

TEACHING ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE VOCABULARY AT THE A1 LEVEL THROUGH GAMES: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES



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Abstract: *This study investigates the role of language games and gamification in teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) vocabulary at the A1 level, within preparatory year. Starting from the necessity of acquiring a minimum repertoire of 500-800 basic words, the paper highlights the limitations of traditional methods based on mechanical memorization and proposes the integration of lexical fields and ludic activities as an essential teaching strategy. The research was conducted on a group of 10 international students, and the results showed a significant increase in productive vocabulary (from 40 to over 400 words) and receptive vocabulary (up to 600 units), higher lexical retention (70% compared to 55% for traditional methods), as well as reduced language anxiety and increased motivation. The findings emphasize that language games should not be regarded as mere recreational activities but as a central strategy in vocabulary teaching, capable of fostering cultural integration, authentic communication, and active learner engagement.*

Keywords: Romanian as a foreign language, A1 level, vocabulary teaching, language games, lexical fields, gamification.

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1. Introduction

Teaching foreign languages has become one of the fundamental priorities of contemporary education. In a society characterized by globalization, academic mobility, and cultural diversity, knowledge of foreign languages is not merely an advantage but a necessity. Vocabulary plays a crucial role in the process of language learning. No matter how well grammatical structures are mastered, authentic communication is impossible without a basic lexicon. For this reason, vocabulary instruction must be placed at the core of teaching practices, especially when learners are developing their initial tools for communication.

For the A1 linguistic level, the reference documents – *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* (Nation, 2001), *Nivel prag* (Moldovan et al., 2002), *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2003)*, and *A Minimalist Description of the Romanian Language* (2016) – establish several basic competencies. At this level, the learner should be able to use familiar, everyday expressions, introduce themselves, and respond to simple questions about personal life. They should also be able to interact in a basic way with interlocutors who cooperate and speak clearly, relying on a minimum vocabulary of approximately 500–800 words.

The difficulties of vocabulary teaching are multiple. On the one hand, mechanical memorization of word lists does not guarantee their transfer into active use. On the other hand, the absence of context causes these words to be perceived as isolated elements, which are difficult to remember and apply. In addition, many learners face language anxiety, which reduces their willingness to use newly acquired words in communication.

Krashen (1982) argues that learning occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that also contains new elements. Long (1996) emphasizes the importance of interaction and negotiation of meaning, which create opportunities for vocabulary acquisition. Within this framework, language games and gamification strategies provide innovative solutions. They stimulate motivation, create a relaxed atmosphere, reduce anxiety, and facilitate vocabulary consolidation through varied and contextualized repetition.

International studies confirm these benefits: Nguyen et al. (2024) show that games enhance motivation and engagement; Abdelhadi (2020), through an experimental study, demonstrates the superiority of games in vocabulary teaching; Saleh and Althaqafi (2022) confirm long-term lexical retention. In addition, Ersöz (2000) and Deesri (2002) provide practical examples of effective games, while research conducted in Romania (Săftoiu et al., 2022; Tonț, 2022) demonstrates their applicability in teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RFL).

The aim of this article is to analyze, within both a theoretical and an applied framework, the role of language games and lexical fields in teaching Romanian vocabulary as a foreign language at the A1 level. We begin with classical and contemporary contributions regarding the role of vocabulary and games in the learning process, then examine the fundamental lexical domains for A1, and finally propose a teaching methodology based on language games and gamification.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Importance of Vocabulary in Language Acquisition

Vocabulary represents the foundation of any process of language acquisition. Without a minimal lexicon, learners cannot understand basic messages or construct

simple sentences. As Nation (2001:13) states, knowledge of words is essential for successful communication, since communication cannot rely solely on grammatical structures but requires meaningful lexical units.

Over time, the status of vocabulary in foreign language didactics has varied. In the structuralist tradition, the emphasis was placed mainly on grammar and the automatization of structures. Vocabulary was regarded as a secondary, supportive element. Only with the development of communicative approaches did vocabulary become a central object of teaching (Harmer, 2007), with researchers now accepting that it constitutes the core of communicative competence. Through the hypothesis of comprehensible input, Krashen (1982) demonstrates that vocabulary plays a decisive role: without understanding lexical units, the message cannot be perceived. Comprehensible input is dependent on lexicon, and linguistic progress requires exposure to new words in familiar contexts (i+1). Long (1996), in the interactionist theory, shows that vocabulary is consolidated through negotiation of meaning in real communicative situations. Empirical studies confirm this central role. Laufer (1997) emphasizes that vocabulary is the strongest indicator of language proficiency, even more important than grammar. A lack of vocabulary negatively affects all four skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) whereas a rich lexicon enables comprehension and production of messages even in the presence of grammatical errors.

Reference documents for foreign language learning highlight a common set of competencies expected at the A1 level. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2003) defines this level as one in which the learner can use familiar, everyday expressions, produce simple statements to meet concrete needs, introduce themselves, and respond to questions about personal details (for example, where they live, the people they know, the things they possess). Moreover, the learner can interact in a basic way with interlocutors who are willing to cooperate and who speak slowly and clearly. Nation (2001), in *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, estimates that approximately 500–800 lexical units are necessary at this level, forming the core of the basic vocabulary. Locally, the *Minimalist Description of the Romanian Language* (2016) provides an organized list of about 600 fundamental words and expressions, structured into thematic lexical fields covering the essential domains of communication. Meanwhile, Antonela-Carmen Arieșan-Simion states that “the lexical inventory of Romanian as a FL/L2 at the A1 level contains 845 words” (Arieșan-Simion, 2022: 203).

An important aspect to be mentioned here is the distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary refers to the words a learner recognizes and understands when encountering them in context. Productive vocabulary, on the other hand, designates the words a learner can actively use in speaking and writing. Nation (2001) points out that receptive vocabulary is always

larger than productive vocabulary, and the transition from receptive to productive occurs through active practice and repeated exposure to words in varied contexts.

Vocabulary also has an affective dimension. Language anxiety often arises from the fear of not finding the appropriate word in conversation. Therefore, vocabulary teaching is not only a cognitive matter but also a way to enhance learners' confidence in their ability to communicate.

Consequently, vocabulary cannot be regarded as an accessory to grammar. It represents the central element of language acquisition, enabling both the comprehension and the production of messages. In teaching Romanian as a foreign language at the A1 level, building a basic lexicon is essential for achieving communicative objectives. This requires a methodology centered on lexical fields and on activities that transform vocabulary from passive knowledge into active competence.

2.2. Play as a Pedagogical Tool

The integration of play into the educational process has a long tradition and a solid theoretical foundation. Play is not merely a recreational activity but a complex practice with cognitive, social, and cultural functions that contribute both to personality development and to learning.

Huizinga (2023:39), in his classic work *Homo Ludens*, defines play as a constitutive dimension of human culture: *"Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing."* Thus, play is a universal activity, prior to and independent of social institutionalization, which makes it a fundamental instrument for the natural development of language.

From a psychological perspective, Vygotsky argues that play creates the zone of proximal development, where a child or learner can achieve performances beyond those attainable individually: *"In play, a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself"* (Vygotsky, 1978:102). Applied to foreign language teaching, this principle demonstrates that play provides a framework for linguistic experimentation in which learners can surpass their limits and use vocabulary in a creative and spontaneous way.

Wright et al. (2006), in their seminal work *Games for Language Learning*, demonstrate that language games support learning by stimulating motivation and reducing anxiety. Moreover, the authors emphasize the psychological and affective dimension of play: *"Games provide a way of helping the learners to experience the language, not merely to study it"* (Wright et al., 2006:2). This idea is also confirmed by Ersöz (2000), who shows that games not only increase attention and participation but also reduce inhibitions: *"Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and at*

the same time challenging.” In a similar vein, Deesri (2002) argues that games are activities with clear learning objectives: *“They are not just a diversion, a break from routine activities, but a way of getting the learner to use the language during the game.”*

Thus, the literature shows that play simultaneously fulfills several functions in the didactic process: cognitive (facilitating memorization and knowledge transfer), motivational (stimulating interest and the enjoyment of learning), social (creating cooperation and authentic interaction among learners), and affective (reducing language anxiety and supporting active participation).

2.3. Gamification and Educational Innovation

Gamification is defined by Deterding et al. (2011) as the use of game-design elements in non-game contexts. In education, gamification translates into points, badges, levels, and missions that stimulate motivation and engagement. Faiella and Ricciardi (2015) also show that gamification contributes to reducing anxiety and increasing intrinsic motivation.

In Romania, Săftoiu et al. (2022) applied gamification in teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) for academic purposes, using applications such as ClassDojo, GooseChase, Storyjumper, Wordwall, and Kahoot. The results indicated increased student engagement and effective vocabulary consolidation. In the same vein, Tonț (2022) confirmed that software tools used in RFL teaching and learning activities improve the Romanian communicative competence of non-native speakers.

3. Language Games and the Role of Lexical Fields in Teaching Vocabulary at the A1 Level

3.1. The Concept of Lexical Field and Its Relevance for RFL

In linguistics, the notion of a *lexical field* refers to the set of lexical units that belong to the same semantic domain and are organized around a common core of meaning. This structuring facilitates the cognitive processes of memorization and vocabulary retrieval. According to Nation (2001), grouping words into thematic domains allows for rapid consolidation of vocabulary and supports the development of active lexicon.

For A1-level learners of Romanian, organizing vocabulary into semantic fields is crucial, as it enables them to immediately relate new knowledge to everyday experiences. For instance, learning words from the field of “food” becomes more effective if these are associated with images, tastes, smells, and real-life contexts (e.g., “at the market” or “at the restaurant”).

3.2. Language Games as a Strategy for Activating Vocabulary

Language games are defined by Wright et al. (2006) as educational activities that combine rules, interaction, and competition to stimulate learning through engagement. Although they were initially used in teaching English as a foreign language, numerous studies have demonstrated their effectiveness across diverse cultural contexts and at various proficiency levels. Abdelhadi (2020), in an experimental study, confirmed that learner groups instructed through games achieved superior results in vocabulary acquisition compared to groups using traditional methods. The findings revealed not only an increase in immediate test scores but also longer-term lexical retention. Saleh and Althaqafi (2022) replicated these conclusions in preschool settings in Saudi Arabia, showing that vocabulary games produced lasting effects even after several weeks. Săftoiu et al. (2022) and Tont (2022) demonstrated that thematic games applied in Romanian language courses for foreigners stimulate engagement and foster the creation of a learning community, supporting both linguistic and intercultural competences.

3.3. The Main Lexical Fields at the A1 Level

At the A1 level, the most frequently addressed lexical fields are those that correspond to the learners' immediate needs. Platon et al. (2014:19–22) suggest the following domains:

- **Days, months, hours:** Days: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday; Months: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December; Hours: quarter, half, o'clock.
- **Weather:** warm, cold, sun, wind, snow, clouds, to rain, to snow.
- **Personal information:** Family: mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, son, daughter, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, cousin, nephew; Address: apartment, street, city, village, country; Identity documents: passport, identity card.
- **Personal characteristics:** Physical traits: tall, short, thin, beautiful, blond, brunette; Personality traits: good, bad, hardworking, lazy, intelligent; General appearance: elegant, sporty.
- **Education:** school, university, student, course, break.
- **Professions and the professional sphere:** Professions: teacher, doctor, nurse, pharmacist, engineer, painter, police officer, actor, waiter, driver, shop assistant; Workplace: office, colleague, to work.
- **Parts of the body, personal hygiene, health:** Body parts: head, neck, hair, eyes, nose, ear, mouth, teeth, hand, foot, body, skin; Personal hygiene items: toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, shampoo, shower gel, towel, toilet paper, tissues; Treatment: medicine.

- **Clothing, footwear, accessories:** Clothes: trousers, blouse, shirt, T-shirt, sweater, skirt, dress, hat, gloves; Footwear: shoes, sandals, boots; Accessories: bag, backpack, tie, watch, ring.
- **Colors:** white, black, yellow, blue (dark, light).
- **Housing:** House, garden and yard: house, apartment, building, garden, yard, garage, gate; Rooms: living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, office, hallway; Furniture: table, chair, wardrobe, bed, sofa, desk, bookcase, sink, bathtub; Appliances: refrigerator, stove, washing machine; Dishes and cutlery: dishes, pot, plate, mug, bowl, glass, spoon, fork, knife, teaspoon; Household activities: to wash clothes/dishes, to clean.
- **Food and drink:** Main meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner; Dishes: soup, French fries, rice, steak, salad, omelet, sandwich, pasta, pizza; Spices: salt, pepper; Baked goods: white bread, brown bread, multigrain bread, pretzel; Dairy: milk, yogurt, cheese, butter; Vegetables: tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, onions, potatoes, carrots; Fruits: apples, pears, bananas, oranges; Meat: chicken, pork, beef, fish; Sweets: sugar, honey, cake, biscuits, chocolate, ice cream, jam; Drinks: still water, sparkling water, tea, mint tea, coffee, juice, wine, beer;
Quantities/packaging/containers: kilogram, gram, liter, packet, bottle.
- **Daily activities:** to wake up, to wash, to get dressed, to eat, to go, to work, to study, to cook, to undress, to go to bed.
- **Sports and leisure activities:** Sports: football, basketball, handball, volleyball, tennis, skiing, swimming; People, objects, places: player, footballer, ball, swimming pool, gym; Leisure activities: to run, to dance, to play the piano/violin/guitar, to walk, to watch TV/a movie, to paint, to draw, to read, to play, to visit, to travel.
- **Vacations:** Destinations: seaside, mountains, lake; Accommodation: hotel, cabin; Tourist attractions: museum, castle, church.
- **Transport:** Means: bicycle, car, taxi, bus, train, subway, airplane, ship; Places: station, parking lot, railway station, airport, waiting room, ticket booth, information office; Objects: ticket, luggage.
- **Nature:** Animals: dog, cat, chicken, pig, cow, horse, elephant, giraffe, bear, lion; Plants: tree, fruit tree, flower, grass; Landscape and natural formations: sea, mountain, lake.
- **City:** Shop: client, price, cash desk, expensive, cheap, to buy, to sell; Market: vegetables, fruits, to want; Restaurant: table, client, menu, bill, to order, to pay; Club: to dance, to listen, to smoke; Museum: painting, guide, ticket, to visit; Theatre/opera: performance, to watch; Cinema: film, movie theatre; Hotel: reception, reservation, single/double room, to book; Park: bench, grass, flowers, to walk; Hospital: sick, emergency, ambulance; Pharmacy: medicine,

prescription; Bank: money, lei, currency, to exchange; Embassy: ambassador, visa, citizenship; Post office: letter, postcard, envelope, to send, to receive; Police: police car, uniform; Travel agency: ticket, vacation, to travel; Library: book, library card, to borrow.

- **Press and mass media:** newspaper, magazine, television, radio.

These lexical fields represent an essential strategy in teaching vocabulary at the A1 level. They provide a coherent learning framework, facilitate memorization, and allow for the integration of vocabulary into authentic contexts. Language games adapted to these fields stimulate motivation, reduce anxiety, and encourage active participation.

4. Methodology

4.1. Educational Context and Target Group

Teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) at the A1 level generally takes place within preparatory programs organized by universities or specialized language centers, but also in non-formal contexts (private courses, language schools, intercultural projects).

In our case, the target group consists of international learners of diverse ages and backgrounds, coming from varied linguistic and cultural contexts, enrolled in the *Preparatory Year of Romanian Language for Foreign Citizens* (PYRLFC) at the Faculty of Letters, University of Oradea, during the 2024–2025 academic year. Most of these learners have no prior knowledge of Romanian and present immediate communication needs in everyday contexts: interaction with teachers, peers, university administration, medical staff, or shop assistants. Therefore, at the A1 level, the major objective is the rapid acquisition of a functional vocabulary.

Learners display highly heterogeneous levels of literacy, and for many of them Romanian is the first Indo-European language they encounter. This generates additional difficulties related to phonetics, morphology, and vocabulary. In this context, the teaching methodology must focus on:

- creating a motivating and non-threatening learning environment that reduces language anxiety;
- using visual and auditory support to facilitate vocabulary recognition and memorization;
- implementing interactive and collaborative activities that encourage communication from the very first lessons;
- integrating language games and gamification as ways to transform the teaching process into an enjoyable and effective experience.

In conclusion, the educational context of teaching RFL at the A1 level requires a functional, interactive, and learner-centered approach, in which the basic lexicon is

not only taught but also activated through language games in order to meet the immediate communication needs of the target group.

4.2. Teaching Objectives

Teaching Romanian as a foreign language vocabulary at the A1 level requires the formulation of clear teaching objectives, aligned both with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2003) and with the *Minimal Description of the Romanian Language* (2016). These objectives reflect not only lexical acquisition but also the ability to actively use vocabulary in real communication contexts.

General objectives:

- **To develop basic lexical competence** by acquiring a minimum repertoire of 500–800 frequent words and expressions, organized into fundamental semantic fields (family, housing, food, time, daily activities);
- **To stimulate oral communication** through interactive activities that encourage the active use of vocabulary in authentic life situations;
- **To create a positive and motivating learning climate** by integrating language games and gamification elements, which reduce anxiety and increase learner engagement;
- **To ensure the transition from receptive to productive vocabulary** through exercises of recognition, repetition, application, and free production.

Specific objectives:

- **At the lexical level:** learners should be able to recognize and use basic words to introduce themselves, ask for and provide personal information, and describe people, objects, places, and daily activities.
- **At the pragmatic level:** learners should be able to formulate simple requests (*I want water*), ask about prices (*How much does it cost?*), make basic reservations (*I would like a hotel room*), and express basic needs (*I am hungry, I am cold*).
- **At the socio-cultural level:** learners should recognize greetings and polite formulas appropriate to different contexts, respecting norms of interaction in Romanian.
- **At the affective level:** learners should develop confidence in using vocabulary and be motivated to participate actively in games and activities.

Formative objectives:

In addition to lexical learning, the methodology also aims to:

- develop **learning autonomy** through the introduction of games that require individual memory strategies;
- build **collaborative competences** through group activities that encourage cooperation;
- cultivate **intercultural curiosity** through games that situate vocabulary within Romanian cultural contexts (e.g., customs, traditions, gastronomy).

Thus, teaching objectives are not limited to word accumulation but aim at **integrating vocabulary into global communicative competence**, in accordance with modern principles of foreign language didactics.

4.3. Teaching Strategies and Didactic Tools

The methodology of teaching Romanian as a foreign language vocabulary at the A1 level must combine the theoretical principles of lexical acquisition with interactive and playful practices.

4.3.1. Teaching Strategies

1. Contextualized learning:
 - Presenting vocabulary in meaningful contexts (dialogues, skits, real-life situations).
 - Linking words to images, real objects, and concrete experiences.
2. Teaching through lexical fields:
 - Organizing vocabulary into clear thematic domains (family, food, transport, education, etc.).
 - Activating lexical fields through associations, classifications, and group games.
3. Transition from receptive to productive vocabulary:
 - Recognition phase: bingo-type games and memory games.
 - Consolidation phase: role-plays and skits.
 - Free production phase: chain stories and guided discussions.
4. Varied and multisensory repetition:
 - Combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic channels.
 - Alternating written exercises with oral and digital activities.
5. Gamification of the learning process:
 - Introducing game elements (points, badges, levels, leaderboards).
 - Using digital platforms to provide immediate feedback and additional motivation.

4.3.2. Didactic Tools

1. Traditional games:

- *Lexical bingo*: consolidating vocabulary through rapid recognition.
 - *Memory game*: matching words with images or synonym pairs.
 - *Charades*: practicing verbs and professions.
 - *Describe and guess*: developing descriptive and deductive skills.
 - *Board games*: progress on the board depends on recognizing and using vocabulary.
 - *Role-play*: simulating real-life situations (in a shop, at the doctor, at the hotel).
 - *Chain stories*: each learner adds a sentence using the target vocabulary.
2. Visual and associative games:
- *Lexical puzzles*: reconstructing an image associated with a word.
 - *Family tree*: consolidating family vocabulary.
 - *Interactive calendar*: days, months, hours.
 - *City map*: identifying places and public services.
3. Digital games and applications:
- *Kahoot, Quizizz, Wordwall*: vocabulary competitions with instant feedback.
 - *Plickers*: quick checking of vocabulary understanding through cards.
 - *GooseChase*: digital scavenger hunt for words and expressions.
 - *StoryJumper*: creating interactive stories with the learned vocabulary.
4. Creative activities:
- *Weather journal*: learners presenting the weather forecast.
 - *Team recipe*: inventing a menu or a recipe.
 - *Fashion show*: describing classmates' clothing.
 - *Description police*: guessing a person based on given traits.

4.4. Teaching Stages

Teaching Romanian as a foreign language vocabulary at the A1 level is based on a coherent methodological structure consisting of four main stages: presentation, practice, consolidation, and assessment. Each stage incorporates language games and interactive activities as essential means for vocabulary acquisition.

1. Presentation of vocabulary:

- New vocabulary is introduced on the basis of lexical fields outlined in the *Minimal Description of the Romanian Language* (2016).
- Visual materials are used (images, real objects, flashcards, digital applications).
- The teacher contextualizes the vocabulary through model dialogues and authentic situations (e.g., "At the shop," "At school," "In the family").

- Examples of games in this phase: *Picture Bingo* (for recognition), *Interactive Calendar* (for days and months).
2. **Practice of vocabulary:**
- The transition is made from recognition to guided use of words in simple sentences.
 - Activities are centered on pair work and small group interaction.
 - Examples of games:
 - *Memory game* (matching word–image).
 - *Charades* (for verbs and professions).
 - *Family tree* (for family vocabulary).
3. **Consolidation of vocabulary:**
- Achieved through activities requiring the active and repeated use of words.
 - Emphasis is placed on creativity and collaboration.
 - Examples of games:
 - *Role-play* (“At the shop,” “At the doctor,” “At the hotel”).
 - *Team recipe* (for food vocabulary).
 - *Description police* (for physical and personality traits).
 - *Board game* (progress on the board requires the use of vocabulary).
4. **Assessment of vocabulary:**
- Assessment goes beyond traditional tests and is carried out through competitive and collaborative games that provide immediate feedback.
 - Examples of tools:
 - *Kahoot* or *Quizizz* for knowledge checking.
 - *GooseChase* (digital word hunt).
 - *Evaluative skit*: each group prepares a scenario using the new vocabulary.
 - Assessment includes both immediate tests and delayed evaluations in order to measure long-term retention, following the recommendations of Abdelhadi (2020) and Saleh & Althaqafi (2022).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Research Context

The study was conducted on a group of 10 international students enrolled in the Preparatory Year of Romanian Language for Foreign Citizens during the 2024–2025 academic year. The learners came from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe), with ages ranging from 17 to 41. Most of them had no prior exposure to the Romanian language.

5.2. Applied Methodology

During the first semester, vocabulary was taught in accordance with the *Minimalist Description of the Romanian Language* for level A1 (2016), following a methodology structured into four stages: presentation, practice, consolidation, and assessment. Each lexical field was associated with language games, as follows:

- **Days, months, hours:**
 - *Interactive calendar*: learners arrange flashcards with days and months.
 - *Daily schedule*: each student describes what they do on a given day.
 - *Kahoot "What time is it?"*: with questions such as "Is it quarter past ten?"
- **Weather:**
 - *Weather Bingo*: the teacher describes the weather, students mark the image.
 - *Weather journal*: in groups, learners present the forecast for a day.
 - *Memory game*: matching words with weather symbols.
- **Personal information and family:**
 - *Family tree*: groups create a fictitious family.
 - *Personal interview*: learners ask each other questions about personal details.
 - *Guess who I am*: family role labels placed on each student's forehead.
- **Personal characteristics:**
 - *Describe and guess*: one student describes, the others identify.
 - *Description police*: one group describes a "suspect," another recognizes them.
 - *Visual collage*: students receive images of people and select suitable adjectives.
- **Education and professions:**
 - *Role-play "At school"*: teacher and students in a classroom situation.
 - *Profession bingo*: with images and words.
 - *Job fair*: each learner receives a profession and must present themselves.
- **Parts of the body and health:**
 - *Simon says*: "Put your hand on your nose!"
 - *Body puzzle*: completing a silhouette with labels.
 - *Role-play "At the doctor"*: one student as patient, another as doctor.
- **Clothing and accessories:**
 - *Fashion show*: students describe classmates' clothes.
 - *Memory game*: with clothes and accessories.

- *Role-play "At the clothing store."*
- **Housing and household objects:**
 - *Object hunt:* rapid identification in the classroom.
 - *Lexical lotto:* matching picture–word pairs.
 - *Sketch "Spring cleaning."*
- **Food and drinks:**
 - *Role-play "At the shop" or "At the restaurant"*
 - *Team recipe:* learners create a recipe together.
 - *Board game:* progression requires identifying food items correctly.
- **Daily activities and leisure time:**
 - *Charades:* one student mimes the action, the others guess.
 - *Chain stories:* each student adds a sentence with a verb.
 - *Skits:* "An ordinary day of a student."
- **Sports and free time:**
 - *Digital quiz (Kahoot) about sports.*
 - *Sport charades:* "Play tennis without words."
 - *Role-play "In the park or at the gym."*
- **Vacations and transport:**
 - *Role-playing game "At the train station" or "At the hotel."*
 - *Vacation map:* groups plan a trip with destinations.
 - *Digital game "The transport race."*
- **Nature and city:**
 - *City map:* learners locate landmarks.
 - *Role-playing game "At the restaurant" or "At the pharmacy."*
 - *Urban scavenger hunt:* each team receives a list of places/objects.

5.3. Results Obtained

Progress was assessed through initial tests, intermediate evaluations, and a final test.

5.3.1. Lexical Progress (initial – final)

| Evaluation stage | Receptive vocabulary (average words) | Productive vocabulary (average words) | Observations |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Initial test (November) | ~80 | ~40 | Limited, fragmented basic lexicon, mostly borrowed from international languages |
| Intermediate evaluation (December) | ~350 | ~200 | Rapid increase through role-play and visual activities |

| | | | |
|----------------------|------|------|--|
| Final test (January) | ~600 | ~420 | CEFR A1 objective achieved; significant difference compared to the beginning |
|----------------------|------|------|--|

The data presented in the table confirm the positive impact of language games on the process of lexical acquisition at the A1 level. First, lexical progress is evident: from approximately 40 active words in the initial test, students reached over 400 words used productively by the end of the semester. The receptive repertoire expanded to 600 units, which corresponds to the objectives established by the *Minimal Description of the Romanian Language* (2016) for this level.

5.3.2. Lexical Retention (after 4 weeks)

| Type of instruction | Retention rate | Examples |
|---|-----------------------|--|
| Through language games | ~70% | role-play, memory game, bingo, Kahoot |
| Through traditional exercises (lists, translations) | ~55% | sentence completion, simple translations |

The analysis of long-term retention shows that vocabulary taught through language games is better retained (approximately 70%) than vocabulary taught through traditional methods (55%). This finding confirms hypotheses from the international literature (Abdelhadi, 2020; Saleh & Althaqafi, 2022), while also validating them in the context of teaching Romanian as a foreign language.

5.3.3. Level of Participation

| Type of activity | Active participation (average % of group) | Observations |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Language games | 85% | Students engaged, competitive and collaborative spirit |
| Traditional activities | 60% | Lower level of involvement, reduced motivation |

Active student participation was significantly higher in the case of games (85%) compared to traditional exercises (60%). The competitive yet friendly atmosphere contributed to constant engagement, even among the more reluctant learners.

5.3.4. Observations on Motivation and Anxiety

| Indicator | At the beginning of the course | After 3 months of ludic activities |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Declared motivation | Medium (6/10) | High (8.5/10) |
| Language anxiety | High (7/10) | Low (4/10) |
| Oral participation | Low (40% of group) | High (80% of group) |

The average declared motivation score increased from 6/10 to 8.5/10, while language anxiety decreased from 7/10 to 4/10. Oral participation, which was only 40% of the group at the beginning, rose to 80% after three months of ludic activities.

Overall, these results confirm that the systematic integration of language games and gamification has a major effect on the learning process: it accelerates lexical acquisition, enhances retention, stimulates motivation, and reduces anxiety. In addition, it contributes to creating a positive intercultural atmosphere in which students collaborate and communicate with confidence.

5.4. Discussion

The results confirm the findings of the specialized literature but also add a practical perspective to the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language. For the 2024–2025 target group, the difference between vocabulary taught through games and that taught through traditional methods was significant, demonstrating the effectiveness of the ludic strategy.

The results must, however, be interpreted with certain limitations in mind. First, **the small sample size** – the study included only 10 students who were present from the first month of the preparatory year. Therefore, the conclusions reflect the progress of this restricted group and cannot be generalized to the entire cohort. This situation was due to the **administrative delays** typical of the preparatory year, as many international students arrive later to classes after completing visa procedures, receiving acceptance letters, and other bureaucratic formalities.

Another aspect relates to the **specific context of the first month**, during which the motivation and involvement of students present on time may have been higher than that of those who joined later. Furthermore, the analysis was limited to a single group, with no possibility of making **comparisons with other cohorts** from previous years or with parallel groups.

At the methodological level, there were also limitations related to the implementation of games. **Not all activities were equally effective for all learners**: introverted students preferred individual games, memory games, and puzzles, while dramatizations and role-plays were more difficult for them to manage. Moreover, **differences in digital competences** influenced participation in online games, with

some students being more reluctant to use interactive platforms. Finally, the teacher experienced the **additional preparation time** required for planning and adapting ludic activities, which may represent an obstacle in contexts with limited resources.

Overall, these limitations do not invalidate the results but highlight that the effectiveness of language games depends on multiple factors: group size and diversity, administrative and organizational context, individual learner profiles, and the resources available to the teacher.

6. Conclusions

Teaching vocabulary at the A1 level in Romanian as a foreign language proves to be both a challenge and an opportunity. Our study, carried out with a group of ten international students enrolled in the preparatory year 2024–2025, showed that the integration of language games is not merely a pleasant addition to the lesson but a strategy with visible effects on the process of language acquisition.

At the beginning of the course, students' lexical repertoire was very limited, restricted to a few international words and common greeting formulas. After several months of intensive work, based on organizing vocabulary into lexical fields and on ludic activities, the difference became evident. Words that had seemed difficult to memorize in the first lessons became familiar and were used spontaneously in simple conversations. The playful atmosphere – whether through bingo, role-plays, or digital games – changed the classroom dynamics: students were no longer shy and withdrawn but competitive, eager to participate and interact.

This transformation was reflected not only in the number of words retained but also in learners' attitudes toward learning. Whereas at the beginning anxiety was high and the fear of mistakes hindered communication, after several weeks of ludic activities students began to speak more freely, to collaborate, and even to seek opportunities to use new words outside the classroom. Their motivation increased considerably, and lessons became a space of active engagement and joy in learning.

The results align with what international literature has already highlighted: language games enhance retention, stimulate motivation, and reduce anxiety. However, in the specific context of teaching Romanian as a foreign language, they play an even more important role, as they address the immediate communicative needs of students living in a foreign country, who require practical vocabulary for daily integration.

The main conclusion is that language games and gamification should not be regarded as secondary activities but as a central strategy for vocabulary teaching. They transform the lesson from a mechanical exercise into a lively and memorable learning experience. Moreover, they create a positive intercultural framework where learners' differences become resources for cooperation and dialogue.

Looking forward, this experience opens new perspectives. It would be useful to extend the research to higher levels (A2, B1) to observe how games can support the development of intermediate and specialized vocabulary. Furthermore, a comparison between traditional and digital games could provide additional insights into preferences and effectiveness in multicultural groups.

Overall, the experience of the preparatory year 2024–2025 confirms that language games can become the key to a modern and effective methodology for teaching Romanian as a foreign language. They not only transmit words but also build bridges of communication, confidence, and motivation, elements essential to any authentic learning process.

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