participating in the same group activity. Gamified scoring systems, badges, and levels help maintain motivation and encourage consistent improvement.

These games also support cultural competence by exposing learners to diverse intercultural communication scenarios. For example, a game may simulate a conversation with an elderly person, a university professor, a client, or a close friend. Each scenario requires different politeness strategies based on cultural norms. Learners are encouraged to reflect on how politeness in English can differ from that in their native language, thus preventing cultural misunderstandings. Comparing responses such as "Here you go", "Please accept this", or "I'm honored to offer this to you" helps students analyze levels of formality and respect in different cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION. The study concludes that interactive story-based games are a powerful tool for teaching politeness and register variation. They provide authentic, context-rich opportunities for learners to practice formal, neutral, and informal language, while receiving immediate feedback. By incorporating branching dialogues, role-playing, and reflective tasks, teachers can enhance learners' sociolinguistic awareness, pragmatic competence, and engagement¹. Future research may explore integrating multimedia resources and cross-cultural scenarios to further enrich the teaching of politeness and register variation².

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