

BENEFITS OF GAMIFICATION IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

BENEFICIOS DE LA GAMIFICACIÓN EN EL APRENDIZAJE DE SEGUNDAS LENGUAS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching methods have evolved substantially over time, as students' learning styles and needs nowadays are different from those that students used to have in the past. That is the reason why the integration of technology in the language learning process has been progressively introduced in the classrooms. Mobile Learning and gamification are only some of the most recent trends. Gamification in education refers to the use of game design elements in educational contexts. The aim of this paper is to discuss the benefits derived from gamification in second language learning in the areas of vocabulary and grammar learning, language and soft skills development, and second language assessment. Some of the benefits found in this study include frequent and personalized feedback, development of social learning, and an increased motivation.

KEYWORDS: game; gamification; second language learning; second language teaching; technology.

RESUMEN

Los métodos de enseñanza han evolucionado considerablemente a lo largo del tiempo puesto que los estilos de aprendizaje y las necesidades de los estudiantes hoy en día difieren de los que solían tener en el pasado. Éste es el motivo por el cual la integración de la tecnología en el proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas se ha ido llevando a cabo gradualmente en las aulas. El Aprendizaje Móvil y la gamificación son sólo algunas de las tendencias más recientes. La gamificación en educación se refiere al uso de elementos propios del diseño de juegos en contextos educativos. Este artículo tiene como objetivo explorar los beneficios de la gamificación en el aprendizaje de segundas lenguas en las áreas de vocabulario y gramática, desarrollo de destrezas lingüísticas y blandas, y evaluación de la segunda lengua. Algunos de los beneficios observados en esta investigación incluyen la obtención de retroalimentación frecuente y personalizada, el desarrollo de aprendizaje social y el aumento de la motivación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: juego; gamificación; aprendizaje de segundas lenguas; enseñanza de segundas lenguas; tecnología.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of gamification, which refers to the application of game design elements to non-game contexts in order to increase user engagement, has become popular in a variety of areas, including education, behavioral psychology, and even physical and mental health. In fact, Scopus searches (2022) reveal a dramatic growth of gamification and similar terms (gamified, gamifying, etc.) since 2011, indicating that gamification research has increased significantly in recent years (see Figure 1).

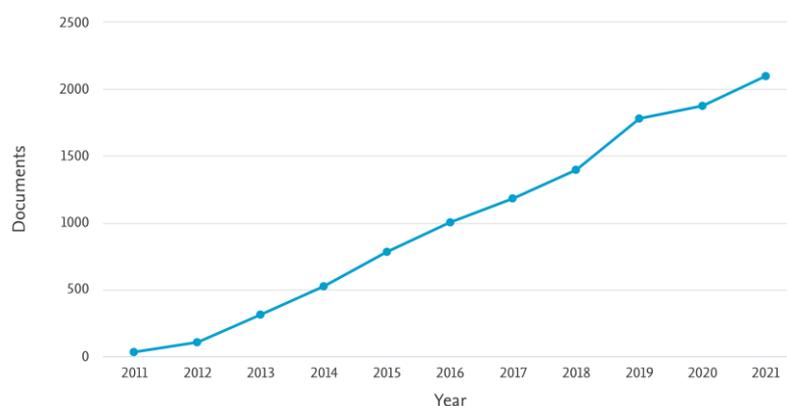


Figure 1. Evolution of gamification studies: documents by year (Scopus database, 2022).

According to this bibliometric analysis, scholars are integrating gamification into other scientific disciplines outside Computer Science and Education (Social Sciences) (see Figure 2). However, it should be noted that the terms analyzed in Scopus appear to be mostly related to keywords predominantly coming from the field of education, such as students, motivation, education, e-learning, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), serious games, teaching, and virtual reality (VR).

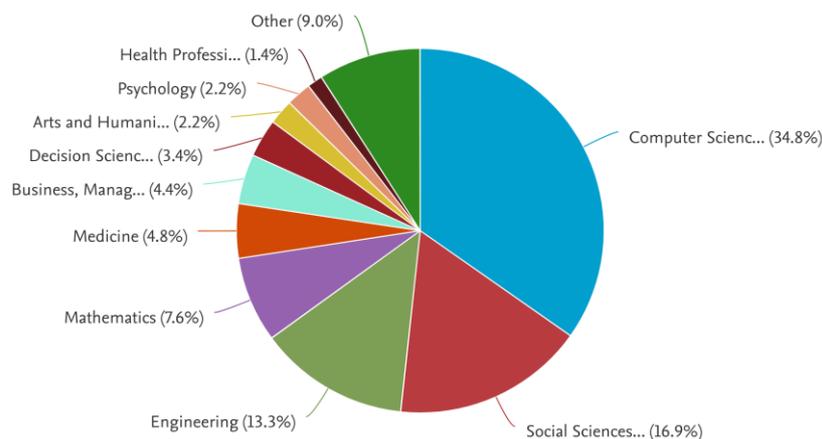


Figure 2. Gamification in scientific fields: documents by subject area (Scopus database, 2022).

The aim of this article is to discuss the benefits of gamification in the field of education, particularly in second language (L2) learning, including vocabulary and grammar learning, language and soft skills development, and L2 assessment. Previous studies on the benefits of gamification in L2 learning have been considered. All these studies are based on scientific evidence, or prove effectiveness through evaluation in practice.

2. METHODS

The researcher conducted the search for relevant studies using key terms associated with gamification and with the different benefits derived from gamification in L2 learning, including vocabulary and grammar learning, language and soft skills development, and L2 assessment. This search was performed in the scientific search engines ERIC, Google Scholar, and Scopus.

Initially, the researcher focused on how gamification is conceptualized from a theoretical perspective. In addition to keywords related to gamification (gamif*, game, gaming), derivatives of the terms “concept”, “framework”, and “theory” were used. Besides, keywords denoting practical use were utilized: “application”, “gamify”, and “method”. Finally,

the researcher explored the different benefits derived from gamification in L2 learning. “Advantages”, “benefits”, and “uses” along with “vocabulary”, “grammar”, “language skills”, “soft skills”, and “assessment” were used as keywords.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Theoretical Framework

3.1.1. Defining Gamification

While there is no universally accepted definition of gamification, most descriptions have similar characteristics (BURKE, 2014). Deterding et al. (2011a: 2) sustain that it is “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts”; Zichermann (2010, 3m30s) defines it as the “process of using game thinking and mechanics to engage audiences and solve problems”, and Kim (2011: 6m20s) understands it as “using game techniques to make activities more engaging and fun”.

From an instructional standpoint, Kapp (2012: 10) sees it as “using game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems”. Similarly, Figueroa (2015: 38) claims that the goals of gamification seek to increase people’s motivation by introducing game elements to “create in the users a sense of empowerment and engagement in the way they work through processes and achieve tasks”.

The term gamification was coined in 2002 by Pelling to describe “applying game-like accelerated user interface design to make electronic transactions both enjoyable and fast” (BURKE, 2014: 5). This contrasts to Deterding et al. (2011a, 2011b), who state that the term first appeared in the digital media industry in 2008 and did not become popular until the second half of 2010.

Despite the novelty of the concept, Deterding et al. (2011a) claim that the precepts that underpin it have previously been studied in HCI research (CARROLL, 1982; CARROLL and THOMAS, 1988; MALONE, 1981). The first study examining the factors that underlie why computer games are appealing and can be integrated in other interfaces was published by Malone (1981). As a result, Deterding et al. (2011a) question whether the principles associated with gamification are different from those linked to HCI, and establish gamification as a research topic, emphasizing the concepts of games, elements, design and non-game contexts as key terms.

Gamification is further divided into two types (KAPP et al., 2014: 55): structural gamification and content gamification. In the former, game elements are added to a system in

order to propel students through content without changing the content itself. Only the structure surrounding the content is intended to be game-like (points, badges, levels, etc.). An example would be a learner earning points within a course for completing an assignment. Content gamification refers to the incorporation of game elements into content to make content more game-like. For instance, starting a course with a challenge instead of a list of objectives. Marczewski (2015: 56) agrees with this categorization but renames both types as extrinsic gamification (structural gamification) and intrinsic gamification (content gamification), and puts forward a new way of categorizing gamification types, namely, digital gamification, analogue gamification and hybrid gamification (MARCZEWSKI, 2020).

Digital gamification is commonly used online. An example could be a reward system embedded in a website, or game-like materials uploaded to a Learning Management System. These are the cases of Blackboard, Edmodo, Google Classroom, Moodle or Schoology¹. Analogue gamification typically consists of board games or card games, and takes place in real-time with participants in the same location. For example, an escape room that uses a number of games to help participants acquire or review specific contents. Digital and analogue gamification are combined in hybrid gamification. Some components exist in a digital realm, such as a gamified tracking system, while others happen in the actual world, for instance, the activities that allow you to earn points. *Pokemon GO!*² is a clarifying example.

3.1.2. The Elements of Gamification

The term game elements refers to the several types of game components that can be used in gamification (WERBACH and HUNTER, 2012). As will be discussed in the following paragraphs, there have been numerous attempts to characterize such game elements (BUNCHBALL, 2010; KAPP, 2012; REEVES and READ, 2009; ROBINSON and BELLOTI, 2013; WERBACH and HUNTER, 2012, 2015; ZICHERMANN and CUNNINGHAM, 2011; ZICHERMANN and LINDER, 2010).

While Deterding et al. (2011a) assert that precisely defining and classifying game elements is challenging, Werbach and Hunter (2012) examined more than 100 gamification applications and found that a significant proportion incorporated points, badges and leaderboards. Some scholars argue that they have an important impact on user behavior

¹ *Blackboard*: <https://www.blackboard.com/>, *Edmodo*: <https://new.edmodo.com/>, *Google Classroom*: <https://classroom.google.com/>, *Moodle*: <https://moodle.org/>, *Schoology*: <https://www.schoology.com/>

² *Pokemon GO!*: <https://pokemongolive.com/>

(FRITH, 2012; THOM et al., 2012; WERBACH and HUNTER, 2012); nevertheless, gamification is not limited to the use of these elements as many scholars have analyzed a much broader range.

Bunchball (2010), the pioneer in the area of gamification, has established connections between the different *game mechanics* and *dynamics* (see Figure 3). Points, levels, challenges, virtual goods and spaces, leaderboards, gifts, and charity are examples of game mechanics, which refer to the “various actions, behaviors, and control mechanisms that are used to ‘gamify’ an activity” (BUNCHBALL, 2010: 2). They denote the game rules and rewards, which help to create a compelling and absorbing experience for users by satisfying their human needs and motivating them to perform specific actions.

Game Mechanics	Human Desires					
	Reward	Status	Achievement	Self Expression	Competition	Altruism
Points	●	●	●		●	●
Levels		●	●		●	
Challenges	●	●	●	●	●	●
Virtual Goods	●	●	●	●	●	
Leaderboards		●	●		●	●
Gifts & Charity		●	●		●	●

Figure 3. Game Mechanics and Human Desires (Bunchball, 2010: 9).

The goal of game mechanics is to elicit the player’s primary desires (that is, reward, status, achievement, self-expression, competition, and altruism). These are considered to be universal, and span cultures, demographics, genders, and generations. The term dynamics addresses the “compelling desires and motivations” of the actual experience (BUNCHBALL, 2010: 2), whose function is to lead the player to a predictable behavior (HÄGGLUND, 2012). The relationships between basic human desires (game dynamics) and gameplay (game mechanics) can be seen in Figure 3. While the green dots denote the primary desire that a particular game mechanic satisfies, the blue dots show the additional zones that it affects.

3.2. Gamification in the Educational Field

The Piano Staircase and *The World's Deepest Bin*³, two experiments conducted by *The Fun Theory*, an initiative of Volkswagen (VOLKSWAGEN, 2009a, 2009b), revealed that people are more likely to participate in an activity if it appeals to them. Many children are attracted to games and video games because they are closely associated with the concept of leisure. According to Richards (2003), the average adolescent will have spent roughly 10,000 hours playing video games by the age of 21. In reality, the gaming sector has recently surpassed the movie industry in terms of revenue (RICHTER, 2020) and the number of active video gamers throughout the world has never been higher (CLEMENT, 2021). Moreover, according to recent research from the University of Oxford, time spent playing video games is positively correlated with well-being (JOHANNES et al., 2021).

Games and video games entail the existence of a parallel universe where rewards, fun, and competition inspire people to act. They also involve creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, and a variety of other skills. At this point, the instructional use of games, also known as *edutainment*, is not new for users. This paradigm has been used to design board games, video games and even TV shows. Furthermore, numerous meta-analysis studies have demonstrated the efficiency of instructional games in *Game-Based Learning* versus traditional teaching approaches (HAYS, 2005; KE, 2009; RANDEL et al., 1992; SITZMANN, 2011; VOGEL et al., 2006; WOLFE, 1997).

According to the New Media Consortium (NMC) (2014) *Horizon Report*, gamification is also gaining popularity among teachers. The report indicated that “the gamification of education is gaining support among educators who recognize that effectively designed games can stimulate large gains in productivity and creativity among learners” (NMC, 2014: 42). The NMC *Horizon Report* exemplifies this point with Kaplan University, where gamification was implemented in their web applications and a pilot program was conducted in an Information Technology class. The results of this study revealed that “students’ grades improved by 9% and the number of students who failed the course decreased by 16%” (NMC, 2014: 43).

Dichev and Dicheva (2017) carried out a systematic review on gamification in educational settings and also claimed that the popularity of gamification is increasingly growing. However, they stated that:

³ *Piano Staircase*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBbyymar3bds>
The World's Deepest Bin: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRgWttqFKu8>

Insufficient evidence exists to support the long-term benefits of gamification in educational contexts; the practice of gamifying learning has outpaced researchers' understanding of its mechanisms and methods; the knowledge of how to gamify an activity in accordance with the specifics of the educational context is still limited (DICHEV and DICHEVA, 2017: 25).

Dichev and Dicheva's (2017) assertions summarize the reasons behind the detailed analysis of the nature of gamification being performed throughout the present paper, which aims to shed light on this subject by examining scientific evidence rather than on speculative potentialities or beliefs.

3.3. Gamification in Second Language Learning

Learning a first language (L1) is different from learning an L2. Hart and Risley (1995) believe that these differences take place since L1 learning does not require formal instruction, but a permanent exposure to the language. This contrasts to L2 learning where language exposure might be reduced to the classroom or other formal setting. Because of this limitation, personality factors have a significant influence on the L2 learning process (BROWN, 2000; EHRMAN and OXFORD, 1990; KIANY, 1998; SHARP, 2008).

Brown (2000: 152) suggests that these personality factors involve the affective domain, self-esteem, attribution and self-efficacy, willingness to communicate, inhibition, risk-taking, anxiety, empathy, extroversion, Myers-Briggs' (1962) personality profiles, and motivation. Considering Schunk et al.'s (2010) perspective on motivation, this concept is addressed as a psychological process responsible for initiating and continuing goal-directed behaviors. Thus, the closest element between language learning and gamification is motivation.

Teaching methods have changed significantly over time as students nowadays belong to the so-called *Games Generation* whose learning schemes and necessities are different from those that students used to have in the past (PRENSKY, 2001). That is the reason why the integration of technology in the language learning process has been progressively introduced in the classrooms. In the last few decades, Computer-Assisted Language Learning and the Web 2.0 have had a noteworthy role in this field, and Mobile Learning, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning and gamification are only some of the most recent trends. This section aims to discuss the benefits derived from gamification in L2 learning, such as frequent and personalized feedback, development of social learning and an increased motivation.

3.3.1. Gamification in Second Language Vocabulary and Grammar Learning

The risks that players take in a gamified environment are low since they are restricted to that particular context, that is, they learn from mistakes without feeling embarrassment (HUANG and SOMAN, 2013). Besides, gamification fosters the completion of grammar and vocabulary tasks in an engaging manner where students feel actively involved and develop their language competence. The high impact digital that gamification has on these two areas has been studied by many scholars (ABRAMS and WALSH, 2014; BOYINBODE, 2018; CRUAUD, 2016; DINDAR et al., 2021; MUFIDAH, 2016; PERRY, 2015; ZARZYCKA-PISKORZ, 2016).

Zarzycka-Piskorz (2016) examined how effective the application of some gamification elements is on university students' motivation and involvement in grammar learning. A *Kahoot*⁴ online game was used as part of the General English language course that students in The Foreign Languages Centre of the Pedagogical University of Krakow were attending. Results showed an increase in students' motivation toward learning and grammar practice. Mufidah (2016) also attempted to determine the effect of gamified grammar tasks on university students' foreign language anxiety and grammar achievement. Test grades revealed both the positive results of gamified activities on their language anxiety and a substantial effect on their grammar performance.

Similarly, Perry's (2015) research on gamification and French as a Foreign Language learning in higher education had some promising results, namely, all the students expressed enthusiasm and used the L2 while interacting with the quest-based augmented reality mobile learning tool, and most of them found it helpful and defined the experience as "motivating" (PERRY, 2015: 6). Likewise, Cruaud (2016) studied the use of a gamified application in an upper secondary school through interaction analysis of video data. The results of this study revealed that learners were showing expressions of playfulness and gaining autonomy and, what is more, they were so engaged in the activities that they were voluntarily doing extra language tasks.

More recently, Dindar et al. (2021) conducted an experimental study on the effects of gamification on English vocabulary learning with a mobile application, where they compared the impact that gamified cooperation and competition had on task effort, learning achievement, motivation and social relatedness. The participants were arbitrarily assigned to the gamified cooperation or the gamified competition group and studied English vocabulary for two weeks. Whereas differences were not found between both groups concerning task effort, learning

⁴ *Kahoot*: <https://kahoot.com/>

achievement and motivation, social relatedness in the gamified cooperation group showed a considerable improvement compared to the gamified competition group. Thus, they concluded that “gamification in English vocabulary learning should move from individual learning space to group learning space” (DINDAR et al., 2021: 14). In addition, they also observed that gamifying competitive and cooperative group activities can foster the students’ effort and motivation.

A case study carried out by Boyinbode (2018) aimed to develop an English vocabulary m-learning system, which incorporated gamification techniques and provided students with an m-learning environment for English learning without the limitations of time or place usually imposed by traditional onsite classroom learning. Experimental results suggested that this gamified system considerably enhanced their English vocabulary skills and raised their interest.

At this point, Reinhardt (2019) highlights how m-learning sites and apps such as *Duolingo*⁵ leverage game mechanics into their reward systems to promote users’ motivation and keep them participating. This results in learning gains for them and constant profits for the site.

Some scholars would argue that learners can improve their grades and spend more time working with the app than they usually do, as their independent learning is fostered (BERNS et al., 2013; GODOY, 2019; GOEHLE, 2013; METWALLY et al., 2019, 2021; PALOMO-DUARTE et al., 2014). Nevertheless, Pardoel et al. (2018) analyzed the Moodle¹ app gamification features and their potential for foreign language learning, and they reported that students might view m-learning as a double-edged sword. That is, they might like using their device for educational ends, but also consider that it intrudes on their private lives somehow.

The following statement from the gamification expert McGonigal (2012) could help us get a closer understanding of the phenomenon of digital gamification:

The real world just doesn’t offer up as easily the carefully designed pleasures, the thrilling challenges, and the powerful social bonding afforded by virtual environments. Reality doesn’t motivate us as effectively. Reality isn’t engineered to maximize our potential. Reality wasn’t designed from the bottom up to make us happy. [...] Reality, compared to games, is broken (MCGONIGAL, 2012: 3).

However, analogue gamification (MARCZEWSKI, 2020) has also shown encouraging results when gamifying language teaching. El-Magd (2017) conducted an experimental study with 64 6th-grade students to assess their grammar learning when provided with discovery-based gamified tasks. Grammar content was fully presented in the form of a game by using

⁵ *Duolingo*: <https://duolingo.com/>

game elements such as badges, avatars, points, rules, challenge, leaderboard and feedback, promoting both competition and cooperation. A grammar test was designed to assess the pupils' grammar achievement in the target grammatical structures, which were included in the Ministry of Education English language textbook for 6th grade. Results showed that students whose lessons were gamified more than doubled the test grades of those students whose lessons were not gamified.

3.3.2. Gamification and Second Language Skills Development

The effectiveness of gamification to develop oral (ATHANASOPOULOS et al., 2018; REITZ et al., 2016) and written language skills (OCRICIANO, 2016; STANLEY, 2014) has also been proved. Reitz et al. (2016) gamified oral language training by embedding English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning into a 3D cooperative VR game, inducing a setting with information gaps to promote authentic communication in real-life situations. The empirical analysis revealed that the game designed with content based on the Graded Examination in Spoken English (GESE) Trinity Exam successfully trained the learners' oral communication skills. This allowed them to improve their speech production and offer qualitative linguistic output.

Athanasopoulos et al. (2018) also investigated the gamification of oral language skills in computer-assisted foreign language pronunciation training. They used storytelling and gamification elements to support a novel spoken karaoke together with a new self-evaluation system driven by audiovisual signal processing techniques. Feedback during the prototype implementation showed that generating immersive conditions produced positive effects on pronunciation learning.

Likewise, Oliveira and Cruz (2018) integrated African oral traditional storytelling and gamified tasks into English classroom practices and observed that gamified storytelling favors a better comprehension of a story, as well as the students' reflection throughout the whole process (pre-reading/reading/post-reading). They also observed that gamified tasks foster the development of students' creativity and critical thinking skills.

Stanley (2014) conducted a study to shed light on whether the implementation of a gamified writing system could motivate 12 and 13-year-old learners and increase their writing fluency skills. This system was supported by an interactive whiteboard (IWB) that helped create badges and level tables, which were displayed at the beginning of the class on the IWB. Students were awarded badges for achievements related to positive aspects of their writing, such as originality, best introduction, creativity, etc. Findings showed that this system increased

both their motivation and their fluency in writing. All students started to write longer texts and teachers reported enthusiasm on the part of the students. However, gamification seemed to work better for some students than for others. Although most of them considered the experience to be beneficial, very few showed interest in continuing this way of writing after three months. On the one hand, these few students saw that they would never be top of the leaderboard. On the other hand, they felt that writing was now harder than before the implementation of the gamified writing system.

Similarly, Ocriciano (2016) undertook action research to explore the impact of gamification on international students' writing skills for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. She made use of platforms such as Class Tools, Kahoot, Super Teacher Tools, Quizlet and Cram⁶, and added all the scores obtained to Moodle in order to upload leaderboard data and keep track of students' performance. Results pointed out that most of the students were motivated, increased their autonomy, and improved spelling, sentence structure and vocabulary use in four weeks. In fact, Ocriciano claims that students usually need ten weeks to achieve the same results in the average setting.

3.3.3. Gamification and Soft Skills Development

Gamification has been evidenced to promote students' interaction as they are involved in a social game. This interaction favors the integration of communicative approaches in L2 teaching and learning, and helps students respond in a natural way to feelings such as happiness, empathy, and frustration, respect social rules (taking turns, etc.), and develop their soft skills (FOGG, 2002). With regard to the latter, a wide range of abilities are involved, namely, adaptability, communication, creative thinking, dependability, work ethic, teamwork, positivity, time management, motivation, problem-solving, critical thinking, and conflict resolution (DOYLE, 2020, para. 10).

Idek (2019) investigated the impact of gamification on a group of English language tasks named "Zombie Challenge Series", aimed to develop vocational school students' soft skills. Target grammatical forms (sequence connectors, conditionals, modal verbs and sentence construction) were integrated into the gamified context, which incorporated numerous game elements. Four levels were considered where learners were asked to complete a challenge to move from one level to the next one. The findings of the research indicated that they not only

⁶ *Class Tools*: <https://www.classtools.net/>, *Kahoot*: <https://kahoot.com/>, *Super Teacher Tools*: <https://www.superteachertools.us/>, *Quizlet*: <https://quizlet.com/>, *Cram*: <https://www.cram.com/>

became more aware of the linguistic elements that they were supposed to employ and the cognitive skills that they needed to complete the challenges, but also increased their motivation to learn and could develop their soft skills while focusing on particular target forms in English. The students affirmed that they learned “how to work as a team, to discuss their opinions, to accept others’ answers and to make the best decision under pressure” (IDEK, 2019: 901), and remarked how difficult decision-making was when working in a team within various constraints like time limit and rules.

3.3.4. Gamification and Second Language Assessment

Challenges in game-like activities are suitable in the language classroom as “in a game, players (learners) will endure frustration and challenges that in other situations would cause them to give up” (LADLEY, 2011: 3). Under the umbrella of gamification, L2 learners could think of themselves as players looking forward to completing a level that involves completing a task, a unit or a module so as to move forward to the next one. This allows teachers to keep track of the students’ performance and progress (INCENTIVE RESEARCH FOUNDATION, 2014). Thus, this kind of challenge provides alternatives for L2 teachers to plan reconsidering their practices based on the similarities between games and learning.

This leads us to the most debated aspects of the use of gamification in education and, particularly, in L2: should students’ grades be directly related to their performance in the game? Is the reward system a fair system to prove their learning? While some researchers explicitly state that gamification should not be used for assessment (CHEONG et al., 2013), other scholars assume that the students’ language learning growth could be assessed through diverse game-like experiences (ABRAMS and WALSH, 2014; AMES, 1990, 1992; BABER, 2015; BUCKINGHAM, 2014; KOCADERE and ÇAĞLAR, 2015; PINTRICH, 2003; WOOD et al., 2013), and others identify some limitations (FIGUEROA, 2015; GLOVER et al., 2012; SCHRADER and MCCREERY, 2012; TRI ENDARTO, 2017).

Baber (2015) studied gamification and EFL teaching in Japan through the implementation of two examples of course-level gamification in Business Education and came to the conclusion that gamified tasks can be designed for assessment by making use of measurable outcomes. These tasks can be a time-saver if they are planned to be easily evaluated. Moreover, while he found that there is no need to include leaderboards, he remarked on the impact that badges had on the students’ outcomes.

Abrams and Walsh (2014) gamified English vocabulary learning through the use of the Vocabulary.com Challenge⁷, which utilizes adaptive technology to establish customized word lists for students to learn. As shown in Figure 4, the status bar to the right of the question provided learners with real-time feedback on their progress: word mastery, points achieved, and status within the game (e.g. the leaf signifies “novice” status). Students could improve their status and earn badges, such as the crown (denoting a perfect round) and the medallions (indicating the number of correct answers in a row), which were publicly displayed.

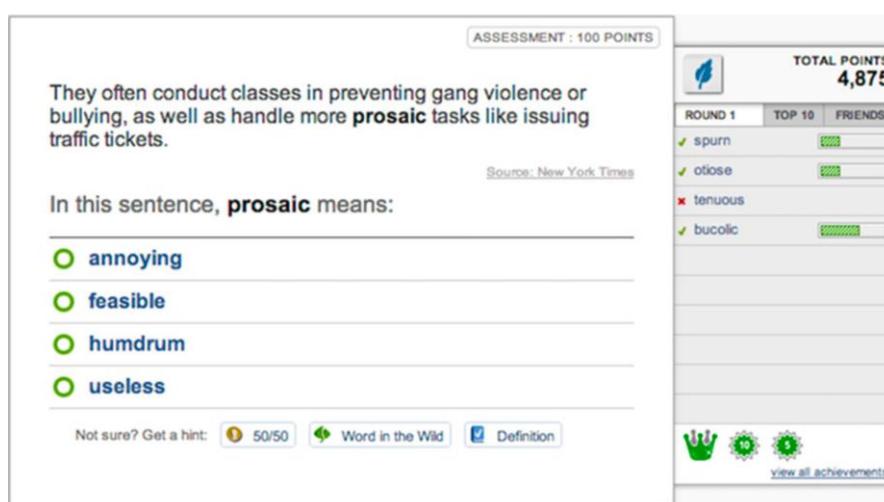


Figure 4. An example of the status bar and rewards displayed to the right of a question (Abrams and Walsh, 2014: 52)

Abrams and Walsh (2014) also observed that applying game elements such as competition, point accumulation, surprise bonus questions, immediate feedback, and public recognition of achievement increased the students' performance level with regard to vocabulary study. This helped them grasp a better understanding of the subtleties and nuances of language items being learned and improve their awareness of the language patterns being taught. Finally, they concluded that the rewards could be used for immediate formative assessment of the learners' knowledge of vocabulary.

In this regard, Kocadere and Çağlar (2015) highlight the role of gamified assessment in assessment *for* learning (to support students in their learning) as opposed to assessment *of* learning (to grade students' achievement). They designed and implemented a gamified assessment task with a group of undergraduate students, including Werbach and Hunter's (2012) dynamics, mechanics and components. They observed that gamified assessment produced enjoyment, flow, learning, and motivation, and did not cause exam anxiety.

⁷ *Vocabulary.com Challenge*: <https://help.vocabulary.com/hc/en-us/sections/203092227-The-Challenge>

Furthermore, Kocadere and Çağlar share Wood et al.'s (2013) view of the potential benefits of gamification in learning during assessment by allowing students to learn from mistakes and try new options, on the one hand; and by providing them with frequent feedback through a variety of game elements (e.g. points, badges, leaderboards, etc.), on the other hand. Since supportive, individualized, detailed and relevant feedback has been considered to be one of the most decisive factors in learning (HATTIE and TIMPERLEY, 2007), using it in assessment will boost and improve learning.

At this point, Buckingham (2014) points out the value of badges in L2 learning not only as a motivational tool but also as a form of formative assessment in the process of achieving fluency, and Glover (2013) emphasizes that reward-gamified systems should encourage further engagement in activities, such as completing a research task, and should not discourage it, such as being exempt from a test. If this takes place, the learning process could be disturbed (MEECE et al., 2006).

The *Three Kingdoms* experience can shed some light on this matter. It was developed in the academic year 2012-2013 with a group of students aged 12 and 13 preparing for the *Cambridge English: Key* (KET) exam. In this gamified experience, performance in classroom activities was one of the ways to be awarded points. Those students who had low learning performance believed that they would never be able to reach the highest places in the ranking, leading them to feel demotivated in the learning process.

Consequently, in the case of using gamification as a teaching tool and not as the core, it could be said that the marking system should be separated. Nevertheless, if the whole learning process is going to be carried out through gamification, weaker students should be provided with rewards for their *distributed practice* (EBBINGHAUS, [1885] 1913), that is, not only for their achievement of the task but also for their improvement made through practice, which has been proved to be a robust and strong phenomenon in learning (AUSUBEL and YOUSEFF, 1965; CAPLE, 1996; CLARK and MAYER, 2002).

In this sense, Tri Endarto (2017: 134), who studied the use of gamifying language testing through web-based platforms, holds the view that “with the growing prominence of various web-based games and gamification platforms, it is easier for teachers to change the stereotypical nature of language testing, which is nerve-racking and demotivating, into a more fun and stimulating one”. However, he supports Schrader and McCreery's (2012) idea that a reflection on the right tools for language assessments should be made:

Philosophically, any approach to assessment should begin with a clear description of what will be learned, how it will be learned, and under what conditions (i.e., context). Assessment is subsequently based on the response to these questions and outlines what will be measured (e.g., learning, skill, knowledge), how it will be measured (e.g., rubrics, essays, multiple-choice, observation), and under what conditions (e.g., classroom context, virtual context, dynamic interactions). Broadly speaking, games address one or many of these questions, depending on the affordances involved and the capabilities of the students. (MCCREERY, 2012: 15)

In the end, the success of any language testing gamification will be subject to whether it is properly aligned with the students' learning objectives and whether these are evaluated with the right criteria (FIGUEROA, 2015).

4. CONCLUSION

This article attempted to evince the benefits of gamification in the L2 classroom. The mentioned studies have yielded pedagogical implications concerning the implementation of gamification language learning programs in the L2 classroom. Gamification helps to build skills by providing a zero-risk practice zone, which favors learning by mistakes without embarrassment, and transforms monotonous tasks into engaging ones by motivating learners through exciting challenges. In addition, it fosters the development of oral and written language skills through repetition alongside the gamification elements (points, levels, etc.), and promotes the learners' social learning, integrating communicative approaches which help them develop their soft skills. Finally, gamification can play a key role in both assessment *of* learning, if it is accurately aligned with specific objectives and fair criteria, and assessment *for* learning, as students are provided with frequent and personalized feedback.

While it can be asserted that the use of gamification in L2 learning highly contributes to the students' learning experience based on the information presented, there is a need for more research on the use of gamification in school settings, particularly when it comes to foreign language learning, refining the process of integrating gamification into the syllabus. Future research could also study the relationship between the use of gamification and good teaching practice. It seems evident that the use of gamification in the classroom should be complemented by quality instruction for the whole process to be effective. Yet, it is not clear which elements of instructional shortcomings (e.g. lack of teacher feedback) have the capacity to neutralize the positive influence of gamification, and which aspects of the use of gamification can compensate for instructional shortcomings.

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