


Game-based teaching and gamification in ELE: cases and projects / Enseñanza basada en el juego y la gamificación en ELE: casos y proyectos

*José Manuel Foncubierta**

He is a professor at the University of Huelva. He is a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Louvain (Belgium) and a PhD in Educational Sciences from the University of Huelva (Spain). His lines of research and current scientific publications focus on the analysis of the reading process in additional languages and the affective factors in the acquisition of a second language.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7077-3303>

*José María Rodríguez Santos***

He is a professor at Universidad Internacional de La Rioja. He obtained a PhD in Theory of the Literature at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and his current lines of research and scientific publications are focused on the study of stand-up, fiction and comedy, cultural rhetoric, and the metaphorical engine.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3319-9648>

Received: 26 jul. 2023. **Approved:** 31 jul. 2023.

How to cite this article:

FONCUBIERTA, José Manuel; SANTOS, José María Rodríguez. Game-based teaching and gamification in ELE: cases and projects. *Revista Letras Raras*. Campina Grande, v. 12, n. 2, p. 60-70, aug. 2023. Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.8301638.

ABSTRACT

The present work deals with the game and the strategy resulting from the use of its elements, also known as gamification, as motors of the motivation of students of Spanish as a foreign language. Starting from the relevance of the game in the learning process from positions ranging from the anthropological to the neuroscientific, the ideas of the narrative component and the sensation of the game are addressed as prominent elements in this objective of involving students in learning tasks, providing specific practical cases on its application.

KEY WORDS: Game; Gamification; Spanish as a Foreign Language; Motivation.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo aborda el juego y la estrategia resultante del empleo de sus elementos, conocida también como gamificación o ludificación, como motores de la motivación del alumnado de español como lengua extranjera. Partiendo de la relevancia del juego en el proceso de aprendizaje desde posiciones que van desde lo antropológico

*

 Jose.foncubierta@dfilo.uhu.es

**

 josemaria.rodriquez@unir.net

hasta lo neurocientífico, se trabajan las ideas del componente narrativo y la sensación de juego como elementos destacados en ese objetivo de implicar a los estudiantes en las tareas de aprendizaje, aportando casos prácticos concretos sobre su aplicación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Juego; Gamificación; Español como lengua extranjera; Motivación.

1 Introduction: The Playful Component

The game is perhaps the simplest, most natural, and sophisticated learning mechanism that exists. As a significant part of the development of our psychomotor abilities and cognitive and socio-emotional faculties in childhood, play is the great simulator of experience. Likewise, it is the driving vehicle upon which the capacity to encode knowledge, norms, guidelines, and behaviors is built, which will later be key to our integration into adult life. According to Mora (2017, p. 59), "play is the disguise of learning." And thus, from a neurobiological point of view, play is revealed to us as the enzyme with which nature provides the individual with motivational elements so that pleasure and learning are found in the construction of knowledge through experience. Therefore, it could be said that playing and observing play are natural activities that usually bring pleasure, captivate the senses, and can lead to a state of flow and creativity (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI & SELIGMAN, 2014, p. 279-298).

Play is not just for children. Playing is a part of our lives throughout different stages of maturity; it simply takes on different forms. This explains the success of sports games, board games, card games, or games of chance; all of these activities can be remembered as memorable precisely because they provoke some kind of emotion. The transcultural nature of play is also understood from its natural composition. Play existed even before culture and the emergence of verbal communication (HUIZINGA, 1949). Many authors have highlighted the connection between the playful element, the act of imagining, and the origin of languages. According to Asher (1993, p. 20), "without imagination, there would be no language." Imagining enables us to create patterns or models such as phonemes from the sounds that make up the spoken language, and play is precisely a way to enter imaginary worlds.

If acquiring a language involves the ability to construct a statement elaborated by ourselves without the need to repeat what others have said, linguistic usage must be in itself an exercise of creativity, and play is a great stimulus to achieve it. Huizinga (1949, p. 15) argued that "words and ideas do not arise from logical or scientific thought, but from creative language." Learning a second

language requires an intelligence that enjoys itself, and play is a magnificent means to achieve that objective.

2 The Game and Learning of a Second Language: Insert Coin

The profession of teaching Spanish as a foreign language (hereinafter referred to as ELE) finds in the ludic component the provision of scenarios, the generation of contexts, and imaginary worlds in which the functionality of linguistic forms is put into practice within a classroom atmosphere full of emotional nuances such as enjoyment, fun, curiosity, and uninhibitedness. From a didactic point of view, there is no doubt about the inclusion of the ludic element in the ELE classroom, especially with the advent and consolidation of communicative paradigms in the 1980s, and currently, with post-communicative paradigms in language teaching/learning. Thus, institutional documents such as the Curriculum Plan of the Cervantes Institute (PCIC, 2006) or the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2002) have already mentioned the importance of the ludic component in the development of teaching and learning processes. In the case of the PCIC, the importance of ludic language games and their suitability for learning a second language is emphasized, while in the case of the CEFR, it is also highlighted.

Play creates magic circles (HUIZINGA, 1949), that is, environments or contexts where there is more tolerance for errors (be they phonetic, lexical, grammatical, or otherwise), without the student feeling their own image or self-concept so threatened or compromised. As Stevick (1975) pointed out regarding second language learning, "the student's own image is their most precious possession" (p. 1). Ludic experiences allow us to transcend expressive limits by turning the use of language into a game itself. When a student feels they can make mistakes, the capacity to take risks emerges. Playing is an activity that helps us liberate ourselves in the use of words and act creatively, as Rodari (2002, p. 12) would say, "not for everyone to be artists, but so that no one is a slave."

3 Gamification in the ELE Classroom: The Sensation of Play

In the didactics of Spanish as a foreign language (ELE), the emergence of what we now know as gamification has revitalized interest in play by deconstructing it to bring the sensation of

play into the classroom, in line with pedagogical objectives that aim to make the act of learning a more enjoyable experience (FONCUBIERTA & RODRÍGUEZ, 2014).

Although play has always held and continues to hold a prominent place within the culture of the ELE classroom, analyzing its constituent elements and reflecting on the effects it produces opens up a new possibility different from traditional play: gamified activity. Studies show that gamified activity offers several virtues, such as adding fun, improving attention, helping to modulate emotional states, providing a break when we detect exhaustion, and increasing motivation (REINHARDT, 2019; BOUDADI & GUTIÉRREZ-COLÓN, 2020).

Deconstructing play helps us to appreciate even more the fact that playing is a very serious activity that brings significant benefits when addressing some concerns of teachers and alleviating the potential struggles of learners, such as boredom or the feeling of difficulty.

Gamifying does not just mean playing. Gamification is a technique that a teacher can employ in designing a learning activity (whether analog or digital) by incorporating game elements (badges, time limits, points, dice, etc.) and mindset (challenges, competition, narrative, etc.) to enrich the learning experience, guide and/or modify students' behavior in the classroom (FONCUBIERTA & RODRÍGUEZ, 2014).

3.1 The Narrative Dynamics of Games and Pedagogy

One of the most interesting aspects of gamification is the narrative dynamics. The ability to tell stories is one of the most powerful resources that games have to facilitate action and provide communicative contexts. The narrative helps transform the classroom into a space of infinite possibilities for language practice and learning. As Acaso (2011, p. 57) points out regarding narrative pedagogies:

We can understand the act of teaching not as a neutral act in which information is simply transferred and mimetically reproduces something that exists in reality, but as a metaphorical act that, whether we want it or not, transforms reality. (ACASO, 2011, p. 57)

Narrative dynamics are the primary source of the sense of play in the classroom. By replacing the mere completion of exercises with the transformation of the classroom into a story and embracing metaphors (FONCUBIERTA & RODRÍGUEZ SANTOS, 2016), students can shift

from being mere consumers of exercises to protagonists of a story created from the imaginary world constructed in the class. In this regard, intrigue and suspense turn out to be learning dynamics that give meaning, purpose, and context to the linguistic forms that are intended to be taught. Thus, intrigue or curiosity, as emotions responsible for opening the cognitive windows of conscious attention (MORA, 2017), can contribute to infusing the teaching with emotional glue to foster linguistic learning in a playful and creative way. According to Acaso (2013), when pedagogy is narrative, pleasure, participation, and experiential learning emerge. However, when pedagogy is descriptive and lacks narration, learning becomes a contemplative, boring, and bulimic activity.

3.2 From Analog to Digital: Sense Luscious

Before the digital era, Spanish teachers already used and continue to use an array of analog resources to gamify learning activities or introduce games themselves. Traditionally, in the Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE) classroom, board games, role-playing games, popular games (such as "I Spy," "Hangman," riddles, or word searches), as well as games created ad hoc (NEVADO, 2008; LORENTE-FERNÁNDEZ & PIZARRO-CARMONA, 2012) are often employed. With these resources, educators have sought to infuse the learning of Spanish language and culture contents with a playful sensation that allows for the creation of social contexts of use, combining pleasure with fun, promoting the escape from boredom, alleviating symptoms such as overexertion, and increasing the likelihood of achieving spontaneous speech in the target language.

Now, with the advent of digital tools, the ways of gamifying and playing have multiplied. Classes, previously devoid of so many auditory resources, moving images, and tactile elements, have been enriched by the introduction of new sensory experiences. Beyond sight and hearing, the classroom has been transformed into a more nourishing sensory ecosystem (sense luscious) than the austerity of black on white paper.

The digitalization of the classroom or the use of mobile devices outside of it now allows learning to be enriched with experiences that stimulate the student's capacity to imagine or create worlds in which to anchor their learning. The advent of technology has made it possible to recreate virtual worlds where the student not only imagines but also lives, experiences, and feels what they learn through new narratives such as hypermedia, crossmedia, and transmedia ludic experiences (ANDRADE-VELÁSQUEZ & FONSECA-MORA, 2021). Likewise, digital technology can further streamline the automation of processes such as assigning points, updating rankings, providing

rewards, or offering immediate feedback, processes that used to be more laborious to carry out (MARTÍN, 2014).

The humanized use of technology has brought about the connection between games and images, sounds, and movement in the development of video games. This evolution has also contributed to further enriching language learning. Video games allow students to experiment with simulating or adopting other identities, engaging in different verbal behaviors in the target language compared to their communication in their native language (BLAKE, 2012). The use of video games stimulates the creation of digital identities, avatars, which make the student see themselves as real agents capable of directing their own actions, fostering a sense of control, and reinforcing self-image, which are crucial for learning (DÍAZ-BRAVO, 2019).

4 Gamified Activities: Cases and Project

In Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE) classes, the playful component has often been introduced through the simple instruction in the instructional design: "imagine." When activity instructions for practicing or comprehending linguistic forms or sociocultural norms began with an invitation to imagine, there was already a possibility of introducing students to some kind of narrative dynamic. For example, role-playing games were initiated in the classroom, allowing the generation of contexts and stories based on the dialogues created by the students themselves. A similar circumstance, with which to observe the emotional component as a dynamic of action, would be the case of an activity for level A2 (according to the CEFR) called "Trueque de cualidades" (ARNOLD & FONCUBIERTA, 2019). This is an exercise that creates a positive classroom atmosphere through socialization.

One day at the beginning of the course, before finishing the class, ask the students to think of five positive qualities they have at home. Working from home allows them to use dictionaries and ask questions among friends, classmates, or family members about the qualities they possess. The next day, ask the students to write their qualities on a post-it note and stick it to their bodies. Then, review the vocabulary related to measurements, making any lexical unit that expresses quantity valid (una pizca, una cucharadita, un kilo, un metro...). Once the vocabulary is reviewed, write "Trueque de cualidades" on the board and add two examples of language: "I'll trade a kilo of my friendliness for a pinch of your enthusiasm" or "Do you want to exchange a meter of my sincerity

for two spoonfuls of your imagination?" With these instructions, the simulation is ready, and the class is prepared to transform into a market where qualities are exchanged.

The activity concludes with an emotional photo booth where students collect the qualities of their classmates, the ones they possessed, and the ones they have acquired, in a photo they can take with their mobile phones and later use to create a classroom mural.

En este caso, the gamified activity goes beyond just using playful elements and places game elements (dynamics, mechanics, and components) at the core of the process to make the learning or active participation in the classroom more engaging. For instance, we could take a narrative dynamic like a detective story and work with enigmas in a similar way to the card game known as Black Stories. In fact, we could use these cards as a source of inspiration. For this occasion, let's work with an enigma that is already a classic (The story of Romeo and Juliet) to practice the past tense verb forms with our B1 level students (CEFR, 2002). The use of enigmas will require the teacher to become storytellers to engage the students in the narrative.

Before starting the story, the students are divided into groups that will compete against each other. A challenge is presented to them: to solve an enigma. There will be a "Sherlock badge" for the group that solves the enigma, and recognition points will also be given, which can be exchanged for badges, to the groups that come up with good hypotheses for solving the enigma (magnifying glass points) and to those who formulate their sentences with greater grammatical accuracy (academic points). One of the successes of video games is that they possess a multimodal nature (sounds, images, movement, etc.), so a piece of advice is to have some thrilling background music playing, like the ones from Alfred Hitchcock's movies (e.g., Psycho), while explaining the story.

By incorporating these game elements, the gamified activity not only adds an element of fun but also enhances motivation, engagement, and active learning in the classroom. The use of narratives, enigmas, and rewards like badges and points creates a sense of challenge and achievement, turning the learning experience into a dynamic and exciting adventure for the students. This fosters the creation of a conducive environment and stimulates the curiosity and intrigue inherent to the genre, something that is deeply ingrained in the world of cinema. Once the functioning has been explained and the atmosphere created the enigma of "The Story of Romeo and Juliet" is presented, supported by images of symbolic elements from the story, which can be projected using PowerPoint or Genially, accompanied by audio files with special effects extracted from the internet.

That weekend, the members of the B1 level course, consisting of Professor X and his students, decided to spend a few days at the lodging house of one of the professor's friends. The evening started well with fun conversations, songs, and a good dinner, but it gradually became complicated. First, a strong wind began to blow (sound of wind), then heavy rain (sound of rain), and finally, a full-fledged storm (sound of thunder). Suddenly, we heard the sound of broken glass coming from another room. The professor's friend and owner of the house rushed over and opened the door (sound of a door) to find water on the floor and the bodies of two guests, Romeo and Juliet. (Source: prepared by the author of this article)

After recounting the story, two five-minute rounds are given for the groups to develop their hypotheses and try to solve the enigma. The teacher can only respond with "yes" or "no," and the students must figure out what happened. After the first round, the first hypotheses are presented, and magnifying glass points and academic points are awarded. After the second round, they hope to be able to solve the enigma. If not, a third round can be opened, or the solution can be given. The scoring system will be used to establish rankings. Finally, students are invited to create their own enigmas in groups and present them in class with the effects or elements they choose to enrich the classroom experience.

Using digital artifacts to carry out a project is another way to bring gamification into the Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE) classroom. For example, Living Madrid Comillas or UPCOele - Interculturality Magazine is a project that was carried out at the Pontifical Comillas University. This project involved exchange students who were taking Spanish courses as a means of achieving faster linguistic and cultural integration. The course was designed for these B1-level (CEFR, 2002) students and focused on creating an adaptation guide for future foreign students, based on the completion of five challenges. Each of these challenges aimed to capture the students' experiences in their progressive discovery of the city, while also working on the curriculum's learning objectives.

To achieve this, web tools were proposed for communication and work organization, including social media platforms like Instagram and the university's virtual platform. Each challenge involved creating a blog entry that addressed the needs presented in the different tasks, such as what to do upon arriving in the city for the first time (transportation, routines, exploring neighborhoods, interacting with native speakers, etc.). A time limit was set for each challenge, adding an element of reinforcement to the playful learning experience they sought to create. Upon successfully completing each challenge, each group received a badge of recognition, which the

students included in a designated section of the blog. The objective was to create a gamified experience where storytelling, challenges, and badges disguised these activities as games based on everyday actions. This connection between the sense of play and the experience was key to the engagement and satisfaction of the participating students.

Conclusion: Game Over

In the journey from rote learning to memorable learning (ARNOLD & FONCUBIERTA, 2019), game elements and gamification play a crucial pedagogical role as they enable a more lasting type of learning. According to Bruner (2000, p. 66), "what is not structured in a narrative form is lost in memory." For this reason, the opportunities offered to teachers by gamified activities to bring narrative dynamics into the classroom and play with narrative elements (images, sounds, and other components) are highlighted. These elements awaken the students' imagination and engage them in language and cultural content that might otherwise have a lesser impact or interest from the learner. Games provide highly positive experiences because they activate the capacity to imagine and the feeling of being involved in something that is not threatening. These are good remedies against learning adversaries like forgetfulness or boredom.

If the goal of second language teachers is to enable students to develop their ability to communicate effectively, integrating games or gamification can offer the chance to make the learning process more exciting, intense, and enduring.

CRedit
Acknowledgement: Not applicable.
Financing: Not applicable.
Conflicts of interest: The authors certify that they have no commercial or associative interest that represents a conflict of interest in relation to the manuscript.
Ethical Approval: Not applicable.
Contributor Roles: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. FONCUBIERTA, José Manuel. Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft. SANTOS, José María Rodríguez.

References

- ACASO, M. *Pedagogías invisibles*. Madrid: La Catarata, 2011.
- ACASO, M. *Reduvolution. Hacer la revolución en la educación*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2013.
- ANDRADE-VELÁSQUEZ, M. R., y FONSECA-MORA, M. C. Las narrativas transmedia en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras. *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación*, v.12, n.2, p. 159-175, 2021.
- ARNOLD, J. y FONCUBIERTA, J. M. *La atención a los factores afectivos en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera*. Madrid: Edinumen, 2019.
- ASHER, J. J. Imagination in second language acquisition. *The Journal of Imagination in Language Learning*, v.1, pp. 20-25, 1993.
- BLAKE, R. J. Homo ludens, los videojuegos y las TIC. En *Actas del IV congreso de FIAPE: La enseñanza del español en un mundo intercultural. Jornadas pedagógicas*, Santiago de Compostela, España, 2011.
- BOUDADI, N. A. y GUTIÉRREZ-COLÓN, M. Effect of Gamification on students' motivation and learning achievement in Second Language Acquisition within higher education: a literature review 2011-2019. *The EuroCALL Review*, v.28, n.1, p. 57-69, 2020.
- BRUNER, J. *Actos de significado. Más allá de la revolución cognitiva*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2000.
- CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, M. y SELIGMAN, M. E. Positive psychology: An introduction. Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology: The Collected Works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, p. 279-298, 2014.
- CONSEJO DE EUROPA. *Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas*. Madrid: Anaya e Instituto Cervantes, 2002.
- DÍAZ-BRAVO, R. Guadalingo: aprendizaje experiencial de español LE/L2 en un entorno virtual gamificado. *Journal of Spanish Language Teaching*, v.6, n.1, p. 64-70, 2019. DOI: 10.1080/23247797.2019.1613078
- FONCUBIERTA, J.M., y RODRÍGUEZ SANTOS, J. M. Didáctica de la gamificación en la clase de español. Madrid: Edinumen, 1-8, 2014.

FONCUBIERTA, J. M. y RODRÍGUEZ SANTOS, J. M. Metáforas, símbolos y comunicación en el aula de ELE. *Mosaico*, v.34, p. 22-28, 2016.

GROS, B. *Videojuegos y aprendizaje*. Barcelona: Editorial Graó, 2007.

HUIZINGA, J. *Homo Ludens. A study of the play-element in culture*. London: Routledge y Kegan Paul, 1949.

INSTITUTO CERVANTES. *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes. Niveles de referencia para el español*. Madrid: Instituto Cervantes, 2006. Consultado el 18 de noviembre de 2022.

LABRADOR PIQUER, M. J. y Morote Magán, P. El juego en la enseñanza de ELE. *Glosas Didácticas*, v.17, p. 71-84, 2008. Recuperado a partir de <http://www.um.es/glosasdidacticas/numeros/GD17/07.pdf>

LORENTE-FERNÁNDEZ, P. y PIZARRO-CARMONA, M. El juego en la enseñanza de español como lengua extranjera: Nuevas perspectivas. *Tonos Digital: Revista de estudios filológicos*, v.23, 2012.

MARTÍN, P. P. La aplicación de la ludificación y las TIC a la enseñanza de español en un contexto universitario japonés. *Cuadernos Canela*, v.25, p. 65-83, 2014.

Mora, F. *Neuroeducación. Solo se puede aprender aquello que se ama*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2017.

NEVADO, C. El componente lúdico en las clases de ELE. *MarcoELE*, 7, 2008. Recuperado el 22 de noviembre de 2022.

REINHARDT, J. (2019). *Gameful second and foreign language teaching and learning: Theory, research, and practice*. Tucson: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

RODARI, G. *Gramática de la fantasía: Introducción al arte de contar historias*. 8ª edición. Barcelona: Ediciones del Bronce, 2002.

Stevick, E. Alienation as a Factor in the Learning of Foreign Language. En *The Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages*, Washington, D.C., Nov. 1975, p. 27-30.